

Creativity and its Relation to Extrasensory Perception¹

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I

Telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and the whole spectrum of paranormal experiences have been reported by many highly creative persons. Walter Franklin Prince, long with our Society and with the Boston Society for Psychic Research, gathered together an extraordinary range of such experiences, carefully recorded and edited in a volume entitled *Noted Witnesses for Psychic Occurrences*,² now at last made generally available to us by Felix Morrow, of University Books. Here we have records of the experiences of Mark Twain, Rider Haggard, Robert Schumann, Goethe, David Belasco, and dozens of others, with just enough said about the lives and characters of these creative persons to get a tantalizing glimpse as to the possible relations between their creative gifts and their proneness to paranormal experience. Two examples will be given here, condensed from Prince's book. The first is a dream of Rider Haggard which coincided with the accidental death of his dog, Bob:

I went to bed about 12:30 and suffered from what I took to be a nightmare. I was awakened by my wife's voice calling to me . . . All I could remember of [the nightmare] was a sense of awful oppression and of desperate and terrified struggling for life such as the act of drowning would probably involve. But between the time I heard my wife's voice and the time that my consciousness answered to it, or so it seemed to me, I had another dream. I dreamed that a black retriever dog, a most amiable and intelligent beast named Bob, was lying on its side among brushwood, or rough growth of some sort, by water. My own personality in some mysterious way seemed to me to be arising from the body of the dog, which I knew quite surely to be Bob and no other, so much so that my head was against its head, which was lifted up at an unnatural angle. In my vision the dog was trying to speak to me in words, and, failing, transmitted to my mind in an undefined fashion, the knowledge that it was dying . . .

. . . Bob, between whom and myself there existed a mutual attachment, either at the moment of his death . . . or, as seems more probable, about three hours after that event, did succeed in calling my attention to his actual or recent plight by placing whatever

¹This paper was delivered by Professor Murphy at a meeting of the Society held on March 4, 1963.

²Boston Society for Psychic Research, Boston, 1928. Reprinted (with an Introduction by Gardner Murphy and Bibliographical Note on W. F. Prince) by University Books, Inc., New Hyde Park, N.Y., 1963.

portion of my being is capable of receiving such impulses when enchained by sleep, into his own terrible position. That subsequently, as that chain of sleep was being broken by the voice of my wife . . . with some last despairing effort, while that indefinable part of me was being slowly withdrawn from him . . . he spoke to me, first trying to make use of my own tongue, and, failing therein, by some subtle means of communication whereof I have no knowledge, telling me that he was dying, for I saw no blood or wounds which would suggest this to my mind (pp. 157-161). [Bob had been killed on a trestle by a train which hurled his body into the water below.]

Our second example was quoted by Prince from Albert Bigelow Paine's *Biography of Mark Twain*:

Yet in due time he received a warning, a remarkable and impressive warning, though of a kind seldom heeded. One night, when the *Pennsylvania* lay in St. Louis, he slept at his sister's house and had this vivid dream:

He saw [his brother] Henry, a corpse, lying in a metallic burial case in the sitting-room, supported on two chairs. On his breast lay a bouquet of flowers, white, with a single crimson bloom in the center.

[Two days later, after Twain's brother Henry had been killed in the explosion of the steamboat *Pennsylvania*] . . . he saw the boy taken to the dead room, then the long strain of grief, the days and nights without sleep, the ghastly realization of the end overcame him. A citizen of Memphis took him away in a kind of daze and gave him a bed in his house, where he fell into stupor of fatigue and surrender. It was many hours before he woke; when he did, at last, he dressed and went to where Henry lay. The coffins provided for the dead were of unpainted wood, but the youth and striking face of Henry Clemens had aroused a special interest. The ladies of Memphis had made up a fund of sixty dollars and bought for him a metallic case. Samuel Clemens, entering, saw his brother lying exactly as he had seen him in his dream, lacking only the bouquet of white flowers with its crimson center—a detail made complete while he stood there, for at that moment an elderly lady came in with a large white bouquet and in the center of it was a single red rose (pp. 190-191).

