

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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## PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOPHYSIOLOGICAL STUDIES

Support from the Parapsychology Foundation (see THETA 25) has enabled the P.R.F. to initiate two new projects. Drs. John L. Artley and William T. Joines have begun a program for applying instrumental techniques to field investigations of poltergeist and haunting disturbances, as well as to the claims associated with physical mediums. The purpose is twofold; first, to aid in the detection of familiar physical causes that might explain the occurrences, such as earth movements, electrical disturbances, or fraudulent interference; secondly, if phenomena occur which cannot be explained by known processes, to explore the nature of the energies that may be responsible for them. As a first step, a portable detector, highly sensitive to infrared and ultraviolet radiation, has been developed. The device will help to detect the movements of persons in darkened areas as well as interference with invisible radiation which may be associated with physical psi effects, as in the case of the phenomena produced by Rudi Schneider (see THETA 24). A long-range plan for instrumental investigations will be presented by Artley and Joines at the convention of the Parapsychological Association in New York City, September, 1969.

The second project concerns the relationship of brain states and psychical abilities. The descriptions by sensitives of their mental states during parapsychological experiences in many respects resemble those reported by subjects when producing the alpha brain wave on the electroencephalograph. In order to determine whether there is a relation between the alpha state and ESP abilities, a test program has been started by Dr. Robert L. Morris, assisted by Miss Donna Cohen (for the summer only) and Mr. Joseph Burch. Mr. Burch is electronics

technician at the Department of Psychology at Duke University. Dr. Morris and Mr. Burch will present a survey of psychophysiological work in parapsychology at the P.A. convention as well as the preliminary findings of their tests on the relationship between the alpha state and ESP results.

## HOUSING FOR THE P.R.F

The grant from an anonymous donor has made it possible for the P.R.F. to obtain office and library space. At the end of 1963, when the P.R.F. left the Duke campus, where it had enjoyed temporary shelter under the roof of the Parapsychology Laboratory, its activities were focused in two rooms added to the home of Mr. W. G. Roll, with special research activities conducted at various places in the Durham-Duke area.

The new accommodation has been rented from the University and consists of two adjacent, five-room, frame houses located at 2013-15 Erwin Road. These houses, formerly private residences, were acquired by Duke as part of its expansion program and are at the northern border of the campus. The houses will provide offices, a combined conference room and library, an experimental area and an efficiency apartment for mediums participating in the research or other visitors.

## DOUGLAS JOHNSON VISITS THREE HAUNTED HOUSES

A special grant from Mrs. Eileen J. Garrett, President of the Parapsychology Foundation, was provided for the investigation of a "haunted" house near Jacksonville, Florida. The investigation was extended to two similar houses in the Philadelphia area. The studies were undertaken with the aid of Mr. Douglas Johnson, the

English medium who has collaborated in previous P.R.F. programs (see *THETA* 13, 19, and 22). Exploratory studies of both cases were made by Dr. Joines, one of which he has reported (see *THETA* 23). The investigations in Philadelphia were conducted by Mr. W. G. Roll and Mr. J. P. Stump, while Drs. Joines and Artley and Miss Cohen were in charge of the Florida study.

Mr. Johnson did not find any incorporeal sources in the two Philadelphia homes at the time of his visits, though he did not discount the possibility that they may have been haunted previously. He wondered whether the houses' occupants, who in both cases were women, were responsible for the events, perhaps abetted by their psychical abilities. Mr. Johnson re-

ported several visual images in the homes, but felt that they were "psychometric," that is, ESP impressions elicited by physical objects (in this case, the two houses) associated with the events, rather than independent apparitional entities. In one of the homes, he gave the first name of the person whom the family thought responsible for the hauntings.

In the Florida home, in which several apparitions had been sighted, Johnson attributed most of the experiences to imagination and exaggeration. However, he did "see" a woman in old-fashioned clothing who resembled in several respects one of the three apparitions described by the owner of the house. Dr. Joines will report on this study in a research brief at the P.A. convention.

