

A BULLETIN FOR RESEARCH ON THE PROBLEM OF SURVIVAL AFTER BODILY DEATH  
PUBLISHED BY THE PSYCHICAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION, INC., EDITED BY W. G. ROLL

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## THE PSYCHICAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION, INC.

This is the first issue of THETA, a bulletin published by the Psychical Research Foundation. The Foundation was created in August, 1960 by the late Charles E. Ozanne to promote scientific research on the problem of survival of personality after death. It began operation in January, 1961 and is the only organization devoted wholly to that purpose.

The research and educational activities of the Foundation are directed by W. G. Roll, formerly research associate at the Parapsychology Laboratory of Duke University. The Foundation has a Board of Directors of which Dr. J. G. Pratt (Duke University) is President and Professor H. H. Price (Oxford University, England) Vice-President. Other members of the Board are Mr. A. R. Bennett (Wachovia Bank and Trust Co., Durham, N. C.), Mr. Chester F. Carlson (Pittsford, N. Y.), and Dr. Ian Stevenson (University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va.).

The Foundation is also assisted by an Advisory Committee consisting of Professor C. D. Broad (Cambridge University, England), Professor E. R. Dodds (Oxford University), Professor C. J. Ducasse (Brown University, R. I.), Dr. Portia Hamilton (Durham, N. C.), Dr. Hornell Hart (Florida Southern College), Dr. Gardner Murphy (The Menninger Foundation), and Dr. R. H. Thouless (Cambridge University).

The Foundation and its bulletin represent no position regarding survival except the belief that scientific observation and experimentation may lead to a solution. The bulletin is not intended as a substitute for other publications in psychical research and parapsychology. On the contrary one of its functions will be to direct readers

to papers and books by abstracts or reviews. It will also discuss current researches and activities that touch on the survival question.

### THE TERM 'THETA'

The word 'survival' is ambiguous. Sometimes it refers to a person who has been in an accident or disaster and escaped with his life. In parapsychology or psychical research 'survival' means 'survival of the human personality or a part of it after the death of the body.' There would be no ambiguity if this phrase were always used in full, but a shorter one would clearly be a convenience.

Accordingly 'theta,' which is the first letter of the Greek word "thanatos" (death), has been adopted. It will be used as an adjective to mean 'relating to the question of survival of the personality after bodily death,' as in 'theta phenomena' or 'theta evidence' (positive or negative). Also, as a noun denoting inquiry into the possibility of survival of the personality after the body's death, as in the expression 'research on theta.' At this stage the term in no sense implies that survival is a fact.

And also, THETA has been adopted as the name for this Bulletin.

### THE PRESENT PERSPECTIVE

In recent years psychologists have become increasingly aware of the importance to man of his attitude to death. As Herman Feifel says in his book, *The Meaning of Death*, a person's attitude toward death "can serve as an important organizing principle in determining how he conducts himself in life." An empirical solution to the theta problem will greatly affect human lives and social relations: to be concerned with the survival question is not to turn

one's back on reality, but to face a central biological and sociological problem. It is not an exaggeration to say that in the theta issue science is presented with a major challenge.

And it is only scientific research that can give the answer. More specifically, theta projects will be guided by methods, developed at centers like the Parapsychology Laboratory of Duke University and the Societies for Psychical Research in London and New York, for studying those aspects of human personality which lie outside the scope of established science. Theta phenomena belong to the same general class of parapsychological (psi) occurrences as extrasensory perception (ESP) and psychokinesis (PK). In fact, theta phenomena usually appear in the guise of ESP or PK, since communications with surviving personalities would be examples of ESP, and since action by such personalities on the physical world would be examples of PK.

To place theta within psychical research is not to exclude it from other disciplines. Parapsychology is related to all branches of scientific inquiry that deal with human personality and theta research will have to make full use of the discoveries and technical tools of such professions as psychology and neurology, if it is to be effective.

### IS PROOF POSSIBLE?

In all searches for information about existence after death living subjects (sometimes professional 'mediums') have been part of the system of communication. It is through their ESP or PK abilities that pieces of information are obtained, allegedly from some deceased person. These are checked against existing sources, including the memories of the living, letters, diaries, etc. This method of verification has the seed of a counterhypothesis: if sense perception or chance coincidence cannot explain the findings, the subject may have used his own psi abilities unaided by discarnate agents. The picture we get of the after-world may reflect only this. How then can one hope ever to get evidence bearing on the survival hypothesis?