For reasons which will perhaps become obvious as I move along, I am offering the hypothesis that there actually is a relation between creativeness and extrasensory perception. Although I shall undoubtedly fail to make altogether convincing what I would now offer you, I shall stretch my powers in the hope that by struggling to make it clearer I can in time establish such an hypothesis to be sound.

II

Let us look first at the nature of creativeness, the capacity for genuine and original integration of materials of any sort—color,

line, tone, word, rhythm, spatial and temporal patterns—thrown together into fresh and living form. Let us look closely to see what this capacity for creativeness consists of. J. P. Guilford and his associates³ at the University of Southern California have offered much careful experimental evidence that creativeness consists of a number of different functions; that it is not just one thing, but the sum or composite of many separate kinds of gifts.

I shall offer a somewhat similar view. In my schema, a conception of creativity must consider the following: (1) Receptivity to the outer environment in the form of readiness to accept the structure of the world out there which confronts us; (2) receptivity to our own inner promptings, whether they come from feelings in our vitals or in our muscles, or indeed from the patterns of our long hidden but still active memories; (3) the capacity to love or move outgoingly toward such stimulation, whether from without or within, which the psychoanalysts call cathexis, but which I have at times called canalization—the forming of an emotional line of communication from the self to the stimulus value of outer or inner things; (4) combinatory skill—the capacity to put two and two together, the capacity to form structure, whether architectural, verbal, musical, or whatnot—which is conceived to be in large measure a hereditary capacity, though of course greatly stimulated and strengthened by environmental circumstances; (5) the capacity for progression, for moving forward from one level to the next, which among students of esthetics is known as the "progressive mastery" principle—the principle which makes success at one level so boring that one must step beyond it to a new and more complex level of expression; and finally (6) an urge or will to create.

Can my six-fold system be justified for the time being, and is there any way to show how it is related to the world of the paranormal, the world to which extrasensory perception belongs? I believe this can be done without much sleight of hand, borrowing from the classical studies in our field. The classical period for the study of creativeness and works of genius was indeed the period in which the relation of genius to the paranormal was first vividly expressed, notably by Frederic W. H. Myers.⁴ For him the unconscious mind, or subliminal self, accumulates through its gropings the contacts and the cathexes or canalizations to which I have referred; and there is a storehouse of rich experience loved and held close to the heart which, when instigated by some situation

³ *A Factor-Analytic Study of Creative Thinking*. I. Report from the Psychological Laboratory, University of Southern California, April, 1951.

⁴ *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*, Longmans, Green and Company, London, 1903. (See especially Chapter 3, "Genius.")

for which we have a creative answer, bursts forth into consciousness. Myers called this a "subliminal uprush." Genius, he says, is an expression of subliminal uprush. Examples are found in what he calls "sensory automatisms," like the visions seen in a crystal, in a cloud, or, indeed, even in the Rorschach Inkblots, which give a new structure expressing both what has been accumulated in the subliminal and what is happening in the outer world which is significant for us, to which we are reaching out. Thus the creative and the paranormal become expressions of the same potential subliminal materials and the impulse to fulfill them, round them out, and give them new integration by making contact in one way or another with the outer world.

This conception of Myers was certainly sound as far as it went. Today, however, it seems to have left out a great deal and there is much to add. There is, for example, Max Wertheimer's⁵ conception of productive thinking as involving a sudden integration based upon the actual internal harmony or coherence of the patterned structures in the outer world. Man, says Wertheimer, does not have to forge together material which is intrinsically piecemeal and meaningless. The meanings are right there in the environment and man needs only to glimpse them intuitively and allow them to achieve their highest structure. Going beyond Wertheimer, in turn, is the conception of using our own weaknesses and inadequacies to make possible a higher structure, as developed on the one hand by Alfred Adler⁶ with his theory of compensation for inferiority, and on the other hand by Jan Ehrenwald,⁷ who has suggested a compensatory function which goes beyond the defects or "minus functions" present within us, and asserts a positive new integration. Indeed, here I would also add Sigmund Freud's dynamic conception that the unconscious emotional and instinctual life, including the world of love in both its biological and its extended sense, finds twin expressions in the creativeness of artist and scientist, and likewise in those strange incidents to which Freud⁸ himself referred, in which the patient in analytic therapy appears to make paranormal contact with events in the life of the therapist. We have, then, a number of conceptions in the realm of psychical research which are curiously like a series of conceptions which have developed in the scholarly study of creative gifts.

