

A BULLETIN FOR RESEARCH ON THE PROBLEM OF SURVIVAL AFTER BODILY DEATH
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THE CIPHER TEST OF SURVIVAL

Robert H. Thouless

One of the common tests for survival is the *sealed package* type of test as used by F. W. H. Myers and Sir Oliver Lodge. A psychical researcher, planning to give evidence of his survival after bodily death, leaves some message in a sealed package. The intended proof of his survival is his communication of the contents of that package through a medium after his death. Various defects of this way of testing the matter have become apparent in use.

First, there is difficulty in assessing the value of the evidence for survival if what is communicated is not the exact content of the message but something which seems more or less to resemble it. A satisfactory test should be unambiguously either a success or a failure.

Secondly, the test is necessarily finished once the package is opened. A satisfactory test should be one of which repeated attempts at verification can be made.

Thirdly, even if success in this type of test were attained, it would remain doubtful whether this was due to communication from the person who originally left the message or merely to the clairvoyant powers of the medium. A satisfactory test should make some discrimination between these alternative possibilities.

I have tried to overcome these difficulties by the replacement of the sealed message by a message in cipher which had been enciphered by me by a known method but with an unknown key. Such an enciphered message has been printed in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* (48, 253-63, 342-3, London, 1946-49) and is available to everyone, but it cannot be deciphered without knowledge of the key.

The task to be accomplished as evidence for my survival is the communication of this key after my death. Presumably the communication will be through a medium although it is not necessary to the test this should be the case.

This form of test overcomes the three difficulties mentioned above. Any key communicated is unambiguously right or wrong; there can be no partial success. The right key will enable the message to be read; any wrong attempt at the key leaves the message undecipherable. As a result, the second difficulty is also overcome. If a wrong key is communicated, the message cannot be read; this may happen very many times but the undeciphered message remains for a fresh attempt. There is no irreversible step corresponding to the opening of a sealed package.

Finally the possibility of repeated attempts at verification gives the opportunity of discovering whether the cipher can be read by the clairvoyant or telepathic power of the medium without the co-operation of the deceased person who prepared the message, for these powers should enable the medium to give the keys during the lifetime of the person who made the cipher. It is, therefore, an essential part of the test that repeated efforts should be made during the lifetime of the person enciphering the message, to discover through mediums what the keys are. The evidence for survival is then, not that the keys are given, ostensibly by the constructor, after his death, but that repeated attempts to get the keys have failed during his lifetime but have succeeded after his death. It is desirable that this experiment should be carried out by

as many people as possible, so I will here describe an enciphering method that may be used by others who want to leave ciphers of which they hope to be able to communicate the key after their death.

There are two possible loop-holes which must be considered. First, is it not possible that someone expert in breaking ciphers might find the keys by a process of rational inference and falsely represent this as information received from another world? Secondly, might not the keys be guessed right by accident?

The second is obviously a possibility and would even be a not very unlikely one if enough attempts were made to find the keys. It would, however, have to be a very large number of guesses that would lead to the key being produced accidentally. Such accidental success would be as likely to occur during my lifetime as in attempts to get the key from me after my death. It has not happened yet in the attempts made so far, and if the number of unsuccessful attempts after my death is considerably smaller than the number made during my lifetime, it will be a very unlikely explanation of a success after my death.

The other possibility of the cipher being broken by some rational process of inference must be guarded against by using a suitable method of encipherment. One such system is an adaptation of the Vignère method.

Readers who wish to participate in Dr. Thouless' test are asked to send their enciphered messages to THETA. They will be widely circulated so that attempts can be made by several ESP and theta subjects to learn the keys both before and after the death of the participants.

