

Does Mind Survive Physical Death?

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ABSTRACT

The question whether or not the mind survives the death of the physical body has concerned humankind from earliest times. Interest in survival was the main issue that led to the foundation by a group of Cambridge University scholars of the Society for Psychical Research in Britain in 1882. Currently, materialistic-reductionist science, with its belief that the only reliable knowledge is that gained by the senses about the nature of the physical universe has largely rejected the notion that anything can survive the death of the body. Modern psychology, with its conviction that the brain is the seat of consciousness, and that any idea of a non-material mind or soul that can survive physical death is untenable, strongly supports this materialist-reductionist view.

However, the evidence for survival, both indirectly from laboratory studies into the existence of psychic abilities such as telepathy and clairvoyance (which are incompatible with the notion that consciousness is limited to the physical brain), and directly from research into spontaneous cases of apparent post-mortem communications, has continued to grow. Near-Death Experiences (NDEs), in which individuals clinically dead for brief periods nevertheless report the continuation of consciousness) provide further evidence that death may not mean extinction, as does the growing evidence available from ITC research. The discoveries of quantum physics, which suggest that consciousness may be able directly to influence the material world, even provides us with a possible model of how a non-physical mind or soul can interact with and control a physical brain.

The present paper reviews some of this evidence and supplements it with findings from the author's own investigations during his time as President of the Society for Psychical Research and subsequently. The conclusion reached is that, on the balance of probabilities, survival of human

consciousness and other life forms appears to be the most likely explanation for the facts under discussion.

INTRODUCTION

My starting point is the premise that the reality of psychic phenomena has been firmly established, both by the laboratory-based research of parapsychologists and by the investigations carried out into mediumship, spontaneous cases, Near Death Experiences, and most recently ITC. Given this premise, I do not need to review the evidence from which it is derived. For those unfamiliar with the evidence on laboratory-based research I strongly recommend Radin (1997) for an excellent summary, Gould (1982) for an equally impressive review of mediumship, and Roy (1996) for some good examples of spontaneous cases.

On the strength of the premise that psychic phenomena exist, my aim is to proceed to explore what the various areas of psychical investigation tell us about whether or not humans and other living systems survive the change we call death. We can accept the existence of psychic phenomena without accepting survival, and similarly of course we can believe in survival without accepting any of the evidence for psychic phenomena. But in my view the two complement and support each other at a number of important points.

Since the beginning of recorded history men and women have sought to know if some part of our being - which for convenience I propose to call the mind - containing sufficient of our consciousness, memories and personal characteristics to be recognisable as ourselves, is independent of the material body and unaffected by its mortality. Such knowledge is crucial not only for the way in which we view ourselves, but for the way in which we relate to the world. It has to do with whether existence has meaning and purpose, or whether we and the rest of creation are nothing more than a vast bio-physical accident created by blind chance and cast adrift at the mercy of only one law, the survival of the fittest. If creation has meaning and purpose, then there are major implications for the way in which we live our lives and for the way in which we relate to the other bio-systems that share the world with us, and to the planet itself and the natural resources upon which all life depends. If creation has no meaning and purpose, then we can use and

exploit not only the physical environment but all living systems including each other.

Modern science and modern philosophy are largely wedded to the second view. The materialist-reductionist creed which governs this view has it that the world is constructed only of matter, and that this matter is made up only of dead atoms. Thus even the human mind (I say 'the human mind', because this creed does not recognise the existence of minds in any creatures other than man) somehow emerges from the matter that makes up our brains. Nature is without any intrinsic purpose or value, and in a purely material world the only possible goals are material goals. And since mind is created by the physical brain, when the brain dies the mind dies with it. The creed thus not only rejects any possibility of survival, it regards all those who accept this possibility as hopelessly naive, and in consequence one of the quickest ways to lose credibility as a scientist is to insist that the evidence for survival should at least be properly identified and assessed.

My aim in what follows is to attempt this identification and assessment. The materialist-reductionist creed has had dramatic and catastrophic consequences not only for our own psychological and physical welfare, but for the environment, for virtually every species of animals and plants, and for the myriad eco-systems that sustain us all and without which life as we know it could not survive. Thus the need to identify and assess this evidence has never been more pressing. Unless we can move away from this creed, then as a species we are very unlikely to be around much longer. The great tragedy is that in the process of destroying ourselves, we will also destroy all other forms of life, most of which have inhabited this planet for very much longer than we have, and which therefore, even by the logic of our human laws, have a greater right to existence than we do.

