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WHAT NEXT IN SURVIVAL RESEARCH?

A Symposium Arranged
by the *Psychical Research Foundation, Inc.*

Introductory Remarks

Body-Mind Theory as a Factor Guiding
Survival Research

An Experimentalist's Approach to
Survival Research

Evidence of Survival from "Other-
World" Experiences

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GARDNER MURPHY ✓

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

W. G. ROLL

In a difficult field of research the survival problem is perhaps the most difficult. Why be concerned with it? The very complexity of the problem and the need for ingenious research is challenging. But the survival question is important mainly because it asks about a crucial event in the existence of every human being, death. As Dr. Herman Feifel says in *The Meaning of Death* (McGraw-Hill, 1959), a person's attitude toward death "can serve as an important organizing principle in determining how he conducts himself in life."

Survival research combines two difficulties: scarcity of data and the problem of interpretation. Ostensible survival phenomena were apparently less rare in earlier times. This is probably not because there were more gifted subjects available then, but because more efforts were made to find them. Research that depends on whether suitable subjects will volunteer for testing at a laboratory is not likely to go far.

The newcomer to this area should familiarize himself with these earlier efforts. He ought to do so, not with the purpose of reaching a judgment about the survival hypothesis, or even about the simpler question whether there is decisive evidence for psi in this material, but to become aware of the problems of analysis and interpretation which may confront him in his own research.

A study of survival, of necessity, includes the general field of psychical research because the psi abilities of the living play a central role in the counterhypotheses. At this stage, it is even more important that the investigator should form a clear picture of the conventional psi processes than of the survival hypothesis itself. If he can discover something about the nature and limitations of the channel of information that connects a subject with events distant in space and time, an important step will have been taken toward a test of the survival hypothesis. We cannot know whether a subject is communicating with the deceased if it is equally plausible that the information was obtained solely by means of his own ESP abilities.

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The research worker of today has some advantages over his predecessors. Developments in statistics, personality testing, and instrumentation for measuring physical and physiological effects will help in the design of better projects. Recent progress in areas such as dream research and the work with "consciousness expanding" drugs may also suggest leads, since ostensible communication with deceased personalities sometimes occurs in dreams, and since the hypothetical after-death state might resemble states artificially induced by drugs. The investigator should be guided by actual research opportunities, not by some image of the "ideal" case which will once and for all prove survival. Psi phenomena in general and ostensible survival phenomena in particular are rarely made to order.

If, after a major research effort, the investigator finds that he has not proved anything about survival, but only about living agency psi, this is not a defeat; it may lay the foundation for a more decisive attack. Discoveries about the nature of psi are discoveries about the force or weakness of the counterhypotheses. Fortunately, ESP and PK often appear to operate in their most striking form in the same subjects and situations where ostensible survival phenomena are found.

Research in this area can therefore be profitable also for parapsychologists who are interested in ESP and PK rather than in the survival issue as such. The subjects who claim that they sometimes communicate with the deceased also often show greater ESP abilities than the common run of laboratory subjects; it would therefore seem that they are more likely to contribute information about ESP. Similarly, whether or not alleged cases of recurrent spontaneous PK ("poltergeist," "haunting") involve discarnate agencies, they may reveal more about the nature of PK than the faint traces that are produced at the laboratory dice tables.

An effective attack on ESP and PK can perhaps best be made in situations where there is ostensible survival evidence in the same way as an effective attack on the survival problem largely depends on ESP and PK research.

A meaningful expression of the survival hypothesis must not only relate to psi phenomena but also to other natural events. The establishment of survival, if it ever is established, will not mean that the picture given by physics and the other sciences is false, but merely that it is incomplete. This is already recognized and additions are frequently made.

Moreover, the survival theory has to be stated in a way that is self-consistent, consistent with parapsychological findings, and consistent with the known facts of nature. Theoretical work as well as empirical explorations are necessary. Fortunately, among

those who are active in parapsychology there are many capable philosophers and scientists. The Psychical Research Foundation has invited some of these to assist in the clarification of the survival problem and to outline new research projects by participating in the present symposium. The editorial committee for the symposium consists of Professor C. J. Ducasse, Dr. Gardner Murphy, and myself.

Abstracts of all symposium papers have appeared in *Theta* (Numbers 4-8), the quarterly bulletin of the Foundation. In consultation with the three symposium editors and the A.S.P.R. editor, a selection of these papers is printed in full in this and subsequent numbers of the *Journal*. Readers are invited to submit papers on the symposium topic or comments on the published contributions for possible future publication in the *Journal*. Symposium papers should be fifteen hundred words or less and should state clearly what types of investigations, in the writer's opinion, would provide data that are difficult to reconcile with any hypothesis other than that of the survival after death of human personality, or some aspect of it. The proposals need not be restricted to what might be the ideal evidence for survival, but can take into consideration actual research opportunities or reflect the writer's special interests. Symposium papers and correspondence should be sent to "What Next in Survival Research?" at the address below.