First a 26 x 26 square of letters of the alphabet is made:

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ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
BCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZA
CDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZAB
DEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZABC
EFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZABCD
FGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZABCDE
GHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZABCDEF
HIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZABCDEF
IJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZABCDEFGHI
JKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZABCDEFGHIJ
KLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZABCDEFGHIJK
LMNOPQRSTUVWXYZABCDEFGHIJKL
MNOPQRSTUVWXYZABCDEFGHIJKL
NOPQRSTUVWXYZABCDEFGHIJKLM
OPQRSTUVWXYZABCDEFGHIJKLMN
PQRSTUVWXYZABCDEFGHIJKLMNO
QRSTUVWXYZABCDEFGHIJKLMNOP
RSTUVWXYZABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQ
STUVWXYZABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQR
TUVWXYZABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRS
UVWXYZABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRST
VWXYZABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTU
WXYZABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTU
XYZABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUV
YZABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVW
ZABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWX

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Let us suppose the message to be enciphered is LIFE IS ENDLESS and that the key passage is the nursery rhyme *Three Blind Mice*. From this key passage a series of letters is derived in the following way. Each word in the passage is replaced by a single letter which is obtained by replacing each letter in the word by a number which is its position in the alphabet, summing these numbers and then using the letter which is in the position in the alphabet indicated by the remainder left when this sum is divided by 26. The key passage in this case is "Three blind mice, see how they run. (They) all (run) after the farmer's wife, who . . ."

The letter replacing the first word 'three' is D, since T is the 20th letter of the alphabet, H is the 8th, R is the 18th and E is the 5th. $20 + 8 + 18 + 5 + 5 = 56$. 56 divided by 26 leaves remainder 4, and D is the 4th letter of the alphabet. In the same way summing the numerical values of the letters in 'blind' gives 41, with remainder of 15 when divided by 26, so 'blind' is replaced by the 15th letter which is O. Similar calculations show that 'mice' must be replaced by D, 'see' by C, 'how' by T, and 'run' by A. Words that have

already been used are not used again, so the next occurrence of 'they' and 'run' is omitted leaving the words: 'all,' 'after,' 'the,' 'farmer's,' 'wife' and 'who,' which are replaced by the letters (as determined above) Y, X, G, B, Q, and T. The key letter series is, therefore, DODCTFAYXGBQT. This is written above the passage to be deciphered as below:

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Key letter series:  D O D C T F A Y X G B Q T
Message:           L I F E I S E N D L E S S
Enciphered message: O W I G B X E L A R F I L

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The third line showing the enciphered message is obtained from the letter square in the following way. The first letter L of the message has D above it; the corresponding letter in the enciphered message is that in the row beginning with D and the column headed by L, this is found to be O, so O is the first letter in the enciphered message. In the same way W is the letter in the row beginning with O and the column beginning with I. The next letter I is derived in the same way from D and F. And so on.

To prevent use of word length as a means of trying to break the cipher, we

can use the ordinary practice of putting the letters of the enciphered message in groups of five. The final form of the enciphered message will then be: OWIGB XELAR FIL.

This method of encipherment fulfills the essential condition that the message can be read only by somebody who knows the key. This condition would not be fulfilled by the standard Vignère method in which a single word is the key since such a passage could be deciphered by rational means by someone who had no prior knowledge of the key. If the method I have described is used, this cannot be done so long as only one message is enciphered by any one key. If the key is known only to the person who originally enciphered the message, and if mediums cannot discover the key during his lifetime but it is communicated through a medium after his death, this will be strong evidence that it is he who has communicated the key and that therefore he has survived bodily death. The evidence will be stronger if the experiment is successfully repeated by many people.

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CONFERENCE ON RESEARCH IN SURVIVAL

On June 14 a conference on survival research was held at the Barbizon-Plaza Hotel in New York City. It was organized by Dr. Ian Stevenson, Chairman of the Department of Neurology and Psychiatry at the University of Virginia. The invited participants were Prof. H. N. Banerjee, Seth Sohan Lal Mem. Inst. of Parapsy., India, Mrs. Laura Dale, Amer. Soc. Psychical Resch., Prof. C. J. Ducasse, Brown Univ., Dr. Gardner Murphy, Menninger Found., Mrs. Marian Nester, A.S.P.R., Dr. Karlis Osis, A.S.P.R., Dr. Gertrude Schmeidler, City College of New York, and W. G. Roll. The meeting was devoted to free discussions of major problems and areas of research.