PSYCHIC PHENOMENA AND THE MIND

Is the materialist-reductionist creed correct in its belief that mind is created by brain? The answer to this question is crucial to any debate about survival. In fact if the answer is yes, there can be no debate. We do not survive, and there is an end to it. So what does the existence of psychic phenomena have to tell us about the mind-brain relationship? Or to put it another way, what does it have to tell us about the nature of mind? This is

not a question that has been addressed by parapsychologists, who have deliberately avoided developing what we might call the philosophy of parapsychology, on the grounds that if parapsychology wishes to become acceptable to mainstream science, then it must be careful not to seem intent on denying the materialist-reductionist creed. This is a mistake. Now that parapsychology has used good scientific methodology within controlled laboratory conditions to demonstrate that psychic abilities exist, it should be bold enough to turn its attention to the construction of this philosophy.

Such a philosophy would undoubtedly have important implications for survival research. The evidence for survival used to be confined to spirit communications, and these are still very important (in fact more important than ever, and I shall make more reference to them in due course), but laboratory evidence for the existence of abilities such as (to use the traditional terms) telepathy, clairvoyance, psycho-kinesis and precognition suggest strongly that the mind can on occasions operate outside space and time. If we look first at space, we know for example that when the distance between the sender and the receiver in a successful telepathy experiment is increased, the scoring rate does not necessarily diminish - contrary to what we would expect from our understanding of the effect of space upon the transfer of all other forms of energy from emitter to receiver. Similarly we know that in clairvoyant (now called remote viewing) experiments, there appears to be no difference between the ability of the mind to gain paranormal information from distant objects and from those near at hand (see for example McMoneagle 2000). When operating telepathically and clairvoyantly, the mind therefore appear free from any spatial restraints. If we look next at time, we know that in successful precognitive experiments the mind appears able to obtain knowledge of future events through paranormal abilities - contrary to our understanding of the strictly linear quality of time.

The implications of these findings for the concept of survival after physical death are clear and compelling. They are that if an aspect of the human mind can operate outside the constraints of space and time, it provides us with a very good theoretical argument for the survival of that aspect of mind. Death means coming to an end in the space-time continuum, and if mind can operate outside this continuum, then death would seem unable to exert any

influence over it. Admittedly this does not tell us whether or not all that we understand by mind survives physical death, but it provides us with an argument against the prevailing materialist scientific orthodoxy which sees the mind as nothing more than a physical epiphenomenon generated by the activity of a physical brain. According to this materialist orthodoxy, the electrochemical activity of the brain creates the mind, both at conscious and unconscious levels, and the entire inner world of thoughts, feelings, images, dreams, percepts and concepts associated with the mind (see e.g. Kurzweil 1999, Wallace 2000 for surveys and comments). The alternative view, that mind is separate from and works through brain, rather as the driver works through the mechanics of his or her car, is rejected by this orthodoxy, even though it has as much, and in some ways rather more, to commend it, as argued among others by Nobel prizewinning neurophysiologist Sir John Eccles (e.g. 1984) and more recently by Goswami (1993) and by de Quincey (2002).

The orthodox materialist view seeks support in contemporary brain research which identifies the specific areas of the brain activated when certain mental events take place, inferring from this that the areas concerned are therefore responsible for creating these events. However, this inference is unwarranted. We can as readily argue that instead of creating these mental events, the areas concerned are activated by them, i.e. they are activated by a non-physical mind working through a physical brain. Instead of being the force generating our mental life and controlling the body, the brain is may thus be the connecting principle between the non-physical mind and the physical body (the analogy of the television set, which receives signals from elsewhere and converts them into pictures on the screen, is sometimes used to clarify this view of the brain's role). This view of brain as the receiver rather than the initiator of mental events is not disproven by the findings that when the brain is damaged, mental impairment takes place. Mind cannot act as readily through a damaged brain as it can through one that is whole, just as signals cannot be properly received by damaged televisions set, and a damaged car cannot obey the wishes of a driver.