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Body-Mind Theory as a Factor Guiding Survival Research

GARDNER MURPHY

I

The conception of steps to be taken in survival research will depend upon an evaluation of what has really been achieved and what can ultimately be expected. That is to say, the next steps will be defined partly by our situation and the terrain in which we now find ourselves, and partly by our conception of paths that may lead from this terrain to a defined goal.

From this point of view, I must say at first that I think the hope entertained by Myers, and others a half century or more ago, of definitively settling the survival issue in a positive sense has dimmed considerably. The steady growth in the solidity and convincingness of the biological approach to human nature, while leaving some questions open, has certainly not made it easy to conceive of detaching the personality from the living system as a whole and projecting it in time beyond the point of physical death. This means, I think, that the question comes down to the problem of what aspects of the personality may, perhaps, be so independent of physical organization as to be likely to continue, at least for a while, in time, undergoing changes as do all things which have life in any sense of the term. From this viewpoint, the question is to assess, not how strong the case "for survival" is, but what aspects of the evidence are relevant to what kinds of questions relating to survival of certain aspects of personality beyond death; all this is a greatly modified and much more cautious question. The next questions in survival research are thus questions as to aspects of individuality which seem to survive, at least for a while.

I think we may expressly state that in the case of the best survival evidence, some of which I have tried to review in *Challenge of Psychical Research* (7), we have (a) clear retention of memories expressed in accurate reproduction of events in the lifetime of the reporting communicator and not known to any living person or plausibly interpreted as clairvoyant or retrocognitive contact with the past; (b) continuity of aim or purpose, as in the case of some of the Myers cross correspondences, notably where there is plainly a will which contravenes the will toward sheer drowsiness, free association, superficial play-acting, etc.; in short, the cases like those in which the persistence of the living Myers is found again in the persistence of the entity which appears to be communicating, and (c) "personality style," or a type of organization or mode of interpreting the world and living it out which is highly personal and idiosyncratic and hard to reconstruct through any conception of automatism or suggestibility or histrionic poses, no matter how ingenious. It seems to me that "what next in survival research?" might mean "how get evidence regarding memory or continuity of purpose or preservation of the style?" I would say that in all three, the study with powerful mediums is a major mode of investigation and, therefore, whether we like the answer or not, the discovery of powerful mediums is our most immediate task. It is, of course, generally agreed that there are no very powerful mediums to be found anywhere today, and also that there is no very active search being made for them. For this reason, I think that "what next in

survival research?" is something which we are failing to define in such a way as to get ourselves to act.

II

From my own outlook, the next step in any such task as this is to define the general philosophic-scientific situation which confronts our present-day attempts to make a soul or personality independently definable apart from the living system which it represents; the old problem of Aristotle as to how active reason or any other spiritual or intellectual entity can exist except as "form" intimately related to specific matter. Plato and most of the Western tradition have defined soul as an entity really independent of the living system and this is exactly the concept against which almost all of modern science and all of modern thought has rebelled. It seems to be necessary, therefore, to devote a few pages to the simple question: Are we inexorably tied to a modern monism of soul and body, or are there some conceivable ways in which modern man may rationally think of soul or mind as having a certain kind of existence independent of the physical organism?

It is still philosophically permissible to take one's choice among many body-mind theories. Indeed, C. D. Broad (1) tells us that there are at least seventeen workable theories of the body-mind relationship. In practice, however, the issue has become greatly simplified since the time of Spinoza's suggestion that mind and body are simply two aspects of the same living reality. The research done in the physical sciences, in the biological sciences, and in the social sciences presents no very serious difficulty today to the conception that the living system can be studied by the methods of science and that, while the physical activities go on, there is a subjective or personal or psychological aspect likewise going on. As a man thinks, knowing his own subjective thought, the physician might be studying the electrical activities in the man's brain. The electrical activities and the other concomitant physiological activities would simply be aspects of the same reality which is known subjectively in his thought.