A NEW ROLE

During a discussion of mediumistic work Murphy expressed doubts whether a person who allegedly communicates in 1963

is "the same" he was when he died, say, fifty years before, when even the living change so much. The survival question, he said, may be a relative one. Ducasse thought that bodily death might amount to giving up old "roles" and assuming new ones. We have all experienced the death of a part of our lives, for instance, when we cease being bachelors to become husbands: in designing survival tests, we should take account of the shifts of values that bodily death might entail.

The main question, Murphy said, is what could survive in a form that is *communicable*? He thought that posthumous tests, such as Thouless', should be tried shortly after death, since the message to be sent might not long be remembered. Nester wondered whether the *ability* to communicate survives: we should discover whether persons willing to communicate after death

were good telepathic agents in tests conducted before they died.

ESP PROJECTION

Roll said that studies should be made of ESP projection where living subjects have the experience of leaving the body and observing distant events. Ducasse objected that this is not indicative of survival since a person may lose the ability at death. Roll replied that it could be relevant if the research is combined with neurophysiological studies: if it is found that cortical activities associated with normal perceptual and cognitive processes are absent in ESP projection, this would argue that ESP projection is not dependent on the brain and that therefore consciousness and perceptual abilities might survive its destruction. Murphy noted that normal perception results in a suppression of the alpha brain wave and that the absence of such suppression during ESP projection might be a sign of separation.

TELEPATHIC SWEEPINGS

Murphy said that in many instances, as in the work with Mrs. Piper, there was evidence of a telepathic "sweeping of living minds" by the subject. Schmeidler doubted whether this could account for the Boyce case and others where there seemed to be no associations between the subject and the memories of the living or other existing sources from which the information could be obtained. But Murphy said that sometimes people *seek* the remote associations.

Ducasse said that the question boils down to that of identifying a person: it is a fairly easy matter to recognize someone, say over the telephone. Roll noted, however, that in the Gordon Davis and similar cases there seemed to be no doubt of identification, even the tone of voice being reproduced by the subject, though the alleged deceased communicator, in fact, was in the best of health. Ducasse objected that there are some things that cannot be telepathically communicated in this way, namely "idiosyncratic skills," that is, abilities peculiar to a person, such as knowing a foreign language. Whereas the *contents* of one's mind may be available to telepathy, the *ability*

to use them correctly is not, and if a theta subject shows evidence of skills not normally possessed by him, this indicates communication from an external mind.

Murphy commented that Mrs. Piper made a meaningful use of Greek and Latin when supposedly under the influence of communicators who knew them. But her replies to questions were not prompt, as they ought to have been if she was controlled by someone fully familiar with these languages. Stevenson said that in the Jensen reincarnation case, answers to questions in Swedish were immediate, though the subject did not normally know it. But Osis warned that skill may be simulated in interviews in a foreign language if the subject can get the answers from the mind of the interviewer by telepathy. He brought up the case of Ilga K. who apparently could read Russian when her teacher was reading the passage at the same time: evidently she was reading her teacher's mind rather than the book.

Roll said that decisive answers to explanations in terms of ordinary ESP can only be obtained when its limits are known. He has analysed a number of experiments and concluded that ESP is typically confined by the memory traces and abilities of the percipient and by ('psychometric') linkage and other spatio-temporal restrictions. He said that evidence of skill obtained under remote linkage conditions might support the theta hypothesis.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSES

Stevenson has several apparent reincarnation cases in which a birthmark or scar reappeared in the same place on the body in a later incarnation. A discussion ensued how such marks could be produced other than by genetic factors. Schmeidler asked whether they could be caused at birth by forceps, but Stevenson doubted this since the scars, etc., are not as a rule on the head where forceps are generally applied. He thought that interuterine conditions might possibly be responsible; but whatever the direct cause is, it must be guided by parapsychical knowledge to ensure that the mark will look the same and appear on the same place of the body as in the earlier

life. He and Murphy noted the similarity to stigmatizations and other religious or hysterical wounds. The question is, Stevenson said, how to decide whether the mother's idea is somehow imprinted on the body of the child or whether it is the idea of the reincarnated personality.