⁵ *Productive Thinking*, Harper and Brothers, New York, 1959. (Enlarged edition, edited by Michael Wertheimer.)

⁶ *The Science of Living*, Greenberg, Inc., New York, 1929. (See Chapter 2, "The Inferiority Complex.")

⁷ *Telepathy and Medical Psychology*, W. W. Norton, New York, 1948.

⁸ See, for example, "The Case of Dr. Forsyth," in *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, W. W. Norton, New York, 1933, p. 78.

Another reason for connecting creativeness and ESP is that one often finds the steps toward the emergence of a paranormal impression to be similar to the steps of development or "incubation" of creative ideas made evident in the life stories of the gifted artist, or inventor. J. J. Rossman's book, *The Psychology of the Inventor*,⁹ is a classic in its portrayal of this process of slow incubation and sudden irruption into consciousness of a solution to a problem.

I am not belittling the huge role of personal idiosyncrasies and innate capacities, both in genius and in the gift for the paranormal. But I am at the same time emphasizing the rôle which environment and training play in giving shape to these capacities. This has been stressed in a study of outstanding architects, writers, mathematicians, and painters carried out by D. W. MacKinnon¹⁰ at the University of California (Berkeley); the quality of openness—openness both to the outer and to the inner world—is said by MacKinnon to be the salient characteristic of these creative persons.

Thus although many factors seem to justify the linking of creativity with ESP (e.g., the coexistence of the two in the same persons), we must be cautious in the absence of a control group of gifted persons without ESP, and ESP-endowed persons who are not especially creative. A closer look, however, suggests similar psychological processes directly observable in the general thinking of creative persons and ESP-gifted persons, and especially in the creative act itself as compared with the specific act of extrasensory perception. We are struggling to develop a suitable method for obtaining a full introspective or phenomenological study of the creative act. We can build upon the brilliant work of biographers, such as Paine's study of Mark Twain and Rossman's study of inventors.

III

A closer view is being attempted today by Karlis Osis, the new Director of Research at the A.S.P.R. He has been able, especially in the study of painters and sculptors, to catch a bit of the divine fire in which an impression comes or an impulse to act supervenes and transcends all conscious control. An excerpt from a recent tape-recorded interview with a gifted sculptor may help to make this clear:

SL: [In response to a question from Dr. Osis concerning the creative act] . . . at that very moment, at the real moment,

⁹ *The Inventors*, Publishing Company, Washington, D. C., 1931.

¹⁰ "Identifying and Developing Creativity," lecture sponsored by the Field Service Center and the Center for the Study of Higher Education, University of California, Berkeley, May, 1959. (Mimeographed.)

the highest moment, there is an element of unselfconsciousness which has to be present. It's a kind of seminal force which I would say few human beings have. It's an inborn force; it's an intuitive, introspective force that goes on even below the level of consciousness which is driving; an organizational force—I feel that's present in great artists, important artists, that's forcing the situation toward its greatest fulfillment, its greatest intensity, because you can't arrive at this through rational thought. You can't create with the intellect, although the intellect is present in the process. There's something below the level of consciousness that's driving, an unconscious force.

KO: Is there a tension between that force and the intellect?

SL: That's right. There's a tension between both of them, constantly. Constant tension.

KO: So to say, somebody looking over your shoulder?

SL: That's right. The mind is constantly looking over the shoulder of the unconscious—the unconscious organizational force that's driving. I don't sit down and rationally think out, now should I push it this way or push it that way. You don't. It happens, the correct way it is. It happens, and I surmise it has to do with a kind of tension between all kinds of forces that are operating at white heat. It's a kind of *involvement of the whole being—all of life, of your history, of your experiences, of your hopes, of your unconscious, of your emotions, of your sensibilities, of your need for immortality, everything.*

KO: It's all mobilized?

SL: It's all together like a big philharmonic orchestra and everything is playing at once. But the driving force, I feel, is some mysterious thing which is a human thing.