Some of the characteristics of ordinary ESP which research has indicated, may help us identify the theta elements in a subject's

response. For example it seems (A) that an ESP target will cause the emergence into the percipient's awareness (or motor nervous system) of his own mental images and other subjective modes of expression, (B) that the kinds of targets he responds to and the way in which he responds to them is influenced by motivational factors, and (C) that he is more likely to respond to events when he is closely connected with them through acquaintances and other physical linkage than when he is not. These three traits suggest three ways of discovering if theta phenomena break the ESP barrier: (a) Responses should be encouraged in which the information is conveyed in terms of languages and technical concepts which the subject is unfamiliar with, but which are characteristic of the alleged discarnate agent. (b) In the response evidence should be sought of motives and personality traits not possessed by the subject, but characteristic of the deceased agent. (c) Both types of responses should be obtained under experimental conditions which exclude animate or inanimate linkage with living persons who possess the (A) and (B) characteristics.

Theta research may also be carried out in other ways. If a constituent of personality survives, it should be possible to study it before death. The ante-mortem approach to the survival hypothesis cannot give proof but it may furnish clues. If psychological or parapsychological processes are found in a person which appear to operate independently of his body, they may survive its destruction. Research with living subjects will be easier than with discarnate ones and may contribute important discoveries about the latter.

### RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Theta research is undertaken on the assumption that communication systems exist or can be built between the known physical world and the world that may exist after death. In the search for such systems we find two areas where theta may interact with familiar processes: in all ages and societies some persons, now most commonly known as "mediums," are convinced that discarnate personalities communicate through them. Research me-

thods must be developed to determine the nature of such claims. The other phenomena are associated with physical localities (though sometimes the presence of a person at that place also seems important) and are referred to popularly as "hauntings" or "poltergeists." The Foundation has been active in both areas. It has undertaken a thorough investigation of a subject in Richmond, Va. who seemed to communicate with incorporeal agents and conducted field investigations of localized psi phenomena in houses in Newark, N. J., Harrisburg, Pa., Jackson, Mich., Indianapolis, Ind., Clayton, N. C., and Portsmouth, Va. Some of the occurrences were caused by known physical means or seemed to be PK effects from living persons, but others may have involved theta effects.

Though cautious in reaching conclusions, the Foundation will investigate any claim that appears relevant to the survival hypothesis. Each ghost will have its day in court! Our only restrictions will be those imposed by financial limitations and availability of trained investigators.

### Cooperative Project

Persons who know of gifted theta subjects are invited to join in a research project to test their abilities scientifically. A guide for experimentation, "Designs for Tests with Free Response Material" by W. G. Roll, was printed in the October 1962 issue of the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*. If you do not receive the *Journal* but wish to participate in this research, write to the Foundation for a reprint. Persons planning to take part should also state their experience, if any, with scientific testing, the name of their subject, and the types of phenomena produced. The consent of the subject to participate in experimentation should be obtained before writing to the Foundation.

While research resources are still limited and professional investigators few, exploratory studies by competent lay investigators can be of the greatest value.

### PANEL DISCUSSIONS

Panel talks were arranged by the Foundation for the last two conventions of the Parapsychological Association. At the 1961 meeting, which was held in New York City, the panelists were Dr. Ian Stevenson, Dr. Karlis Osis, and W. G. Roll, who was also chairman. After an introduction by the chairman, Dr. Stevenson told about his investigations in India of cases of apparent reincarnation. Children who seemed to remember an earlier existence in another community were interviewed, as were persons associated with the two localities. In some cases there appeared to be no way in which the children could have obtained their knowledge normally. The possibility of ESP was discussed, the speaker, however, preferring the reincarnation hypothesis. Dr. Osis spoke about the methodological problems involved in experiments with mediums. Finally, Roll described a series of experiments with a subject who seemed to communicate with discarnate personalities while in a hypnotic trance. Of the 54 alleged personalities, 23 were traced in existing records, and of these one was selected for special study. The subject was tested by hypnotic memory interviews and the polygraph technique to ascertain whether she obtained the information normally, either consciously or unconsciously. No evidence for this was found. Since there seemed to be no physical linkage between the subject and the deceased personality, the theta hypothesis was indicated more strongly than that of unaided ESP by the subject.