This is not "materialism," for it does not say that the subjective is derived from the physical. It can be called the body-mind "double-aspect theory." One can, however, quite legitimately say that what is known as the physical approach is just another way of stating the perceptual, that is, the subjective, responses of those who study the brain. The "real reality," so to speak, is the man's thought, and the electrical and other physiological activities which the physician describes are simply reflections of thought. This is

not helpful, however, in pushing the matter to a philosophical conclusion as it leads into an infinite *regressus*; and it still does nothing to belittle the importance of the systematic spacetime formulations which we know as physical science. The abstractions of physics are highly useful in connection with the study of what we call space, time, matter, energy; that is, the physical relationships which go on as thought itself goes on. My own view is that all body-mind dualisms ultimately result in double-aspect theories and that all double-aspect theories finally give the explanatory advantage to the subjective or personal experience. There is no purpose whatever in denying the reality of the brain and the rest of the physical machinery of the body; but they are not ultimate, whereas the experience which we know in ourselves is ultimate.

This point of view is ancient and will be found in most of the philosophical texts. I have stated here only an over-simplified form of the theory; but I did want to make my initial position clear.

An important contribution of modern physical science is the definition of the relations of the organism to its environment, stating these relationships in terms of space-time and matter-energy interactions. This makes it convenient to describe the physiological substrate of mental processes without saying that the substrate is the "cause." At the same time, it is unnecessary to say that the mental or conscious event is the "cause" of the physiological substrate. Since the physiological phenomena probably have to reach a fairly high level of complexity to give the kind of awareness or consciousness which is subjectively perceivable and describable, we may suppose that organized matter which is not highly enough organized to be a substrate for consciousness is a substrate for unconscious or semiconscious or subconscious processes.

III

In its study of the relations of organisms to their environments, science has discovered a number of modalities by which contact is maintained. For the most part, sensory communication is a matter of sensitive spots developing on the outer surfaces of the living individual or, in some cases, on the inner surfaces such as the mucous membranes of nose, throat, or gastrointestinal canal; and when stimulation gets above a definable threshold value, there is an eruption of new experience into awareness. This means that the physiological aspect and the psychological aspect come into view at the same time and their reciprocity as aspects can be studied. Let us call this process of response to the environment "sensory communication."

There is also, however, according to the generally acceptable findings of parapsychology, the eruption of impressions regarding distant events, sometimes through direct contact, known as clairvoyance, sometimes through contact with another mind, known as telepathy. The processes within our living system are making contact with other processes in other systems, nonliving and living. In fact, it is mainly these processes which we investigate. We find it necessary to assume that space as an abstraction developed in physics is not useful where the contact is made without using any of the forms of physical energy about which we are relatively well informed. We speak of clairvoyance and telepathy precisely when we do not have anything to say about the transfer of energy over space. In exactly the same way, contact is made with temporally displaced events—events already past or not yet having occurred. Nothing whatever regarding the nature of time or the solidity or flexibility or discontinuity of events in the time series has so far been shown by the findings. Consequently, the fact of precognition has no implications one way or the other regarding fatalistic, deterministic, or other conceptions of causality, or even for the existence of a necessary time sequence. Sticking to our empirical findings, we appear to have a transcendence of the ordinary time dependencies, just as we have a transcendence of the ordinary space dependencies whenever organisms make the kind of contacts which we call paranormal.

IV

From this viewpoint, we must ask ourselves under what conditions these paranormal contacts are actually made. On various other occasions I have pleaded that they operate according to the generally known psychological laws of motivation, sensitivity, and variation of threshold, in terms of needs and the principles of association, facilitation, and inhibition which apply wherever perceptual phenomena are found. In general, as worked out separately by G. R. Schmeidler (8) in 1947 and by me (5, 6) on several occasions, the need and habit system of the living individual plays a prominent part in the extrasensory functions.

Among the needs particularly important in man, and in some higher animals, are those concerned with making contact with significant members of the species; most cases of extrasensory perception deal with such significant entities. Through ESP one makes contact. There are, in addition, many cases where there is an intense need to act as if one were actually in contact.

We have, therefore, some working concepts necessary to explain why through most cultures and throughout the ages extrasensory phenomena occur in connection with illness and death of loved persons and the need to make contact with them both during their life crisis and, if possible, after their demise. In primitive religion, as pointed out by Andrew Lang (4), there is contact with the deceased in the case of ghosts, possession, and reincarnation phenomena insofar as the attitudes and hopes of the members of cult groups aim in this direction. There are, however, widely varying cultural expectations and hopes, and the nature of the ghosts with which contact is made varies all the way from human through animal, supernatural, diabolical, and other entities which depend upon the direction of the attitudes, wishes, hopes and fears, as in autistic and other well-known perceptual responses. There is, of course, a mixing of normal and paranormal processes as there is always a potentiation of one by the other: a normal dream may have grafted upon it a paranormal element. A normal desire to find a lost object finds grafted upon it a deceased person or a supernatural entity which helps in the finding process.