Effectively, therefore, there seems nothing to choose between the argument that brain generates mind and the argument that mind works through brain - or such would be the case were it not for two things, both of which favour

the latter viewpoint. The first is that in the light of current knowledge we have no way of knowing how the physical, electro-chemical activity of the brain can possibly generate the non-physical mental events that constitute mind (or to use my earlier terminology, how mind can arise from the supposedly dead atoms that make up the matter of which the brain is composed). When pressed, neuroscientists fall back upon the argument that when we know more about the brain such evidence will emerge, but this kind of argument is not science at all, it is faith, and blind faith (i.e. faith for which there is no observable justification) at that. By contrast, we do have some theoretical support, however tentative, for the possibility that non-physical mind may work through brain. This support derives from findings that at the sub-atomic level the conscious mind appears able directly to influence material quantum events through the act of observation (taken to extremes, these findings suggest that the material world is in fact a bewildering of transcendent possibility forms, and it is the act of observing these forms that stabilises them into the material world. Our minds are therefore, in a very real sense, co-creators of this world). If mind can directly influence material events at the quantum level, interaction between mind and brain may therefore take place at this level, since quantum events operate inside every atom of every cell in the brain (see e.g. Goswami 1993, Wolf 1985).

The second factor that works against the 'brain generates mind' argument is of course the existence of paranormal abilities. As already indicated, these abilities suggest mind can operate outside the space-time continuum that constrains the physical matter of the brain, which suggests that it cannot arise from the brain. Thus, from both quantum physics and from parapsychology we have theoretical arguments for proposing that mind, or some aspects of mind (religious people might wish to refer to these aspects as the soul), survive physical death. Moreover, since parapsychological research indicates that those aspects behave purposefully, intelligently and coherently (this is particularly apparent for example from the findings of remote viewing experiments - see e.g. McMoneagle 2000) we can reasonably suppose that the surviving mind is able to carry with it at least some of what we understand by our selves.

So much for the arguments in favour of survival derived from laboratory

research. Let us now turn to the evidence from other sources, starting with Near Death Experiences (NDEs)

EVIDENCE FROM NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCES (NDEs)

The term NDE refers to the reported experiences of some individuals during brief interludes of clinical death. Such experiences are too well-known to require great elaboration here. Brought to popular attention by Moody in 1983, earlier (and more impressive) collections of such experiences were published by Crookall (1961 and 1978), while a range of subsequent studies (e.g. Sabom 1982, Ring 1984, Fenwick and Fenwick 1995, Ring and Valarino 1998) indicate variously that between 12 and 40 per cent of those at or near clinical death go through NDE experiences prior to resuscitation. Even children, with no previous knowledge appear to have these experiences (Morse and Perry 1990). Typically adults and children report that during the NDE their consciousness appears to be located outside their bodies, and in some instances they are able to give accurate details of medical procedures carried out on their comatose bodies of which they could not have been aware from the position these bodies were occupying at the time. Sometimes they also give accounts of traveling to paradise conditions and meeting deceased relatives or beings of light who are instrumental in sending them back into their bodies. Usually re-entry is accomplished with reluctance and even repugnance.

A number of large scale studies into the phenomena are currently underway. Notable among them is that being undertaken in the UK for the Horizon Research Foundation by medical doctors Sam Parnia and Peter Fenwick, who have already published evidence for NDEs (Parnia 2001) and involving data from some 20 hospitals. Another current large-scale study is that of Van Lommel and colleagues at Rijnstate Hospital in the Netherlands involving 344 cardiac arrest patients all resuscitated after clinical death. Results reveal that 18 per cent report NDEs, and the authors conclude (as do Fenwick and Fenwick, *ibid* 1995, from their study of 300 cases) that medical explanations such as the chaotic activity of the dying brain or hallucinations consequent upon medical drugs or upon disturbances in bodily chemistry cannot account for these experiences, which are meaningful, clear, relate to real life, and show none of the bizarre characteristics which mark hallucinatory experiences induced by drugs or present in psychosis.

Skeptics, now that normal explanations for the NDE look increasingly unlikely, are prone to fall back upon the argument that as those experiencing NDEs are successfully resuscitated they cannot really be said to have died, and therefore cannot tell us anything about life after death. To this we can reply that in many cases the patient undergoing the NDE did so when pronounced clinically dead on the strength of an absence of all the vital signs equated by the medical profession with life - as was the case with all 344 patients in the Netherlands study.

In my own subject, psychology, we take a particular interest in the effects of experience upon behaviour. Thus from a psychological perspective one of the most significant features of the NDE is its life-changing impact upon the individuals to whom it has occurred. Ring (ibid 1984) found the members of his sample had characteristically lost all fear of death, had changed their life goals and values in more spiritually attuned directions, placed more emphasis upon love and compassion, and tended to become broadly spiritual rather than narrowly religious. Even years after their NDEs the experiences remained fresh in their minds, as did the conviction that they had died and now knew the reality of survival.