## THE MEANING OF PERSONAL EXISTENCE<sup>1</sup>

By Arthur W. Osborn

Reviewed by Rex G. Stanford<sup>2</sup>

To fairly assess any work the reviewer must bear in mind the expressed purpose of the author. Mr. Osborn has set for himself a task both demanding in its complexity and broad in its scope. The author, as indicated by the full title, wishes to consider the meaning of personal existence "in the light of paranormal phenomena, the doctrine of reincarnation, and mystical states of consciousness."

Many books have been written about any one of these three subtopics and at least as often as not psi phenomena, reincarnation, or mystical experience have been related in such texts to religious or metaphysical considerations bearing on such questions as, "Why are we here?" and "What meaning is there in life?" It almost seems audacious, then, for Mr. Osborn to undertake a discussion of the interrelations of all these areas in just 214 pages of actual text. The relevant question

is not, however, "How bold a writer is Mr. Osborn?" Rather it must be, "How well does he fare in the difficult job he sets out for himself?" After a closer examination of the book this question can be more easily answered.

Osborn is familiar with the classes of psi phenomena and their evidence. These are not used as "proofs" of reincarnation, survival, or a nonmaterial side to man. Rather, such phenomena—and he discusses a host of them from ESP to bilocation, auras, and ectoplasm—are simply regarded as being best understood in terms of something like a psychic component in man. He doubts, in fact, that any decisive experiment is possible to "prove" survival, and he is on firm ground here in view of the difficulty of conceiving of a "conclusive" experiment in any scientific area. Empirically derived hypotheses or even laws never partake of the kind of certainty found in deductive systems such as mathematics. "Certainty" in science is a matter of an inductive leap on the basis of accumulated evidence; conclusion, a matter

of decision making, hopefully according to some fairly clear-cut criterion.

It is in this spirit that Osborn opts for the reality of "survival" and thus for a dualistic view involving mind-body interaction. He feels there is considerable evidence supporting the survival notion both directly, as for example, mediumistic utterances and presumed memories of previous lives, and indirectly, as in the case of the assumed independence of ESP from distance, physical barriers, and time. Taken together, all the findings, says Osborn, weigh most heavily in favor of survival and a psychic component to human personality. He regards this as the most parsimonious interpretation presently available.

Parapsychologists reading the book may, however, not all be too happy about the wide array of psychic phenomena and related events which are adduced by Osborn. One example is his discussion of "aura vision" as possible supporting evidence for the existence of "nonphysical" bodies, as proposed by the occultists and certain Eastern religions. Another is Osborn's acceptance of the reality of ectoplasm as reported in mediumistic seances. The point here is that once he has admitted through his conceptual gate certain fairly well established psi phenomena, he has let in other more dubious one as well. These latter events are not *a priori* dubious—the parapsychologist of all persons knows that *a priori* judgments are most often a front for unadorned dogmatism. The fact is simply that the evidence for their reality is still very weak if only for the reason that they have seldom been seriously researched.

One of the prime virtues of the book is that it introduces the reader, however briefly, to a number of possibly unfamiliar theories or ideas. These range from various mind-body notions to theories of precognition and different views of survival after death. He also interestingly compares the Hindu oversoul (atman) concept with the Buddhist no-soul (anatta) view. His dis-

cussions are provocative, generally well-informed, and carefully reasoned. Indeed, the book is a very thoughtful one and the reader who is interested only in phenomena as such may find himself overburdened by the weighty discussion. Osborn has clearly given long and careful consideration to the many difficult problems that he considers. In spite of this, he judiciously refrains from belaboring his points and spurs the reader to seek for himself. The book in fact includes a rather extensive and useful bibliography.

Another of the work's major virtues is that the author does not gloss over conceptual difficulties, even those characterizing his own viewpoint, and his presentation is unpretentious and straightforward.

