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On the Nature of Resistance to Psi Phenomena¹

MONTAGUE ULLMAN, M.D.

I would like to consider in this brief presentation several points with regard to the general resistance encountered around the subject of telepathy. We can say, firstly, that the resistance, as is the case with all resistance, is understandable. There is no obligation, however, to tolerate resistance as we find it at one level; I am referring to aggressive resistance or belligerent skepticism, rooted in an individual conflict unrelated to the phenomena themselves. At this level, it is strictly a matter between the individual and his conscience—or his analyst.

The more significant and more readily understandable resistance is expressed by doubt, incredulity, or simply the rationalization of a lack of interest. This form of resistance is not destructive, but simply represents the initial shock reaction in the face of something startlingly new and different. The function of this initial resistance has to a large extent already been served. It is now time to analyze it out of existence and thus pave the way to new interest and activity on the part of a greater number of clinical investigators. There may be a few who will ask the laboratory to provide even greater astronomical figures, but most of those who have studied the results already obtained have been convinced that further effort should go into building upon the foundation rather than simply extending it by adding more bricks.

The occurrence of telepathy seems to indicate that we may be much more in contact with each other, much more together, than is readily apparent. One of the chief problems we face is related to the limitations in our own conceptual thinking. We are, to put it simply, attempting to grasp a process having to do with "togetherness" with tools originally designed to study things in their "separateness." The crisis in physics, with its attendant challenge to Newtonian premises, has not yet fully reverberated down to the social sciences. The early laboratory work in this country placed the existence of psi phenomena on a secure basis, but accentuated rather than alleviated the difficulties involved in any theoretical approach. Rhine and his co-workers diligently and persistently, over a period of many years, applied the scientific method to the study of these phenomena. The end results precisely illustrate the conceptual difficulties to which I have alluded. The scientific method is the one tool *par excellence* at our disposal for the study of phenomena in their unrelatedness to the

¹ Presented at a Meeting of the Psychiatric Forum Group, May 2, 1951.

observer. The contribution from the laboratory became a bipolar one. Experiments proving telepathy do not at the same time place mind above matter, nor in opposition to matter. The results themselves—precise, repeatable experiments, carefully checked mathematical analyses—have added up to an impressive body of proof. The same ring of validity, however, is lacking with regard to the theoretical formulations and assumptions which have accompanied the laboratory work. These have been indicative of a gratuitous dualism implicit not in the actual results, but in the assumptions underlying the application of the scientific method to this study. Undoubtedly the workers dealing with the problem felt that the greatest objectivity could be obtained through the establishment of the maximum degree of impersonality. Once the whole problem of the interrelatedness of human organisms is omitted from the picture in the pursuit of this type of objectivity, the laboratory results of necessity lend themselves to such mystical elaborations as "mind over matter," "mind-to-mind," and perhaps even the term "extrasensory." It must be said, however, in evaluating the position of the early workers, that, given our present criteria, less impersonal techniques, while they might have avoided the fog of unproductive speculation about the nature of psi, would have prolonged the birth pangs and delayed the establishment of reasonable proof. It is to the further credit of these workers that, once the question of proof was settled, they did turn their efforts to the study of psi in its relation to behavioral patterns and personality. I have perhaps stressed the theoretical weaknesses at the expense of the positive contributions, but only because it is the former which are pertinent to the understanding of the resistances with which we are dealing. The laboratory had left a foundling at the doorstep of the very busy psychiatric family, with no tag to indicate that it belonged there, and, what is worse, with no tag to indicate that it belonged anywhere. This was the situation which existed until several years ago. The resistance remained for there were no adequate means at hand of resolving it. As a result of the more recent laboratory efforts to relate psi functioning to human needs—in *vitro* in the laboratory experiments and in *vivo* in the analytic setting—the baby can now be looked upon as properly tagged and ready for adoption. Significant changes have to be made in the household, however, before this adoption can work out smoothly.

To understand the unique quality of the telepathic dream, we have to be aware not only of what is unique about the dream itself, but also what is unique about the dreamer. Time seems to stand still for the schizophrenic. Perhaps it may be said that his psychosis begins at the point where this fiction becomes his reality. The ability to obviate the changing quality of experience, namely, its temporal aspect, can only be achieved by an overwhelming effort to break

all ties with reality. But this obviating process, before it leads the individual to take the fatal leap into the state of absolute timelessness, omnipotence, and psychosis, may leave traces and side effects which indicate its existence and direction. Telepathic functioning may be just such an evidential side effect. If time and space are viewed as static, fixed, and rigid categories, much as containers in which events occur rather than as reflecting properties of matter, then the dynamism of telepathy has to be placed outside of time and space and of necessity outside of our reach.

It seems to me, if I may be permitted a further brief excursion into philosophical speculation,² that two preliminary steps may be postulated which, if valid, might help in coping with this difficulty. The first has to do with the implications of regarding time and space not as given categories, but rather as abstractions from our experience to express, in the case of the former, the element of change or unlikeness in our experience and, in the case of the latter, the element of sameness or likeness in our experience. Adjustment to experience through time and space as we know them, while it represents the most human and most rewarding way of adjustment in terms of mastery over nature, does not shed light on how these aspects of experience are dealt with in the case of those who have forsaken human goals and needs. This may have some relevance to the situation in borderline psychotics who, in coming close to a total surrender of the possibility of fulfilling their human needs, experience at the same time a disruption of their ability to experience the temporal and spatial aspects of reality in a human way. Whatever deeper level is opened up as a result of this disruption is at this point a matter of conjecture. Telepathic functioning provides us with a glimpse, sufficient to confirm its existence, but too evanescent to reveal much information about it. The occurrence of telepathy in the analytic setting, then, is contingent on inner disarrangements which make other means of communication impossible. It has been a fact in my practice that consistent telepathic functioning occurs in extremely detached individuals, often close to frankly psychotic states, and that it seems to represent a last foothold of relatedness. Once the patient is over the edge in the wrong direction, namely, psychosis, it becomes lost but not forgotten. The hallucinatory and delusional systems of the psychotic nostalgically center about this recently lost and last vestigial evidence of a tie to the real world. Conversely, when growth takes place in the direction of integration and cure, telepathic functioning is replaced by more socially rewarding means of knowing and contacting the environment.

² The ideas expressed here are based on the theoretical analysis of time and space by Christopher Caudwell in his book *Further Studies in a Dying Culture*, Dodd, Mead and Co., New York, 1949.