One of the most unusual NDE cases in my own files was given to me by a highly intelligent woman who has experienced psychic phenomena of various kinds since her childhood..

Traveling with my husband by car during the time we lived in South Africa, we were involved in a terrifying accident in which both my husband and I were thrown out of the car. I found myself out of my body and was able to see both my children, who were sitting in the back of the car and who were unhurt, get out of the wrecked vehicle and run to where I was lying. I watched them trying to resuscitate me, and whilst still out of my body I saw my husband, who was also lying in the road, leave his body and travel towards a bright light in the distance. I knew that he had died, as indeed proved to be the case.

We even have examples of NDEs when the brain is not showing signs of any activity - i.e. when the brain appears clinically dead. One of the best examples is the Pam Reynolds Case (see Sabom 1998). In this case the

patient suffered from hemolysis (ballooning) of an artery at the base of her brain, and the blood had to be drained completely from her brain in order to collapse and repair the artery. As the brain quickly dies if deprived of oxygen, the brain had therefore to be frozen during the time it was without blood. Draining the blood and freezing the brain meant that all the vital signs in the brain were absolutely flat. The brain had literally been switched off, and remained switched off throughout the long operation. Yet on recovering consciousness the patient gave accurate evidence that her consciousness had continued throughout this time, even allowing her to give descriptions of the instrument used to cut through her skull.

EVIDENCE FROM NEARING DEATH (DEATH BED) EXPERIENCES

Linked in some ways to NDEs are what we can call Nearing-Death (or Death Bed) Experiences, where sick people become aware of presences that tell them that they are about to die. The certainty of impending death that this experience conveys usually invokes joy rather than fear, even though the sick person's medical condition suggests at the time that their malady is not life-threatening. In some cases the person is even given correct precise details, apparently imparted by the presence (which may be of a dead relative or friend, or a being of light), of the exact date and hour of their impending death. Bozzano (1998) reports numerous such cases, in some of which testimonies from more than one witness are available. A classic collection of cases involving visions by the dying (sometimes shared by friends and relatives at their bedside) was also made by Sir William Barrett, leading physicist and one of the founders of the SPR (Barrett 1926),

More recently, Morse (1995) and Osis and Haraldsson (1995) present major studies of death-bed experiences, Osis and Haraldsson collecting data involving no less than 50,000 terminally ill patients in the USA and India. An outstanding earlier example of a death-bed experience is the appearance of the deceased Walt Whitman, one of America's greatest poets and mystics, to his dying friend and fellow poet Horace Traubel. Whitman's apparition was seen and recognised both by Traubel himself and by Colonel Crawford who was at his bedside, and who even saw Whitman approach him and touch his hand (producing the feeling of a mild electric shock). First reported in 1921 in the *Journal of the American Society for Psychological Research*, the case was fully investigated by Dr. Walter Franklin Prince, then

research officer of the American Society (see Bozzano ibid 1998).

EVIDENCE FROM ADCs (AFTER DEATH COMMUNICATIONS) THROUGH MEDIUMS

A substantial body of evidence in favour of survival has built up over the years from ADCs given through mediums of the calibre of Leonora Piper, Gladys Leonard, and Eileen Garrett (see e.g. Gauld ibid 1982 for an excellent summary and discussion). The founders of the Society for Psychical Research were concerned above all else with survival. In consequence, over the 120 years of its existence the Society has published an impressive collection of messages communicated through mediums and purporting to come from the deceased. Some of these messages have been accompanied by physical phenomena, as for instance in the case of the Italian medium Eusapia Palladino investigated by three leading members of the Society, Feilding Baggally and Carrington (1909). That mediums communicate information gained paranormally seems beyond reasonable doubt.

Telepathy from the living - the so-called SuperPSI theory - is sometimes advanced as a possible explanation for these ADCs. The medium, it is suggested, actually obtains from the mind of the sitter the information thought to come from the deceased. Should the information be unknown to the sitter at the time, it is argued that the medium may obtain it clairvoyantly from the environment. The information must exist somewhere in the physical world if we are able to check up on its accuracy say supporters of the SuperPSI theory, therefore the medium may be able to obtain it from the physical world rather than from someone in the afterlife. Alternatively, the medium may have obtained the information precognitively, by picking up on the moment in the future when we find the information that he or she is giving to us.