On the negative side of the ledger, Osborn is occasionally a bit hasty in his exposition and may at points make his reader wish for further explanation. This likely stems out of the attempt to handle so many ideas in so few pages. Sometimes the author hints at clarification but fails to give it satisfactorily. One example is in his section on the doctrine of karma, the oriental version of "as you sow, so shall you reap," extended over repeated incarnations. After a somewhat detailed discussion of the sticky issue of "causality," which he fails to tie up very clearly with karma, he then defines the concept of karma: ". . . Karma may be conceived as a statement of the universal connectiveness which is a fact governing all manifestation. It is an expression of an organic Wholeness behind the appearance of discreteness. Disturbances of this Wholeness cannot be tolerated, they produce reactions which individuals register as suffering. Thus we may think of Karma as a law of consequences . . ." (p. 138).

This is rather vague as stated and not too helpful in trying to understand how karma would work in actual practice. The reader who is unfamiliar with the notion of karma may be left adrift in a sea of "Wholeness" and be quite unsure what is connected.

1. Wheaton, Ill.: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1967, 232 pp., \$3.95. Foreword by Ian Stevenson.

2. Dr. Stanford is Research Associate in the Division of Parapsychology, Department of Psychiatry, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

Nor is Osborn's discussion of precognition, as evidence of a "destiny" ruling individuals, much help in assimilating the rationale of karma. Osborn feels that in a sense precognition of events in a person's life, or even of his death, is a kind of evidence for a law of karma. If so, the "evidence" is weak for it does not demonstrate that the "determinism" presumably underlying the precognition extends beyond the present life. This is of course a major tenet of the doctrine of karma.

Otherwise, Osborn's discussion of the idea of karma is generally cogent and is much better informed than that of the usual Westerner writing about this doctrine.

One shortcoming of the work is an apparent lack of adequate proofreading. Punctuation rules are quite frequently ignored, and this makes reading awkward at times. While involved with remarks bearing on the publisher, let it be noted that although the Theosophical Publishing House has released this book, the work itself does not reflect, basically, the theosophist viewpoint. Indeed, Osborn does not hesitate to question pet theosophical notions when he feels this is warranted.

Earlier it was noted that Osborn advocates a dualistic notion of the mind-body relation. He does not leave his metaphysics at this point, however, for this dualism, he asserts, is apparent only at the phenomenal level. Underlying all manifestation is the transcendental unity, a metaphysical monism, attested by those who have undergone mystical experiences. Osborn is a sophisticated student of religion and mysticism. His exposition will prove helpful to most anyone wishing to consider the meaning and destiny of human life in the light of empirical evidence, religious and philosophical speculation, and, very importantly, human experience of the mystical kind.

Osborn is very provocative, not over-

bearing or dogmatic, and very well informed. His rather condensed treatise will repay the reader well for his efforts. It is in fact one of the more generally knowledgeable and thoughtful works this reviewer has had the pleasure of examining in a long while.

As Dr. Ian Stevenson has emphasized in his foreword to this book, Osborn's discourse serves a more vital function than merely attempting to answer the question whether survival actually occurs. Indeed, as Stevenson has well put it: "This is to take us beyond the mere fact of our survival of death (which he accepts from the evidence already available) and lead us to consider the significance of survival for our understanding of human personality and the conduct of our lives now." In this regard, the reader is led to think for himself and to search within himself. Osborn is acutely aware that words in books are more like the shadows on the wall of the cave in Plato's *Republic*, than they are like the messengers of any ultimate Truth. But Mr. Osborn's words are not for this reason to be taken lightly; in fact, they can be taken all the more seriously. Stevenson alludes to this in his foreword: "Few . . . are the books which help the reader to think for himself. Mr. Osborn's book is in this small class. . . ."

The reader may finish the work somewhat uncertain about the ultimate connection of psi phenomena and the more profound or abstruse matters discussed by Osborn. He may emerge with the feeling that psi phenomena somehow "fit in," even if they allow no conclusions to be drawn and even if their final significance cannot be fully ascertained. If the reader feels this way, it is doubtful that Osborn would expect or wish he should feel otherwise. The real effect of psi phenomena may be that they confound the intellect, thus leading us beyond our current conceptions of the world.

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The subscription price for one year is \$1.50 (£-10-0), for two years \$2.00 (£0-15-0).

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Post Office Box 6116, College Station, Durham, North Carolina 27708

Managing Editor: Mrs. Muriel Roll