

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

PARAPSYCHOLOGISTS MEET AT OXFORD UNIVERSITY, ENGLAND

The seventh annual convention of the Parapsychological Association was held at Christ Church College, Oxford, England, September 3-6. More than one hundred persons attended, some from such distant countries as India and Japan. The College housed the participants and provided the 12th-century Chapter Room for meetings. In his opening address the President, W. G. Roll, noted that this was the first convention in the history of the Association to be held outside the United States. The Association had taken a decisive step toward becoming the international professional society envisioned when it was founded in 1957, at Duke University. It seemed particularly appropriate, Roll commented, that the first European convention should be at Oxford University. Several important contributions to the literature originated there and it has traditionally kept its doors open to students of the field. He recalled that when he was a student at Oxford, a university grant supported his parapsychological experiments.

Three members of the Board of Directors of the Psychical Research Foundation contributed to the program. Dr. J. G. Pratt, P.R.F. President, discussed his joint research project with the Dutch parapsychologist, Jan Blom, in Prague, Czechoslovakia; Professor H. H. Price of Oxford University, P.R.F. Vice-President, read a paper on "Memory and ESP"; and Dr. Ian Stevenson, Board member, offered a joint paper with the English psychical researcher, Rosalind Heywood, on spontaneous ESP cases. In addition to the individually presented papers, there were two symposia. "The Psychology of Gifted

Subjects" had papers by Dr. B. M. Smith (University of Virginia), Professor Hans Bender (Freiburg University, Germany), and Professor W. H. C. Tenhaeff (Utrecht University, Holland). In the other symposium, "Explanations in Parapsychology," papers were given by three English philosophy professors, A. Flew, C. W. K. Mundle, and H. H. Price; and by Dr. J. H. Rush (Boulder, Colorado), and Professor M. Scriven (University of Indiana). Professor Scriven's paper was his contribution to the P.R.F. symposium on survival research. An abstract of it appears in this issue of THETA.

The Banquet address, entitled "What Are We Up To?" was given by the English psychologist, Dr. John Beloff, author of *The Existence of Mind* (London: MacGibbon and Jee, 1962).

In the Presidential address, "The Psi Field," Roll advanced a theory that involves a new field which is analogous to the electro-magnetic and gravitational fields in physics and interacts with physical fields to produce ESP and PK phenomena. He cited some findings which suggest that ESP depends on spatial and temporal conditions such as 'linkage,' distance, and frequency and recency of contact between the subject and the target situation. A solution to other parapsychological problems will depend on our ability to understand the basic ESP process, Roll said. This applies especially to the survival problem. If we cannot control the ESP information flow, it can always be said that the subject uses his own ESP ability, unaided by surviving personalities.

This is the fourth installment of abstracts of papers submitted for the symposium.

PERSONAL IDENTITY

MICHAEL SCRIVEN

Dr. Scriven, Professor of History and Logic of Science at Indiana University, Bloomington, discusses philosophical questions about personal identity which have to be considered in order to properly appraise the evidence for survival. His main point is that there are several criteria for the "self," not all of which are important.

These criteria are bodily appearance, physical abilities, memories from a past life, character, mental abilities, present contents of consciousness, and spatial and temporal continuity (especially of bodily appearance and memory). Of these, the last five are the most important. By itself, bodily continuity is not enough: "if a man's impending death from brain cancer was prevented by giving him a blank electronic replacement for his brain, we would have both continuity and bodily criteria kept going for him; but if the cancer had metastasized, and we were later forced to replace every part of his body with an artificial substitute, sequentially, there would be only continuity to support the claim of identity. . . . In such a case, surely a great deal would depend on whether his new brain has or can acquire the memories and/or can exhibit the cognitive characteristics of the 'previous owner' of that 'same' intercranial cavity. If so, we can picture the series of events as a sequence of graftings done to the same person; if not, we might just as reasonably say that the original man had been lost in the shuffle."