As shown by Mrs. Henry Sidgwick (9, pp. 5-7), it is possible to accept the hypothesis of telepathy from the living and, with only minor adjustments, telepathy from the deceased. If one asks how the deceased can exist in terms of a body-mind theory such as we have sketched, just two things need to be said: (a) We have not the slightest idea as to the terms under which the deceased may exist. The controversy of scientists and philosophers and religionists goes on unabated, century by century. (b) From the point of view of psychical research, we have regarded the mental, personal, or subjective aspects of organic reality as fundamental and the physical aspect as one which is set up for conceptual convenience and for such convenience only. Consequently, if there be such a thing as survival—and this paper is completely neutral on the issue—it would probably follow that the personal aspect should be conceptualized as continuing and the physical-cellular-physiological aspect as disintegrating.

It is, of course, also possible that some other physiological substrate may be found, as a wave form in music may set one series of activities, like wires, vibrating and then another set like the air columns of organ pipes. The basic form or mathematical aspect of music is not dependent upon any particular physical structure; and if the personality is a form or reality embodying a certain organization, it can perfectly well get along for a time without a physical substrate that is visible to us. And it may at a

later time assume another substrate which is physical and familiar to us—though perhaps taking surprising form. The same motives which led toward impersonation in the case of mediumship may have led to the establishment of a system of congruent impersonations among the automatists involved in the cross correspondences. Indeed, having once accepted, as in the Piddington "Sevens Case" (3, pp. 243-258), the fact that a whole orchestra of subconscious activities related to the theme of *Seven* can be set going in several different automatists, there is no reason to be surprised if mediumship should prove to be a good resonating system to get the social beliefs about post-mortem existence solidly established and carried forward generation by generation.

VI

So far as I can see, the logic of reincarnation will follow all the principles laid down. The first hypothesis will always be that the members of any cultural group who believe in post-mortem existence will continue to experience and report contact—visual, auditory, etc.—with surviving entities. These entities will become more and more real to the observers and, at times, if there are striking resemblances between their known ways and the ways of living children, the suggestion will arise sooner or later that the children are incarnations of the deceased. The belief will become self-reinforcing as on these terms the ghost with which one has been communicating will now disappear and the child will continue to show the attributes which the ghost previously exhibited. Insofar as a cult of transmigration belief develops, there will always be plenty of opportunities for individuals that die within the social group to be recognized in children born later. The children will remember events in the lives of their prior sojourns in this world insofar as they make sufficiently real psychological contact with the group (and mostly they stick very close to the group which shares the belief regarding the deceased, regarding the reality of transmigration, and regarding the availability of a given child's body as a fresh vehicle for this entity). The child may draw further necessary information by clairvoyance or telepathy; he may also draw such information by retrocognition, an hypothesis supported by several striking cases of contact with remote past events. Although not ordinarily a principle exploited in parapsychology, we may, following Whately Carington (2), assume a rich associative system which makes possible a "psychon system" to borrow and blend, mind to mind, forming higher aggregates; moreover, such aggregates may invade the *future* and the *past* equally well.

The resulting theory, therefore, stretches extrasensory perception in all directions in which it is ready to move, and apparently this kind of stretching process is necessary. We have been too timid rather than too bold in such matters. Several attempts have already been made (such as Carington's) to show that a psychon theory can be legitimately pushed quite far without snapping. From such a viewpoint, Ian Stevenson's cases (10) and other reincarnationist cases strongly suggest that the sensitive mind of a small child, surrounded by persons who believe in reincarnation, latches on and begins to exploit more and more the possibilities for both normal and paranormal information. At times this may be supplemented by rather dramatic cases of "big time" sensitivity. But actually, in reading these cases, I have not found a single one that seems to involve the high order of paranormal power shown by Mrs. Piper or Mrs. Leonard. Very simply, the theory is that the associative pattern is followed and the personal system of ideas and self-concepts within the child are molded as social conditions and personal needs permit. Social conditions, of course, usually play a very large part in the case of the child.

VII

I hope it is clear that I have tried to provide here a deductive as well as an inductive approach to the survival problem. Side by side with the discovery of new working instruments such as more powerful mediums, there is the need for fresh philosophical sophistication and the development of both dualistic and monistic conceptions of the body-mind relationship which will make possible the establishment of rational hypotheses as to what it is in human personality that might survive physical death. Considering the complexity and subtlety of the problem, it is rather pitiful to find modern science and philosophy rehashing old ideas; and it is also rather pitiful to find them usually failing to define new issues in such a way as to permit the planning of new experiments.