The 1962 convention was held in Durham. The panel discussed the "poltergeist" disturbances in the home of a boy and his grandmother in Newark, in 1961. The investigations of Dr. C. D. Wrege ("The First Phase") and Roll ("The Second Phase") suggested that the initial phenomena were parapsychological, later events being caused normally. The work at Duke University on "The Psychiatric Examinations" and "The Psychological Examinations" by Drs. B. J. Feather and J. Altrocchi indicated that in both phases the boy was the agent and that the events were triggered by repressed aggression, the boy being unaware of his involvement.

The study of apparent PK events of the type involved in the first phase is relevant to the theta hypothesis: by indicating the limits of living agency PK, it marks the area beyond which effects must lie before we can consider a possible theta source. This comparative approach has left open the question of such a source in two of the six field studies conducted by the Foundation.

At the same convention Dr. Stevenson presented an apparent case of reincarnation where an American housewife was hypnotically regressed to an earlier life in Sweden.

## PARAPSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

The Council for 1963 consists of Dr. C. B. Nash, President, W. G. Roll, Vice-President, Dr. K. R. Rao, Secretary, Mrs. D. H. Pope, Treasurer, and three Councilmen, Dr. I. Stevenson, Dr. R. Van de Castle, and Miss R. A. White. The 1963 convention will be held in New York City, September 5-7.

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS

It is one of the functions of THETA to bring to the attention of its readers worthwhile publications on the survival problem. The following list from the last four years has three sections. The first contains two books which should be read by any newcomer who has a scientific interest in the problem. The second list includes other valuable introductions, as well as outlines of the evidence for survival. In the third list there are books or articles dealing with special types of theta phenomena or special research plans.

I. C. J. DUCASSE. *The Belief In A Life After Death* (Springfield: Charles C Thomas, 1961). H. HART. *The Enigma of Survival* (Springfield: Charles C Thomas, 1959).

II. C. D. BROAD. *Lectures on Psychological Research* (New York: Humanities Press, 1962). S. FINDLEY. *Immortal Longings* (London: Victor Gallancz, Ltd., 1961).

R. HEYWOOD. *The Sixth Sense* (London: Chatto and Windus, Ltd., 1959; U. S. ed: *Beyond the Reach of Sense*, New York: E. P. Dutton, 1961). G. MURPHY. *Challenge of Psychical Research* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961). F. W. H. MYERS. *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (New York: University Books, Inc., 1961). F. PODMORE. *Mediums of the 19th Century* (Univ. Bks., 1963). J. G. PRATT, H. H. PRICE, J. B. RHINE, L. E. RHINE, W. G. ROLL. "Symposium on Incorporate Personal Agency (IPA)" (*J. of Parapsychol.* 24, 1960). W. H. SALTER. *Zoar* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1961). G. N. M. TYRRELL. *Science and Psychical Phenomena. Apparitions* (Univ. Bks., 1961).

III. C. T. K. CHARI. "Buried Memories" in *Survivalist Research*" (*Intern. J. of Parapsychol.*, 4, 1962, 40-65) and "Paranormal Cognition, Survival, and Reincarnation" (*J. of the A.S.P.R.*, 56, 1962, 158-83). C. G. JUNG. "Jung on Life After Death" (*The Atlantic*, Dec., 1962, 39-44). K. OSIS. *Deathbed Observations by Physicians and Nurses* (New York: Parapsychology Foundation, Inc., 1961). P. PAL. "A Case Suggestive of Reincarnation in West Bengal." (*Indian J. of Parapsychol.*, 3, 1961-2, 5-21). L. E. RHINE. *Hidden Channels of the Mind* (New York: William Sloane Associates, 1961). I. STEVENSON. "The Evidence for Survival from Claimed Memories of Former Incarnations" (*J. of the A.S.P.R.*, 54, 1960, 51-71, 95-117). R. H. THOULESS. "The Empirical Evidence for Survival" (*J. of the A.S.P.R.*, 54, 1960, 23-32). G. ZORAB. "Cases of the Chaffin Will Type and the Problem of Survival" (*J. of the S.P.R.*, 41, 1962, 407-17).

Persons who wish to assist in the work of the Foundation are invited to send contributions to the President, Dr. J. G. Pratt, College Station, Durham, N. C., or to the Vice-President, Professor H. H. Price, Jack Straw's Lane, Oxford, England. Gifts to the Foundation are deductible on U. S. tax returns.

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