Scriven goes on to show that continuity of bodily appearance and abilities is not necessary in order for us to talk about continuity of the self. We say that a person is "the same," even if he loses many or all of his familiar physical characteristics. If surviving spirits have memory and mental and personality properties, identification would be possible in most cases.

In searching for evidence of identity he advocates that personality studies of mediums under trance control and R. H. Thouless's post-mortem cipher test (see THETA 2) be supplemented by experi-

ments in which a medium who is controlled, for instance, by the spirit of a calculating prodigy, is presented with problems to which she must give immediate solutions.

Scriven concludes, "The identity of a man is no more a matter of the presence of a particular element than is the property of being a living entity. Borderline cases . . . lead us to realize that life is an imprecise organizational property and not an all-or-none essential property, and the same is true of a person's identity. There are many strands in the concept of identity and several of them can be stretched or even broken without fatal effects; in particular, corporeal fatality is not a serious threat of personality termination."

SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS RELEVANT TO RESEARCH IN SURVIVAL

IAN STEVENSON

Dr. Stevenson, Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry and Neurology at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, favors a psychologically oriented approach to ostensible theta communicators. The investigator needs to take into account the conditions and limitations that post-mortem circumstances may impose on the communicator.

We tend to think about mediumistic communications as though they were telephone connections. The question arises "whether a potential communicator would want to communicate at all and whether he would want to communicate what those left behind want to hear from him." The comparative failure with which agreements to send special messages after death have met may be due to changes in motivation. Perhaps the after-death state is similar to the condition that hallucinogenic drugs often seem to induce, where a person feels himself detached from his ordinary values, is interested mainly in experiencing his newly discovered inner world, and is correspondingly indifferent to communicating with those around him.

Stevenson considers that since communicators were once living persons, they probably retain some of their former personality characteristics though, no doubt, they lose others and possibly gain new ones. Assuming that communications fol-

low familiar psychological patterns, Stevenson asks next, what types of information are theta agents likely to want to relate? They may wish to describe the circumstances of their death or some unfinished business they left behind. Numerous cases of purported theta communications are consistent with this.

In addition to its effect on need patterns, death may produce other psychological changes. Some theta cases suggest that a fusion of conscious and unconscious mental processes occurs after death; this might inhibit selective and consecutive communication.

In societies with different religious systems the ostensible theta phenomena tend to vary. For some psychical researchers this has suggested that the phenomena are artifacts produced by the expectations of the living. Stevenson says that the survival of personal beliefs after death might account for such differences and could, for instance, explain why cases of ostensible reincarnation are rare in societies that do not subscribe to the belief.

The communicator's ability to remember is an important factor. In the living, recall of a past event is influenced by the frequency and intensity of the experience. The same may be true after death. Accordingly, first names may be easier to communicate than last, especially if the last names were seldom written or heard. Theta experiments should be designed to arouse memories of experiences that were intensive and pleasant for the communicator. The participants should include persons with close emotional bonds to the deceased. When token objects are used, objects should be selected which were emotionally significant to the communicator.

The fact that recognition is usually easier than recall should also be considered. If the communicator cannot recall something such as his last name, he may recognize it if it is hidden among a list of names.

In conclusion, Stevenson says, one must have "both satisfactory controls and appropriate psychological conditions for further progress in the study of survival."

J. GAITHER PRATT WRITES BOOK ABOUT PARAPSYCHOLOGY

In *Parapsychology: An Insider's View of ESP* (Doubleday, 1964, \$4.95), Dr.

Pratt tells about his initiation into parapsychology and the more than a quarter century he has spent as a "professional revolutionist." He begins with some of the puzzling everyday experiences, such as apparent telepathic and prophetic dreams, which gave the first inklings that the human mind reaches further into time and space than known physical principles allow. There is a vivid account of how these elusive abilities were captured in scientific experiments and how each of the four main types of parapsychological phenomena was distinguished from the others: telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis or PK, the "mind over matter" effect. From the orderly progression of university research we follow Pratt into the house of flying objects in Seaford, Long Island, which he and W. G. Roll visited to discover whether the phenomena could be explained by familiar causes or were instances of PK—in which case they would be vast magnifications of the weak effects produced in the laboratory. Another research frontier on which Dr. Pratt has been active is that of animal ESP. In two chapters he relates the investigations of dogs, cats, and other species, with particular emphasis on his search for an ESP factor in the behavior of homing pigeons.