The SuperPSI theory has been with us for very many years, and in principle it is difficult to dispose of it. However, it has a number of serious weaknesses. One of the most important is that we have no laboratory evidence that people can pick up relevant information from the minds of people they have never previously met, whose identities they do not know, and to whom they have no emotional attachments. Similarly, we have no

evidence that they can go clairvoyantly without guidance to obscure places in the environment in order to discover something about people who may have died many years previously and who were unknown to them in life, or can obtain information precognitively with the wealth of correct details often given by mediums. I have had sittings with a number of mental mediums over the years, and although I wouldn't claim that the evidence I have received from them has been particularly outstanding, some of the results not only suggest paranormality but are difficult to explain by the SuperPSI hypothesis. The most recent example is a supposed communication from my mother, who died just over a year ago, and who among other things referred during a sitting with the medium Doris Smith to an unusual silver cigarette case in my possession, which she then accurately described. The cigarette case, which is a family heirloom, was given to me by my mother some years previously, and as a non-smoker I put it in a safe place and promptly forgot about it. At no point did it occur to me that my mother, if she communicated, would make reference to it, and few things were further from my mind during the sitting. Interest in this incident is heightened by the fact that the medium not only had no knowledge of the existence of the cigarette case, but knows me to be a non-smoker and therefore would have been unlikely to associate me consciously with anything connected with cigarettes.

To explain this experience by the SuperPSI theory one would have to suppose that the medium unconsciously fished an obscure memory from my unconscious (by-passing in the process innumerable more vivid memories associated with my mother), and then was able to describe the object concerned not only accurately, but to give me an important detail relating to its appearance of which I had no conscious recollection and which I do not think I had ever noticed. Alternatively, the SuperPSI theory would have us suppose that the medium clairvoyantly (and without realising she was doing it) 'saw' the cigarette case in my home nearly 300 miles away, or precognitively became aware of the moment a days later when I found the cigarette case and verified the accuracy of the information she had given me. Psychic abilities operate outside space and time as we have said, but if they did so with the accuracy with which mediums apparently receive information from the deceased, we would have ample evidence of this in laboratory experiments. And we have not. So unless for some reason we

rule out the possibility of survival on principle, the balance of probabilities is that most of the accurate information given by mediums comes from the deceased.

A second major objection to the SuperPSI theory is that telepathic and clairvoyant information, whether obtained in the laboratory or spontaneously by people in normal daily life, typically takes the form of fleeting, fragmentary impressions rather than the coherent, specific messages received through mediums. The information provided for example by the deceased George Pelham (real name George Pellew) through medium Leonora Piper included recognising and greeting correctly 30 sitters who he had known in life and who were unknown to the medium, while at the same time never once claiming to recognise any of the hundred sitters with whom in life he was unacquainted, is anything but fleeting and fragmentary. In this and many other cases where detailed information is given, we are left with survival as the far more likely explanation.

The frequency with which veridical messages are reported from sittings with mediums also counts against the argument sometimes heard that the vast majority of those who have died disappear without trace. On the contrary, it seems that many people, given the chance, have a strong desire to communicate with those they love. This desire appears to exist for five main reasons, firstly the wish to register the fact that death has taken place when this is not known by the living person at that time; secondly to demonstrate survival; thirdly to reassure loved ones that post-mortem conditions are positive; fourthly to show continuing interest in the welfare of those on Earth; and fifthly to stress the importance of love and of spiritual values.

Recent research by Professor Archie Roy and Mrs. Patricia Robertson in the UK (Roy and Robertson 2001, Robertson and Roy 2001) and by Professor Gary Schwartz in the USA (Schwartz and Russek 2001, Schwartz et al 2001) disposes of a further argument against the claim that ADCs come from the deceased, namely that the messages given through mediums are so general that they could apply to anyone. The research involved taking communications through mediums for people who the mediums did not know, could not see, and who were identified to the mediums only by code numbers, and then giving these communications to a sample of people in

order to see whether those for whom they were intended would recognise more of them as relevant than would those for whom they were not intended. The sample was not informed in advance for whom the communications were intended, so there was no risk that individuals would be biased to accept or reject communications on the strength of this information.