KO: What is it?

SL: It's something ... which I suspect is a predisposition in certain human beings toward organization, toward full organization of some kind. There are some people able to give *form* to the meaning of their needs, toward what they want. In my case as a sculptor, I put the meaning of my life and my hopes and my pains and flops in metal ... I'm taking pieces of metal and I'm putting it into something, and it has what I call *presence*. It has the meaning of my life, and the meaning of my times also, because I'm a part of my times. I feel that the thing which motivates, which drives, which regulates and maintains this high intensity—and that's what we're talking about, the high level of esthetic intensity—is what I would call talent. It's a kind of—

KO: Is it usually called talent?

SL: Well, the word is genius, but I don't like to use that word. *Genie*, coming from the mystery of some inner motivation that some people have and other people haven't got. For instance, I wouldn't have it in music; another man has it in music.

Somewhat similar data are also being obtained in interviews by Gertrude Schmeidler with specially gifted persons.

I am also learning from the interview methods of Robert Lynch, who is active in our newly-formed A.S.P.R. Branch in southern California. He uses a somewhat standardized interview form, but it allows great freedom for the individual interviewed to roam about and express himself in language other than words; that is, gesture, stance, posture, facial expression, and all the other indices of strong feeling. This may be better than the more solemn, "bolt-upright" exchange of words alone, even though there is a tape recording and every effort made to get the whole atmosphere of the conversation. Through such interviewing techniques, we are beginning to learn how to obtain a picture of the individual's development of his creative yen and of the skill with which his creative impulse can be translated into color, or tone or word; or dance form, or architectural three-dimensional vision; and learning how to plumb the depths of his paranormal capacities in the same way.

We agree with many investigators in the past who have spoken of paranormal gifts, such as ESP, as *unconscious* psychological phenomena; but we cannot fully agree with some of them in their belief that consciousness is powerless to throw light on these phenomena. In fact, we seem to find both in psychological experiments and in psychoanalytic practice that there is a constant push, back and forth, between that which is unconscious and that which is in the realm called the "preconscious"; and that there are times when even the deep unconscious may push its way through not only into the preconscious but into consciousness. We have everything to learn by pushing these methods as far as we can. Sometimes in the very process of analysis, as Freud¹¹ pointed out, we seem to encounter the telepathic process. Thus, the same method of probing which throws light on the nature of unconscious dynamics and individual fantasy may also throw light on the process by which we make paranormal contact with distant persons and events.

¹¹ Sigmund Freud, *op. cit.*

IV

At this point we begin to see why it was thought worth while in our new research program to devote ourselves to a study of the relation between creativity and extrasensory perception. A gift from the Ittleson Family Foundation in New York, and another gift later from the Scaife Fund of Pittsburgh, to the Menninger Foundation, made possible our assignment of tasks to a number of experienced investigators all the way from California and western Canada across the continent to New York.

Initially our research group comprised Karlis Osis, of the A.S.P.R., Gertrude R. Schmeidler, veteran investigator who has worked for some twenty years at Harvard and at City College; Robert Lynch, a Menninger-trained psychiatrist doing his Navy service in California, but finding time to go on with creativity-ESP studies; Robert Sommer, a former Menninger psychologist now teaching at the University of Alberta; Remi Cadoret, physiologist at the University of Manitoba School of Medicine; Margaret L. Anderson, a Duke-trained parapsychologist, who for many years has worked with children in school settings, making notable innovations in the investigation of ESP in childhood; Rhea A. White, who has worked with Dr. Anderson, has done valuable work for us as editor at the A.S.P.R., and carried out numerous ESP investigations of her own; and Charles G. Morris, a Yale graduate now pursuing the Ph.D. at the University of Illinois, whose special interest is in the fantasy life.

These workers were appointed in the fall of 1961, at the time the first funds were received from the Ittleson Family Foundation. Later, when funds were received from the Scaife Fund of Pittsburgh, I was able to set up in Topeka a study of creativity in children. Lois Murphy had for years been working with a group of children who had been observed and studied from infancy, whose life histories had been explored with exceptional thoroughness, and about whom we have a wide range of information relating to creativity. With the help of Dr. Alice Moriarty and Dr. Sylvia Ginsparg, a program has been worked out for the investigation in these children of those creative functions which may lie close to paranormal abilities. Eloise Shields, a clinical psychologist in the Los Angeles area, has recently been in Topeka and administered ESP tests to a number of these children; and in the near future Margaret Anderson will visit us and apply her own ESP tests.