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An Experimentalist's Approach to Survival Research

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WHAT WE CANNOT HOPE TO ACHIEVE

Let us consider what can be accomplished by research on survival after death. Will finding the ideal case, or performing the crucial experiment, prove that survival occurs? Or can a carefully conducted series of investigations prove that survival does not occur? Can the best research give us a definitive answer?

From two different approaches we come to the same reply to questions so worded, and the reply is a flat, unqualified *No*. One approach begins with the familiar argument that we cannot prove by research, any more than by kicking a stone as Dr. Johnson did, that an external world exists (though its existence certainly seems plausible); nor can we prove that we ourselves are conscious (though we can assert it loudly and often); and we certainly cannot prove that anyone else is conscious. We cannot even prove by research, while we ourselves are alive, that we will die. Since

we cannot prove these, it follows that survival after an (unproven) death of some (unproven) consciousness is unprovable by research methods.

The other approach begins where this leaves off; it assumes as givens the existence of an external world and of other conscious beings in it. But even with these assumptions we cannot "prove" any general positive law by research. If every stone that is released over the rail of the Tower of Pisa falls down, this does not prove that the next stone released will fall down; it merely makes the conclusion so plausible that any reasonable person is likely to accept it—unless perhaps he knows so much about local wind conditions that he can predict that the next light stone will be carried upward by a gale. Research data can never prove; they can only provide the basis for a consensus.

WHAT WE CAN HOPE TO ACHIEVE

Research results can lead to a consensus. Therefore the experimentalist, *qua* experimentalist, comes to research on survival with hope for meaningful findings but no hope for certainty; with an attitude different from that permissible to a philosopher or theologian and even different from his own natural feelings as a human being who yearns for something stable in which to believe. The experimentalist's most ambitious question, before beginning research, might be phrased something like this: "What sort of evidence on survival after death would make the survival hypothesis seem extremely likely—more likely than any counterhypothesis; and what sort of evidence would make survival seem extremely unlikely?"

Answers naturally vary. But one with which few would disagree is hypothesis-testing: if an hypothesis leads to many predictions which are confirmed, the hypothesis is strongly supported. Little of the research on survival has so far been of the hypothesis-testing type; presumably we should do more of it if we can.

Another answer with which many concur is construct validity: if there are several theories, each weakly supported, and if these theories tie in with each other, then the resulting pattern is more persuasive than any single part of it would have been.

The major positive argument to be presented here is that the best method of hypothesis-testing is the same route which leads to construct-validity. This can be restated in more specific form: to find persuasive evidence we should think up complex theories—and test them. Research has been hampered because it has tried to test only some such global theory as "There is survival after death," a statement too vague to point clearly at testable predic-

tions. A detailed series of interlocking hypotheses would be more useful even if they were wrong, because testing would show where their errors lay and thus would (if there is survival) lead to better constructs for further testing.

An analogy would be the case of the paleontologist who finds bone fragments which he thinks represent a new type of man, but which might be only irregularities in some known type. One odd bone could have come from an unusually tall person, another from a short one, a third from someone with an endocrine abnormality, and so on. If the paleontologist demonstrates a meaningful balance among the irregularities, his thesis of a new type has construct validity. And once the meaningful pattern has been postulated, he will, if he is right, almost surely predict that other body parts not yet found will vary from familiar ones in specific ways. A new digging on a nearby site which yielded other body parts would then support or fail to support his hypothesis. Before he stated his complex theory, no hypothesis-testing could be done.

What a research worker can and should do, then, is to construct from prior observations as detailed a theory as possible, test each part, revise it where the test results refute his predictions, enlarge it as new data emerge, and repeat the testing. The theory in a late revision will either have failed so often that no reasonable person will espouse it, or else it will have made possible such varied, specific, and successful predictions, which other theories do not make, that there will be a consensus of at least tentative acceptance.

AN EXAMPLE OF HOW TO BEGIN

We start with observations: provocative ones that seem anomalous from one point of view but fit together from another. We observe, for example, a wide range of both feeling-tone and content in purported messages from the dead. Typical in our society are messages that say, in effect, "This is I, I, I. I am still with you and I love you." But among the Atimelang of Alor, typical messages say, "You are sick and suffering because you did not give me a death feast." A young mother purportedly appears to her sister and puts her babies in the sister's arms; her mood is tender, loving. A middle-aged man purportedly appears to a friend of his divorced wife, demanding that the first wife intrude into his second wife's home; his mood is peremptory, imperious, arrogant.