Let me say for example that I am a member of the sample in the experiment and that we are given statements from a supposed communicator through the medium that he limped badly in life, that he worked for the Land Registry, that he was an accomplished draughtsman, that his office was in London, and that he supported Arsenal Football Club. All these statements are applicable to my father, who died some years ago, so I would claim them as intended for me. On matching up the sample members to their code numbers and analysing the results of the experiment, the researchers might find that I was indeed the sitter for whom these statements were intended, and that none of the other sitters had claimed any of them. The results would therefore be taken to support the theory that the medium really was in touch with my father. In the event, the researchers carrying out this kind of experiment have indeed found this kind of result far more often than would be expected by chance alone, with the result that over a number of trials these results are seen to be highly significant, with odds of many thousands to one against them occurring by chance.

EVIDENCE FROM AFTER DEATH COMMUNICATIONS (ADCS) OTHER THAN THROUGH A MEDIUM

People who have lost someone known to or close to them sometimes also report experiencing ADCs even in the absence of a medium. For example they may suddenly - and often very unexpectedly - become aware that a deceased person is apparently intent on contacting them. A good early example concerns William Blake, the famous 18th-19th Century English poet and mystic, who illustrated his poems with his own engravings. The engraving processes that existed at the time were expensive, and Blake tried hard but without success to find a cheaper alternative. His fruitless search eventually came to an end when his dead brother Robert, who had died some years before at the early age of 20 and who Blake often felt to be in touch with him, appeared in a dream and revealed the elusive

copper engraving process. The discovery revolutionised the art of the engraver, and provided Blake, who was a poor man and made little money from his poetry, with a means of livelihood for the rest of his life (Raine 1970).

Sceptics might argue that the dream merely dramatised a discovery that emerged from Blake's own unconscious, but there are always dangers in telling people that the inner experiences they have are not what they themselves take them to be. Blake himself was in no doubt that his brother had survived death and continued to be interested in his welfare, and accordingly gave him the help he so badly needed. Experiences like that of Blake are by no means uncommon. A recent study suggests that, both in the UK and in the USA, some 50 per cent of people who have lost a spouse report an apparent experience of contact with him or her. Many of these experiences involve a sense of unseen presence, but 14 per cent of them include actual sightings, and 13 per cent involve hearing a voice. In most of these auditory cases a message is given which contains information unknown to the recipient but which turns out to be accurate. A smaller number involve tactile experiences, or olfactory ones such as smelling a deceased woman's characteristic perfume or the cigar or pipe smoke of a deceased man, or auditory experiences like the sound of recognisable footsteps.

LaGrand (1997 and 1999) provides an excellent review of the evidence together with many examples of ADCs from his own files, and like many researchers I have in my own records a number of accounts of ADCs given to me by the people who experienced them, three of which are worth summarising as each demonstrates a different aspect of the ADC experience. The first example is from a young woman who joined the SPR as a result of the experience concerned.

We live in one of a pair of small cottages. Next door to us there was an old lady with whom we became quite friendly. Eventually she fell ill and was under medical care. One day I was at our kitchen window at the front of the house, and I saw her pass by the window on her way to our front door, as she often did. I was pleased to see that she was better and up and about again. I went to the front door to greet her, but there was no-one there. Later that

day, I learnt that she had died at about the time I saw her. When I saw her pass by the window the old lady looked exactly as she did in life — ordinary clothes, no semi-transparency, nothing strange or unusual about her at all.

The next example is from a very sensible and intelligent woman in her forties, who has had psychic experiences since childhood and whose word I have no reason to doubt.

When I was a teenager, one of my friends, a young girl, was diagnosed with cancer. She lost her arm, but the operation did not stop the spread of the disease, and she died shortly afterwards. In life, she had always been particularly close to my brother, and one day when I entered his room shortly after her death I saw her sitting there in the chair she always occupied when she came to see him. She and I talked together for some time — just about ordinary things, very matter-of-fact.

My third example comes from a very objective and clear-headed professional woman in her 50s well-known to me. She has had only one other psychic experience in her life, and therefore the one I summarise came to her as a complete surprise

I was on a residential yoga retreat with a group of other members of our yoga group, and one day when we were taking a walk in single file and in silence through the woods, Brian, one of the founder members of our group who had recently died, was suddenly walking next to me. He was as tall as in life, a big smile on his face, but not quite solid. I would describe him as semi-transparent. He placed his left hand on my shoulder and we walked together through the woods. I was struck by the fact that he still had the two deformed fingers on his hand that were a birth defect, and I said to him ‘Oh, Brian, I thought we were mended when we get to heaven’. We walked together for about a minute and then he disappeared just before I left the wood. Later I realised that he materialised with the two deformed fingers as clear proof of identity.

