

A BULLETIN FOR RESEARCH ON THE PROBLEM OF SURVIVAL AFTER BODILY DEATH  
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## TENTH ANNUAL MEETING OF PARAPSYCHOLOGISTS

The Parapsychological Association marked its tenth anniversary with a convention at the Barbizon-Plaza Hotel, New York City, September 7-9, 1967.

The President for 1967, Mr. E. Douglas Dean of the Newark College of Engineering, in his address, "Parapsychology and Dr. Einstein," appealed for increased use by parapsychologists of the methods and concepts of modern physics. The invited dinner speaker, Dr. Walter Houston Clark of the Andover Newton Theological Seminary, in his talk on "Parapsychology and Academic Class Consciousness," divided the academic community into "expanders" and "systematizers," placing parapsychologists with the former and explaining opposition to their work in terms of the need of the academic establishment to protect the prevailing system.

The research reports included ESP dream studies, the effect on ESP of guessing habits, token object experiments with sensitives and unselected subjects, and attempts to improve results in telepathy tests by using emotionally loaded material.

In papers concerning the nature of ESP targets including those used in object association ("psychometry") tests, Dr. J. G. Pratt and Mr. W. G. Roll described their joint experiments with the Czech subject, Pavel Stepanek.

According to a theory advanced by Mr. W. P. Bentley, that objects made of materials foreign to the human organism, such as aluminum, are unsuitable as ESP targets, a series of tests was conducted in which targets made of aluminum were alternated with cardboard targets. Only the latter gave significant results. Though further confirmation is needed, the results are consistent with Bentley's hypothesis. In other tests, Pratt and Roll confirmed the "focusing effect," where the subject repeatedly gives the same response to certain concealed

targets, regardless of whether or not it is correct. Since the response is not related to the target's known physical properties, it appears that special psychological properties as postulated in the psi field theory act as ESP stimuli.

Other convention papers relevant to theta research are summarized below.

### THE MIAMI POLTERGEIST

A symposium was presented by Roll and Pratt on their investigation of a series of unexplained disturbances at a wholesale novelty business in Miami, Florida. The Foundation was first notified about the incident by Miss Susy Smith, author of several parapsychological books (see THETA 8 and 13), who was present when many of the occurrences took place. The disturbances consisted of the movement and breakage of more than 150 glasses, ashtrays, and novelty items which fell off their shelves or traveled some distance before crashing to the floor. Police officers and others who came to investigate the occurrences were unable to explain them normally. Roll studied the phenomena over a ten-day period and Pratt was present during three days. The investigation showed that the incidents were concentrated in the vicinity of one of the business' employees, a 19-year-old Cuban shipping clerk, suggesting him as the agent. Certain areas of the room were more frequently affected than others and these became the focus of the investigation. In several cases, target objects placed in these areas by Pratt or Roll were affected when they had the shipping clerk under observation and when no one else was near.

A study of the origins of the movements showed a statistically significant tendency for the disturbances to originate at the back of the agent. The direction of movement was counterclockwise and away from

him, both tendencies being statistically significant. There was also a significant decrease in the number of occurrences with increased distance from the agent. This and the circular movement away from him were suggestive of a vortex field with the agent as the center.

In the effort to discover physiological or psychological factors that might be related to the phenomena, the agent was brought to Durham for testing and observation. No abnormal physical conditions were found and his EEG ("brain wave") patterns were normal. However, the psychological tests revealed strong feelings of hostility, especially toward parental figures, which he could not express overtly and from which he felt personally detached. It appeared that he regarded the owners of the business in Miami as such figures and that the disturbances were a means to express aggression which could find no other outlet.

While in Durham, the young man was tested on several of the PK machines at the Institute for Parapsychology. Suggestive results were produced on a mechanical dice release. In addition there was a disturbance of an object which resembled the Miami incidents.