We reconcile such differences in both mood and content by noting that they correspond to descriptions of the societies, or of the individuals when alive. Our Western culture is frequently

described as individualistic, with extreme needs for recognition and love. Atimelang men are described as having characteristically hostile, demanding attitudes and need for superiority, which is demonstrated by ceremonial displays of wealth. The young mother had been tender and loving; the middle-aged man had been insensitive and overbearing. These are the observations with which we begin.

Now let us construct a simple, incomplete theory of survival—inadequate, but a start. We postulate that (a) messages from the dead can be communicated through a medium; (b) a medium who can receive messages from the dead in one society can also receive them in another society even though the language is different; (c) the major psychological needs of a person when alive will also be the needs of this person when recently dead, and (d) the content of messages from the dead will refer to needs which have goals that can be attained through mediumistic messages.

We cannot predict very much from this theory, but we can predict a little; a few sample tests of such predictions might be: (a) To enlist the cooperation of a medium and of psychologists who have analyzed the need patterns of terminal patients or of the aged; to ask the medium for messages from these individuals after their death; to have the psychologists make a blind matching of need pattern and message content. The prediction is that the match will show more than chance success. (b) To distinguish, in the above experiment, between major needs which cannot be satisfied by mediumistic communication (isolation, withdrawal, curiosity) and needs which can be satisfied or partially satisfied (recognition, affiliation, hostility). The prediction is that the former category will be matched with only chance success, but the latter with better than chance success. (c) To find a medium who has obtained messages in our culture and transport her to a society which anthropologists describe as having different dominant needs; to make a blind sorting of a representative sample of her messages from the other culture and from ours. The prediction is that the sort will show a difference.

If the predictions are not verified, examination of error patterns might lead to a better hypothesis for testing. Even if they are verified at a satisfactory level of significance, there will probably be many individual mismatches or errors of sorting which also could lead to a better hypothesis. Thus a more complex set of constructs would almost surely follow initial work of this type.

Any critical reader has probably by now developed a better and more complex theory than the one proposed above, and probably has also noted with dissatisfaction that even if all the proposed predictions were confirmed they could not give information about

the major counterhypotheses to survival: telepathy from the living and clairvoyance. The criticism is justified, and research designed to test the counterhypotheses should surely take precedence over this other plan. But it is part of the experimentalist's credo that the systematic gathering of data is good preparation for serendipity; it is likely to lead to an unanticipated expansion of knowledge. Possibly, for example, initial research on the simple theory just proposed will show a special group of purported discarnate individuals whose "messages" include evidential material. Further examination might indicate some unanticipated quality which they had in common when alive. If further tests confirmed this pattern, a long-term project could use selected communicators as well as special sensitives, so that the likelihood of obtaining evidential messages would increase. The by-products of a theory and its testing are often more important than the theory itself was; but until a theory is constructed and tested, its by-products may not be found.

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Evidence of Survival from "Other-World" Experiences

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Before suggesting some possible lines of advance in survival research, I would like to make some general remarks on the problem as it presents itself to me. The root of the difficulties seems to lie in the fact that we are hoping to deduce the survival of something whose nature we are unable to specify clearly. If it is the personality which is claimed to survive, what exactly is a personality apart from the body? When have we met a person seeing, feeling, and thinking without a body? The situation is as if, knowing nothing of complex numbers, we aimed to show that the equation $x^2 + x + 1 = 0$ has a solution, although we know perfectly well that it has *no* solution in the terms with which we ordinarily deal.

For an investigation of survival to be possible, we must have at least a preliminary rough idea of what survival could be and what it would imply. Perhaps we picture a "dead" person still conscious in some non-physical world, with a non-physical body

and able to manifest recognizably through a medium. In that case, I take it that the intention of the investigation would be to find convincing reasons, supported by evidence, for believing that these non-physical beings and worlds either exist as we have pictured them, or do not exist.

Are we to be limited in this work, however, to data which are observable in normal physical states (e.g., trance utterances) or which are located in physical space and time and have veridical reference to physical events (e.g., apparitions)? Returning to the analogy of complex numbers, this would be like trying to deduce the properties of complex numbers from the behavior of real numbers. We can indeed deduce some properties of complex numbers if we assume that they obey the same laws as real ones; e.g., any solution of $x^2 + x + 1 = 0$ also satisfies $x^3 = 1$. In the same way, we can deduce some necessary characteristics of the "picture" of survival if we assume certain general principles. Thus, we actually get a *proof* of survival if we assume that the divulging of a coherent system of ostensible memories can occur only when the person (imagined as some non-physical entity) who had the original experiences is present and actually or potentially conscious. The discovery and evaluation of our assumptions is the concern of the "implicit problem of survival," as I suggest calling it. Unfortunately, as with all applications of the hypothetico-deductive method, the status of the solution is only that of a "saving of appearances" most simply, comprehensively, etc., according to the criteria used.