Finally, it is a source of enormous gratification to us to report that Montague Ullman, Head of the Department of Psychiatry at Maimonides Hospital of Brooklyn, has recently set up, with the use of Scaife funds, a research program to study sleep and dreams

as related to extrasensory processes, using some of the newer sleep-and-dream techniques. Dr. Ullman is receiving the assistance of Dr. Clara Torda and Dr. S. David Kahn. Dr. J. L. Woodruff, of the Department of Psychology at City College, and our associate in ESP investigations for many years, has also generously agreed to serve as a consultant, and we hope that D. W. MacKinnon, of the University of California, will soon be able to serve in a similar role.

This is all-in-all an extraordinary group, I believe. Its members all know something of the pitfalls and frustrations in the field of parapsychology, and are not making any spectacular promises whatever. Our focus is on the nature of the creative act itself, and on the nature of the paranormal contact occasionally made with other persons or with the environment. There are many studies from which we can learn and many other investigators with whom we are in touch, but we hope that our own work will have value enough to warrant the faith in us and the large funds committed to our trust. The portion of our work which has advanced furthest so far is the interviewing of gifted people, as expressed, for example, in the work of Osis, Schmeidler, and Lynch. The interviewing, life history analysis, and ESP experimentation will be carried out in that order. An experimental program in ESP must, we feel, be based on thorough preliminary studies of individuals.

But what if it should turn out that there are many independent kinds of creativity and many independent kinds of ESP? If so, we might well fail to verify such hypotheses as I have tried to develop in regard to the creative act. Yet we might, even so, accomplish two things: (1) We might, by using improved methods, do the best study of creativity in children that has as yet been done, and by concentrating upon it, get a little closer to the actual core of the creative act; and (2) we might, through intensive study of a few highly gifted, creative men and women with rich paranormal experiences, get a better qualitative picture of these phenomena as they occur in gifted persons than has yet been worked out. These are, of course, simply our hopes.

At this point I would like to stress what the members of the A.S.P.R. can contribute to our study. There is a great deal that our membership can do to help us: first, by drawing to our attention highly creative persons who are available for study; second, by finding for us people who are highly gifted in ESP; and third, by helping us gather spontaneous cases of telepathy and related phenomena so well described that they will shed light on the dynamics of the paranormal and its relation to creativity.

V

In the time remaining I wish to take you with me into some theoretical areas related very broadly to the nature of our contact with the environment. Our need to confront directly the problem of the relation of creativity to extrasensory perception has forced us to take a very close look at the nature of the normal process of perceiving. For a long time men believed that perception was essentially like a photographic process; that it automatically registered the outer world upon our senses, and ultimately upon our brains. Yet it has become more and more clear with the experimental research and clinical observations of recent years that men come to terms with the outer world in their own ways; that each man introduces a certain idiosyncrasy or personal signature into the process of perceiving. One of the most evident expressions of this individuality is the way in which we integrate and give meaning to nonsense material or chaotic forms. If we look at simple lines and dots, we find them forming different patterns; indeed, we may see them as triangles, squares, pentagons, or other complex figures. Telegraphic clicks, or random arrangements of tone (as recently developed by the Bell Telephone Laboratories), are actually heard as melodies, are given different melodic lines and rhythmic structures by different people. As we listen to the distant surf on a summer evening, we hear almost voice-like rhythms which are expressions partly of our own fantasies. All of this is by way of saying that the act of perceiving is highly integrative.