### EVALUATING MEDIUMISTIC MATERIAL

A new method for the analysis of verbal material was presented by Dr. Ian Stevenson. Dr. Stevenson recently resigned as Chairman of the Department of Neurology and Psychiatry at the University of Virginia to devote himself full time to parapsychological research as Alumni Professor of Psychiatry at the University; he is also a member of the Board of Directors of the Psychical Research Foundation. The method permits the medium's statements to be made in the presence of the target person (TP) for whom they are intended instead of in the possibly inhibiting situation where the medium is isolated from him. The medium's statements are divided into individual items and subjected to the following analyses.

Independent judges divide all the statements into "S" (subjective) and "O" (objective) items. "O" items are of a factual nature, such as dates, names, and places,

which are clearly either true or false. "S" items are items whose evaluation requires a degree of subjective judgment. If the TP scores as correct approximately the same proportion of "O" items as of "S" items, this suggests that he is not being swayed in his ratings of the correctness of the items by wishes and expectations which could influence his judgment of the correctness of the "S" items.

The total list of items is given to three or more other raters of the same sex and approximately the same age, education, and interests. These persons know that the statements were not intended for them. It is expected that they will check fewer "O" items than the TP. An alternative method of analysis in this phase provides for independent judges to assess the specificity of groups of "O" items as to whether or not these could refer to more than one person. The judges would make their assessments without knowing how the TP had scored the items.

A third analysis evaluates the accessibility of the correct information through normal channels to the sensitive. Independent judges rate all the items as to whether they are "Public Domain" items (open to general public knowledge) or "Intimate" items (available only to the TP's family, intimate friends, or by means of fraudulent research). If the TP scores as correct the same proportion of both, it may be concluded that the medium has not achieved her success by "hits" on information about the TP which might be publically available.

The method of analysis proposed by Dr. Stevenson has been applied to statements made about him by a French sensitive, Mlle. Yvonne Nominé, giving results apparently due to ESP.

### EXPERIMENTS WITH THE ENGLISH MEDIUM, DOUGLAS JOHNSON

Mr. Roll presented the results of a series of experiments with the medium, Douglas Johnson. There were three types of tests: (a) experiments where Mr. Johnson gave free verbal responses (FVR's) about target persons (TP's) in face-to-face situations with feedback from the TP's regarding the correctness of the statements; (b) FVR

experiments where there was no sensory contact and no feedback; and (c) token-object matching tests with blank cards which the TP's had kept for a period of time in polyethylene bags. The statements produced in (a) and (b) were tape-recorded and transcribed, and copies were circulated to the TP's for annotation. The (a) statements contained information regarding the TP's which cannot easily be explained in terms of sensory clues or chance coincidence. However, there is no method at present for evaluating this type of material statistically. The (b) statements were assessed statistically and produced an insignificant negative deviation using the Pratt-Birge method and a significant score with another method which,

however, is still in the development stage. In the matching tests (c) evidence of ESP was produced on the cards of G.C. whose objects also gave the best score in the experiments with the medium, H. Beyer, reported last year.

Mr. Johnson expressed a strong preference for the (a) sessions over the (b) sessions and it is suggested that the negative scores in the latter may be due to his dislike of these conditions. The result of the matching test repeats earlier findings by Roll and others and supports the psi field hypothesis and other theories according to which physical objects possess psychical properties to which the subject responds in object association ("psychometry") trials as well as in conventional card tests.

### SURVIVAL OF DEATH: FOR AND AGAINST

By Paul Beard<sup>1</sup>

Reviewed by Ian Stevenson

Mr. Paul Beard is a member of the Society for Psychical Research and President of the (London) College of Psychic Science. The latter group, for those who do not already know it, is an organization of persons who believe in the survival of personality after death and who at the same time maintain a critical attitude towards mediumship, attempting to study it as well as use it. They have been described as intermediate in their attitude towards survival between the Society for Psychical Research (which collectively holds no opinion on anything except the importance of the subject and the need to study it) and the more assertive groups of spiritualists whose members generally regard spiritualism as a religion and generally accept communications of mediums without much examination.