Osis proposed that those cases in which the mother hoped that her child might be a reincarnation of a certain other person should be separated from those in which there was no such expectation, to help determine whether the mother's belief played a role in the formation of the marks.

Ducasse proposed that we should distinguish between apparent reincarnation cases where the person was old at the time of death and those where a young man died; and also compare cases where death was violent with mild or natural deaths. He noted that older persons often have a different perspective on life than young people and that this might affect their desire to communicate after death and perhaps also determine whether or not they would be reincarnated. Roll thought that such analyses should include other factors about the life and culture of the alleged communicators or reincarnated personalities, to see whether a pattern emerges that can be related to the theta hypothesis or ordinary ESP.

Banerjee pointed out that in reincarnation cases there often is an emotional reaction by the subject to persons associated with the earlier life and that this should enter into the appraisal of the genuineness of these cases. As an example, he discussed a Turkish boy's reaction to meeting his 'wife' from an earlier life and showed photographs of the boy's facial expressions.

METHODS OF IDENTIFICATION

Stevenson asked for advice how best to proceed if he has occasion to study reincarnation cases before the people involved get together and compare memories. It is obviously easy to give away information about family relationships, etc., when the person is confronted with his previous relatives and friends. It was thought that photo-

graphs, particularly candid shots and movies would be good, and that the person should also be presented with a floor plan and pictures of his earlier house and attempt to find his way about before actually seeing the house.

Roll thought that neurophysiological instruments might help in identification by registering the subject's responses to personal or common names associated with a previous life (or a deceased communicator) that he cannot consciously remember. He brought up the work of Whately Carington, who gave word association tests to mediums, their 'controls', and communicators to determine whether the latter were part of the medium's personality. Dale reviewed this work in detail and urged that it be continued. Murphy said that word association tests are not very reliable because they are greatly influenced by the situation in which they are administered. He and Schmeidler preferred the "Draw a Person," "House, Tree, Person," Rorschach, and Thematic Apperception Tests. Schmeidler also recommended the Allport-Vernon expressive tests and, with small children, finger painting tests. Murphy said that some aspects of handwriting, such as particular pressures show continuity and might help in identification. Dale recalled at least one instance where the 'automatic writing' by a subject resembled the deceased communicator's.

THETA-PK

Roll noted that reports of unusual physical events at death, such as clocks stopping, pictures falling, etc., suggest that a release of PK energy is associated with it and wondered whether this could be caught in a test. Stevenson asked him to discuss field investigations of recurrent spontaneous PK (RSPK). Roll said that his Foundation is interested in RSEP and RSPK because they combine striking psi effects with repetitive features that allow first-hand observation. The research serves two purposes: the development of scientific methods of observation and experimentation without inhibiting the phenomena and the development of methods focussing on the causal conditions of the phenomena, with

special emphasis on their agency. In the latter approach he relies partially on psychological tests and partially on analyses of the disturbances themselves for motivational clues that tie them to special persons. Roll noted that in four out of six cases where there seemed to be parapsychological effects, a living agent was indicated. In two cases, however, none could be found, the phenomena differing in other respects as well. Moreover, some of the effects seemed related to the concerns and

activities of previous occupants of the house.

Osis brought in a German case of a 'living ghost' in which the phenomena were suggestive of the agency of a former occupant who, however, was still alive.

Ducasse felt that so-called 'haunting' cases suggest the survival of only part of the personality. Murphy, on the other hand, thought the incidents might be *symbolic* of the whole personality. Their repetitive features reminded Stevenson of chronic schizophrenic behavior.

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