Now side by side with this we still find in many writings in our field a very misleading conception of extrasensory perception, as if it were a piecemeal selection of bits of information from an essentially meaningless or chaotic world. But several studies suggest that the more highly structured the target material is, the better the results appear to be. I refer here to some of the work of S. G. Soal and Gertrude Schmeidler in which the odds were one in 25 of getting the target right, and to the work of Whately Carington in which free drawings were used. And from the better studies of spontaneous cases it appears that highly complex and structured personal messages are characteristic of ESP in its full-blown expression. This is a way of saying that extrasensory perception, like normal perception, seems to be much more than the mere passive reception of impressions; it seems to be a structuring process. And insofar as this is so, we can say that there is a latent capacity in all mankind for a certain kind of creativity in its own right.

As we have just said, the person receiving the telepathic impression is not merely "receiving"; he is dealing with structured and meaningful material. He gets the structure as far as he can, and

may often add to it. Eleanor Mildred Sidgwick,¹² one of our most profound students of these phenomena, dealt in a brilliant paper with the overcoming of hindrances and complications in the telepathic process. By this she meant particularly the capacity of the subliminal levels of the receiving mind to preserve intact the patterned stimulus presentation, and in the moment in which there is fragmentation of impression to rebuild it. A similar concept emerges from René Warcollier's¹³ long series of experimental studies.

I am going so far as to say that it is not only the nature of the paranormal processes to preserve the intact and meaningful wholeness which becomes available to the individual under special conditions, but actually to seek to create such wholeness. It is as if we were dealing with an inborn and fundamental human need to create which shows itself both in structured normal perception and in paranormal perception; and, indeed, in thought processes and in the whole realm of fantasy and imagination. We might find it useful to attend here to Plato's *Symposium*, which dealt with the power of creative love to give organization. Few things have done as much damage to our human effort to understand our own thought processes as the fear of the creative or generative urges; the tendency to belittle or to damn the deep and continuous creative reality of life, whether this is expressed in growth, in self-healing, in transformations to higher levels, or of course in generativity itself, which, as E. H. Erikson¹⁴ has pointed out in his writings on identity, is often a completion and fulfillment of many other types of creativity characteristic wherever life has an opportunity to express itself. It is not, I think, accidental that modern biographical and clinical studies of the highly creative thinker and the genius have dealt with the power of love to take very simple raw material and give it a transcendent integrative expression.

Here I find myself at a crossroads where several ideas are trying to meet, express themselves, and pass by at the same time. I am attempting to show how life, growth, love, perception, the paranormal, and the creative process are all interrelated. I groped about for the best study I could find anywhere of the creative process, and found it in the extravagantly brilliant and ingenious book by J. L. Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu*,¹⁵ an intimate study of the two great poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan." After the intricacies of

¹² "On Hindrances and Complications in Telepathic Communication," *Proc. S.P.R.*, Vol. 34, 1924, pp. 28-69.

¹³ *Experimental Telepathy*, Boston Society for Psychic Research, Boston, 1938.

¹⁴ "Identity and the Life Cycle," *Psychological Issues*, Vol. I, No. 1, 1959, 1-171.

¹⁵ Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, 1927.

Coleridge's scholarly readings and discussions for twenty-five years have been absorbed by Lowes, he settles down to make clear how the actual texture of these great poems took shape. Much light on the problem lies in the endlessly quoted and utterly beautiful closing lines of "The Ancient Mariner": "He prayeth best, who loveth best all things both great and small; for the dear God who loveth us, He made and loveth all." What mere receptivity of eye or brain could never accomplish, the outreaching motivation of the lover can reach.

Insofar as this is true, a method of investigation, whether clinical or experimental, will tend to succeed when it permits the free play, the outreaching, the *passion* of the creative impulse to appear and to be communicated through the work of the artist, poet, musician, or scientist. And may it not be the same with the investigator himself, as he tries to "feel himself" into the creative moods which have characterized some of the great spontaneous cases such as those I have summarized above? It was, I believe, because Mark Twain loved his younger brother and went out to meet him, that his striking precognitive dream occurred. And indeed, at an humbler level, it was because Rider Haggard and his dog shared a mutual love and understanding that paranormal contact was made in the dog's last moment. To quote Coleridge again: "He prayeth well, who loveth well both man and bird and beast." Do you see why I am willing to guess that Mark Twain's and Rider Haggard's creative gifts and also their paranormal powers may be related to the specific forms of the love which they bore for animal and man?

The Menninger Foundation
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