The first example is notable for the fact that the percipient did not know of the death of her elderly neighbour or even that her illness was terminal, and found the materialisation so life-like that she supposed the old lady was now

back on her feet. The second is remarkable in that the percipient held a conversation with her dead friend, finding in the light of her other psychic experiences nothing unusual about this. The third example is distinguished by the fact that the materialisation still had the two deformed fingers he possessed in life, quite contrary to what the percipient believed happened after death. In neither the first nor the third example did expectation by the percipient play any part.

This lack of expectation seems to be a characteristic of many ADCs. Research into the phenomenon such as that by Guggenheim and Guggenheim (1995) who headed an extensive seven-year study involving over 2000 cases and with a funding of \$250,000, found that in the USA agnostics and non-believers in survival report ADCs as frequently as believers. Another interesting aspect of their findings is that they identify 12 different categories of ADC, the most significant and common of which I list below.

1. ADCs that convey news of the death of the person concerned before the percipient knows it has taken place. This news may be in the form of a premonition rather than an apparition, and may include physical sensations related to the illness or accident responsible for the death of the deceased (e.g. pains in the head or chest). Typically the experience conveys a sense of certainty, and is more frequent in cases where the emotional link between percipient and deceased is especially strong.

2. ADCs that give information, aurally or visually, which later proves to be correct and which could not at the time have been known by the percipient. Typically this kind of ADC appears associated with someone already known to be dead.

3. ADCs that in some way provide protection or give a warning that leads the percipient to avoid danger or tragedy to self or to others.

4. The ADC involves the appearance of deceased persons apparently there to help the dying through the transition (as in the examples mentioned earlier).

The SuperPSI theory can be even more difficult to sustain in the context of mediumship involving physical phenomena. I have been fortunate in investigating a number of good examples of this kind of mediumship. The

best of these took place with a group known as the Scole Group, which consisted of two mediums and two regular sitters. Together with two colleagues from the SPR I investigated this Group over a period of two years, and with them I experienced a wide range of physical phenomena sitters (see Keen, Ellison and Fontana 1999 for a full report).. These included:

- * the voices of apparently departed people talking through what is called the 'direct' or 'independent voice' which appears to come from mid-air, and which held highly intelligent conversations with us
- * small so-called spirit lights that responded to our requests, changed shape, entered and illuminated crystals (as diffused or points of light) entered Pyrex bowls and an electric light bulb, entered and illuminated a glass of water, passed through a solid table and through our own bodies
- * materialisations of hands that grasped or touched ours on request, sometimes illuminated by spirit lights, sometimes finding us unerringly in the dark.
- * materialisation of full (though not recognisable) forms
- * levitation of objects
- * the impression of messages and images upon films placed in sealed containers.
- * communications through the entranced mediums which made reference to obscure events from the early history of the SPR.

Although we were unable to employ all the strict controls which we sought to use, at no time during the course of this long investigation did we or any of the other investigators who joined us from time to time identify any fraudulent act on the part of any of the four members of the Scole Group. Furthermore, James Webster, an Associate and Silver Medal Holder of the Inner Magical Circle (the most prestigious and professionally exigent association of magicians in the UK) and a man with some 40 years experience of investigating psychic phenomena, also had sittings with the Scole Group and testified to us that the phenomena witnessed by him could not be duplicated by professional magicians, however competent.

Effects such as the materialisations, direct voices, paranormal lights and photographic images experienced at Scole have never been obtained in the

laboratory, and the balance of probabilities would once again suggest that at Scole they were the responsibility of intelligent deceased communicators - as claimed by the voices that spoke through the two mediums. Similar evidence for the presence of some deceased intelligence arose from one of the poltergeist cases investigated by me, which included effects such as stone-throwing, apports and the movement of heavy objects, all of which I observed in broad daylight. Stone-throwing even occurred when I was alone on the premises, and there were many occasions when the poltergeist showed clear evidence of personality and intelligence. For example care was taken never to injure anyone with the sometimes violent stone throwing that took place, and on occasions we were able to throw stones into the most active part of the engineering workshop where the activity took place, and to have stones thrown back at us (see Fontana 1991 and 1992 for a full account). Though I would of course be happy to claim the power to throw stones at myself paranormally, the facts hardly support the idea of such power. The evidence once again suggests the operation of a deceased personality. The agency of a deceased personality, in this case a close friend, would also seem to have been involved in two other psychokinetic effects involving the movement of objects experienced by myself, on one occasion when another witness was present (Fontana 2000).