Beard's book is written from this intermediate position. It reviews somewhat briefly, but quite accurately, the evidence from mediumship for survival. This review contains no information new to informed psychical researchers and the author does not claim that it does. His book does, however, contain much good sense and even wisdom concerning some of the prob-

lems confronting those who search for evidence of survival, either as investigators or for more personal reasons.

The author does not believe that the evidence for survival from mediumistic material is likely to be much improved over what we already have. He thinks that the conviction which mediumistic communications often bring to persons attending séances must inevitably derive from subjective judgments and can never be reduced to objective tests. The little mannerisms, traits of speech, and characteristic turns of phrase which a sitter recognizes as absolutely like those of a deceased person he knew are no more describable than are such traits when we use them to recognize our living friends. Polanyi has called the knowledge whereby we recognize our friends "tacit knowing." Beard thinks conviction about the identity of communicators will always remain in this area of tacit knowing and never become based on objective knowledge. Personally, I think he is wrong in this judgment, but he is certainly not wrong in telling those of us who are more optimistic how much we are up against.

For persons who believe in survival already and who attend or contemplate attending mediumistic séances, Beard has

<sup>1</sup>London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1966. xi + 177 pp., 25 shillings.

valuable advice as to how to conduct oneself, what to expect, and what not to expect. He is well aware of the fact that even the best communications (whatever their provenance) contain heavy admixtures from the medium's own mind. (The ostensible communicators themselves complain of this!) He also points out that most mediums of high quality sit for a select small circle of regularly attending persons. Séances of this kind can rarely be "crashed" by outsiders and yet good evidence is not often obtained through the more publicly available mediums, although it sometimes is. The casual inquirer will need luck if he lacks persistence and expects to obtain good evidence quickly.

The book contains thoughtful chapters on "Difficulties of Communication," "The Medium," and "The Trance Personality." In the last of these Beard discusses *inter alia* the status of controls and "guides." He makes particularly sensible comments on the controls of mediums. He does not solve or claim to solve the problem of their ontological status. I found also interesting his comments on guides, communicators who present themselves as able especially to instruct and sometimes protect the sitters in whose care and development they are interested. Guides are supposedly deceased persons who have themselves developed sufficiently so that they can offer counsel with greater wisdom than the average discarnate personality possesses. Beard is very far from believing that every communicator who presents himself as a guide has qualifications to be one. But he believes that some may have and that these present the best evidence we have that survival after death would be worthwhile. For mere survival into another existence can appeal to no one unless it brings new opportunities, above all new opportunities to become a better person. The testimony

of some communications from guides suggests that they at least have found opportunities for development after death. (Beard nowhere mentions terrestrial reincarnation as an opportunity for further development, but I happen to know that he does not exclude this possibility; nor is it incompatible with what he envisages as opportunities for development in a discarnate life.)

Discussion of discarnate guides may seem to most psychical researchers far beyond where they are now in their gropings for additional evidence as to whether survival after death of any kind occurs. Yet these gropings must be accompanied by efforts of imagination striving to conceive the nature of the discarnate world we expect to reach. Columbus arrived at a very different world from the one he sailed to find, but he would never have sailed at all without *some* idea of what he would find. Then, too, some intrepid Vikings preceded Columbus to America. Spiritualists claim they are ahead of psychical researchers. Could this be partly true?

I am myself very much committed to using the scientific method for the gathering and analysis of further and better evidence as to the survival of personality after death. I believe that this task will be made easier by much closer working relationships between scientific investigators, spiritualists, and mediums (or other "sensitives") than we have had in the past. Indeed, it may be impossible without such improved relationships. This means that psychical researchers should spare no effort to understand the point of view of spiritualists and mediums and try to learn as much as they can from them. Beard's book makes a valuable contribution towards this improved understanding and collaboration.

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#### STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

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