The chapter "Does Mind Survive Death?" is introduced with the visit by William James to the Boston medium, Mrs. Leonard Piper, in 1885. From the beginning, the question was raised whether the medium's trance material came from parapsychical sources or was merely shrewd guesswork. In those instances where guessing or cheating was ruled out, the problem arose whether the information about the deceased was due to the subject's own ESP or the intervention of surviving personalities.

Over the decades that followed the founding of the Society for Psychical Research in England in the 1880's a large amount of evidence piled up through mediumistic work that appeared to point to the agency of deceased personalities. This material reached its apex in the "cross correspondences," where bits of obscure but related Latin and Greek literature turned up in the writings of several sensitives, each of whom was ignorant of the material coming through the others. When

the puzzles were fitted together by classical scholars, evidence was found of precisely the kind of knowledge the purported communicators possessed, but which was quite foreign to the mediums. Among the other attempts to identify ostensible communicators, Pratt discusses the cipher test for survival by Dr. R. H. Thouless (see THETA 2) and the work of Whately Carington, where personality tests were given to mediums in their normal and trance states to find out whether the communicating personality was the distinct one it claimed to be or only a chip off the medium's. Some of the most interesting cases come not from mediums, but the dreams or hallucinations experienced by people who do not possess special psychical abilities. Dr. Pratt describes some of these.

How does the picture shape up to a person who, like Dr. Pratt, has spent most of his professional life in experimental parapsychology? "The work on ESP and PK react upon research on the survival problem in two ways. First, it makes it harder to conceive of the kind of evidence that would be required to provide a conclusive answer to the question. Secondly and conversely, the more we learn about the range and variety of what the normal person is capable of doing through the use of his psi capacities, the more we come to appreciate the existence in man of precisely those qualities that make the concept of survival acceptable as a theoretical possibility." The immediate problem is to show whether the seeming evidence for survival is or is not, in fact, a psychological dramatization of ESP information being presented as a communication from the dead. The solution to the problem deserves "whatever amount of scientific attention may be required to find the true answer—an answer so clear that it will be universally recognized and accepted as established knowledge."

PENGUIN BOOK ON PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

BY R. H. THOULESS

As the title of Dr. Thouless's book, *Experimental Psychical Research* (Penguin Books, 1963, 95 cents) indicates, its orientation is experimental. But this does not mean that experiments should be restricted to cards and dice. Thouless urges controlled testing also in areas such as psychic healing and survival. In these, the investigator is frequently confronted with problems from which his laboratory colleagues are sheltered. For example, some of the most promising phenomena are sometimes reported in connection with persons who have been known to fake results. Some psychical researchers hesitate to work with such subjects. Thouless is impatient with this attitude: "If an experiment has been correctly carried out, it is irrelevant whether the subject is trustworthy or not, since the experimental precautions should have made it impossible for him to cheat. If they have not made it impossible for the subject to cheat, then the experiments, whether the subject cheats or not, are worthless as evidence."

Thouless does not believe that all "poltergeist" occurrences can be attributed to pranksters or the effects of such physical causes as underground streams. "A strong case can . . . be made out for the existence of a real class of spontaneous 'poltergeist' phenomena . . . in which there seems to be paranormal movements of objects." As a theta experiment, in addition to his own cipher test, Thouless advocates studying the psychological characteristics of the same ostensible theta agents communicating through different mediums.

An important advance will be made when experimental workers realize the full potential of these areas for research.

THETA is issued quarterly in Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter.

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

THETA, College Station, Durham, N.C 27708, U.S.A.

Editor: W. G. Roll—Managing Editor: Elizabeth G. Norton—©THETA 1964

Second-class postage paid at Durham, North Carolina