The alternative is to explore the field of *non-physical data* and to formulate the needed concepts and propositions in terms of ostensive definitions. The data could be either observed by us directly in some non-physical state, or reported to us by someone directly observing them. I am concerned here only with such non-physical data as are reported by observers who make it clear that they exercised at the time a detached and balanced mind; that they were able to note details accurately and to weigh alternative explanations impartially in the light of the total circumstances. Under such conditions there is, in my opinion, no more risk of a lack of objectivity than in a normal physical state, and the risk can be made vanishingly small by experience and determination. I emphasize this point to make it clear that scientific investigation is, for me, perfectly compatible with the direct exploration of non-physical states.

The exploration evidently needs tools and experimental skills. Particularly important in this connection are the two kinds of out-of-the-body experiences which I have described in my book (5) as "full" and "free" separation, respectively. I know it is

sometimes argued that (a) claimed separation to a non-physical state is irrelevant to survival research because not verifiable by physical observations, and (b) separation in an appearance of physical space could be merely a power of the living physical body, in which case also it provides no evidence bearing on survival. This seems to me, however, to be muddled thinking. It is as if a man blind from birth said to a sighted man, (a) if your evidence of seeing has nothing to do with the senses which I have, it is irrelevant; and (b) if it has, then it provides no proof of the existence of another sense. The first assertion is of course the false one, and the whole constitutes a "heads I win, tails you lose" argument.

But the assertion that separation is merely a power of the living body also fails, in my opinion, and for three reasons: evidential, logical, and scientific-methodological. How can we try to convince a blind man of the existence and reliability of *seeing*? Certainly not by "proof." He will require (a) direct testimony by reliable people who claim to see, and this he must try to interpret by the powers at his command so as to arrive at (b) a definition or concept of seeing which is "open" and does not prejudge the issue; and finally (c) a successively more and more convincing demonstration that seeing (so defined) is a *system*, rationally coherent in itself and in its relations to other evidence directly available to him.

So with separation, the chief fact directly testified to is, I suggest, that it provides for the separated person an experience of transcending physical space and being "reborn" in a *world of non-physical space and time* without sacrificing any of the fullness of human life. To those who insist that this claim is mistaken, and that there is no possibility of a non-physical existence other than what is merely a function of the living physical body, like breathing, we can point out that they have prejudged the issue. Survival, in any accepted sense of the term, has been declared by them to be *a priori* impossible, and survival research must forthwith be abandoned. Admitting, on the other hand, that the evidential claim *could* be a valid one, a form of the survival concept in accord with a significant body of evidence becomes at once admissible. We have exhibited a new field of experience and can proceed with investigations having this concept in mind. On the survival question, then, we have to ask whether we are correct in identifying the non-physical states to which separation takes us in all the fullness of human life (as now provisionally granted) with those to which a person who has died may be similarly "taken" and in which he may consciously continue. This is the explicit problem of survival. It is to be solved by the exhibiting of rational coherence, or incoherence, in successive stages.

As a preliminary clarification, I propose to distinguish three *degrees of conviction* in the possibility of survival. First, to take an analogy, if we were to go to a distant country, live a full life there for a short while, and then return, we would think it very probable that other people could go there in much the same way, but *not* return. Thus, if we recognize that the "worlds" known in separation are existent in their own right and that we ourselves can live a full life there, we will feel a *first degree of conviction* in the possibility of people remaining there (as we did for a time) and not returning to their physical bodies.

It might be suggested, however, that survival in that country is possible only for short visits such as we have made. We should then feel a *second degree of conviction* in the possibility of (longer) survival if it were a frequent occurrence, on our own visits, for us to meet real living people there. The identification of some of these people as ones who had "gone before," and not returned, would provide a *third degree of conviction*. Belief in some kind of survival for *everyone* would then follow from the realization that a process of such universal spiritual and physiological import is most unlikely to be built into a few selected individuals only of the human race.

For those who have had vividly objective experience of separation, the first degree of conviction is, I believe, usually regarded as sufficient. Survival research, however, will be principally concerned, I suppose, with the problems of personal reality and identity. Any criteria proposed for deciding these questions could also be applied to the study of apparitions; but I think the study of separative experiences will be found to offer considerable advantages.

Let us begin by asking how we recognize people in the physical world (a) as real living persons, and (b) as particular persons we know. We might use one or more of four methods:

1. We notice a large number of interrelated details of appearance and behavior, personal idiosyncrasies, etc., which give the impression of an individual life or person.
2. The person is manifested to all our senses, and three-dimensionally to our quasi-tactual sense of position; that is, the person is solidly in the same world with us.
3. If our encounter with such persons as living beings is sufficiently vivid and real, a power of empathy is awakened in us, as if to fuse with them, by the knowing, in them and us, of a Presence transcending mere appearances—an *I Am* or *Very Self* (or we can speak simply of *love*); this enables individuals to be known simultaneously as two and as one.
4. We can converse with them intelligently, distinguishing

between what comes through them and what comes through us, and between the two "stores of memory" thus revealed.

There comes quite soon a stage when, as it seems to me, the power and rational objectivity of the impressions referred to above in 3 and 4 are such that the reality of the person simply cannot be doubted; these impressions provide the ultimate criterion of personal reality and we have no other means of judging personal reality which could take precedence. The same will now hold true of meetings with living beings in out-of-the-body conditions. Although there are dream-figures, thought-forms, and other illusory appearances, we have also, if our own state is balanced and objective, this ultimate means (empathy, conversation) of verifying personal reality.

Points could be allocated under each head, first for the personal reality and secondly for the personal identity of the alleged beings encountered out of the body or as apparitions. I think it would work out reasonably well if we allocated five points under each head for personal reality, and count a total of ten points as testifying to "complete" reality; also, six points under each of heads 1 and 4 for personal identity and a total of ten as testifying "assured" identity.

Consider, for example, the reported conversations and other-world association of Mrs. Willett with Myers, Gurney, and others (1), and in particular the experience with Gurney discussed in my book (5, p. 92). On the suggested scheme, the points might be 3, 3, 4, 4, totaling 14 for personal reality ("complete," therefore), and 3, 4, totaling 7/10 for personal identity. The experience thus provides a second degree of conviction in survival, and goes far toward providing a third degree of conviction. For the well-known experience of Mr. F. G., to whom a sister dead for nine years appeared "hardly a foot away" and with a relevant scar visible on her face (3, Vol. 2, pp. 27-30), the score might be 4, 3, 3, 0, making complete personal reality, and 6, 0, totaling 6/10 for personal identity.

It must be borne in mind, of course, that appearances alone are not a sufficient guarantee of identity. Personation is evidently easy in non-physical states—*vide* the Gordon Davis case investigated by S. G. Soal (4, pp. 560-589). Doubles of people still alive in the physical world (including ourselves) can appear convincingly before us, and conversation can take place between them and us. In allocating points, this and other facts have to be allowed for. Thus, under the fourth head we might award to an experience 5 points for personal reality, 0 for personal identity (veridical), and 3 for personal identity (non-veridical), if this last is considered to be of interest.

What I have in mind here is the remarkable power, which Swedenborg long ago described, of reading the memory in non-physical states. In one of the two cases of this which I have on record, my own inner questioning about the identity of the person encountered was answered (in the usual thought-transfer, as if in words) by a declaration of the town in which the person had lived, and other details, and finally by the presentation, as by a change of stage make-up, of the clear visual image of an old man which the thought-flow indicated was the appearance of the person at the time of his physical death. It seems to me that survival research could profit greatly if more descriptions of identification experiences of this type were collected and studied.

Possibly, however, the best type of identification experience is when the person concerned has only recently died and the total circumstances are reflected in the manner of "meeting," the personal appearance, and the conversation. My only experience of this kind might reach 15 points for personal reality and 7/10 for personal identity.

The whole subject of memory and personality out of the body seems to me to require thorough investigation before our conception of survival can be regarded as sufficiently clear. In particular, certain questions appear in quite a different light if a monadic theory of personality is envisaged. The results of Whately Carington's well-known experiments (2) on the relationship between Mrs. Leonard and her control, Feda, for example, may be opposed to survival of personality in the ordinary sense (as a single, sealed-off entity); but they are in conformity with the survival of a monadic life as a constituent able to flow into, guide, possess, or blend with others to form a physical personality.

To sum up, what I am suggesting as the next step in survival research is an all-out attack on the explicit problem of survival, entailing the collection, systematization, and assessing of evidence on (a) what may be called "other-world geography" or "experimental metaphysics," especially the phenomena of mergence, blending, etc., of "worlds" and "bodies"; and (b) experiences of alleged non-physical personalities encountered face to face, especially identification experiences. I am not aware that any sustained attempts have yet been made to collect or study experiences of the types I have mentioned. Only in this way, it seems to me, will "survival" cease to be a term loaded with vague presuppositions.

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