EVIDENCE FROM INSTRUMENTAL TRANS-COMMUNICATION (ITC)

Evidence is mounting that communications which strongly support the reality of survival may now also come through modern electronic media such as tape recorders, radios, computers, fax machines, televisions and even telephones (see e.g. Rogo and Bayless 1979, Senkowski 1989, Brune 1993, Locher and Harsch-Fischbach 1997). The area, which has become generally known as ITC (Instrumental Transcommunication), is however still controversial. Consequent upon Ellis' critical research study (Ellis 1978) into the evidence then available, it has been broadly claimed by parapsychologists that the so-called messages received through these media are simply indistinct fragments of random radio transmissions or mechanical noises which are then interpreted as paranormal by recipients using imaginative guesswork and wishful thinking. There is also a suggestion that the whole process is far too susceptible to fraud.

However, both from the evidence presented in the literature and from my own experience, I can testify to the reality of ITC. Dr. Cardoso, with whom I am privileged to work on ITC research, gives a comprehensive summary in these conference proceedings of the results obtained so far by others and by ourselves, and there is no need for me to enlarge greatly upon the subject. Accordingly I will refer to results with just one of the experimental protocols that we use in our work with Direct Radio Voice (DRV), since these results are among those that put the paranormality of ITC beyond doubt. In this protocol, the communicators are invited to repeat certain words that the experimenters give to them. These words should be kept short and simple, and in our view should be relevant to the conversation that is being conducted. Thus words of greeting such as 'Hallo' and 'How are you?', which we have used and which the communicators have repeated on our request, seem appropriate. The value of this protocol is that it removes any suggestion that the voices received through DRV are stray radio emissions from normal sources rather than paranormal communications.

Another important feature of DRV is that it further weakens the theory that SuperPSI, rather than survival, is an adequate explanation for apparent spirit communications. It may be that certain individuals can impress words upon audio tapes simply through the power of thought, just as rare individuals such as Ted Serios were apparently able to impress visual images on films (see Eisenbud 1967). However, there is no evidence that this can be done with the consistency seen in some ITC work. In particular, there is no evidence that one can hold a paranormal conversation with oneself by means of these voices, a conversation in which knowledge is sought by the experimenters and answers previously unknown to them are given, and in which words are repeated paranormally on request. Once again, unless one dismisses the possibility of survival on principle, the only satisfactory explanation for ITC phenomena is that one is indeed in communication with voices from another world.

The hope is that this work will continue to develop. It is noticeable that in the years since spirit communication was first brought to widespread attention with the manifestations at Hydesville in the USA in 1848, these communications have gone through several different - and apparently developmental - stages. Initially it was rappings, table turning and ouija

boards, then came more sophisticated physical phenomena, after which the focus shifted to trance work, then to automatic writing, and then to mental mediumship and channeling. Now the time seems to have arrived for electronic media to play a part. New stages do not supersede old ones. We still have good examples from time to time of every form of communication. However, each stage takes us a step nearer the holy grail of researchers, namely a form of communication in which all who wish to do so can take part, and which allows clear and consistent contacts to be made. Many people hope that ITC may be a very big step in this direction.

In view of the success so far achieved in ITC research, the failure of the parapsychological community to look more closely at the evidence is surprising. Many are still convinced by Ellis (ibid 1978), whose research is now nearly a quarter of a century old, that there is little or nothing paranormal in ITC. Granted the reality of paranormal phenomena, there is in any case nothing intrinsically unlikely about the impression of spirit communications upon recording media. As mentioned earlier, we obtained a number of paranormal images upon film during the Scole investigation, and together with two leading colleagues from the SPR I have been present when similar results, under good control conditions, were obtained by another group producing physical phenomena who we were fortunate enough to be able to investigate. It would be sad if parapsychology becomes hide-bound by the kind of conservatism that handicaps so much of orthodox science.

What Survives?

It is one thing to insist that the evidence for survival is likely to convince anyone who cares to explore it with sufficient care - and if possible to take part in research into this most fascinating and important of areas. It is quite another to say what it is that survives. Some commentators, although largely accepting the fact of survival, confess themselves in doubt as to what aspects of the self survive, given that in the physical world so much of ourselves is experienced as a response to the sensory signals conveyed to us from the physical body. However, judging both by communications through mediums and accounts by those who have had NDEs (to say nothing of the literature from the Western mystery traditions), in the initial stages of survival at least the individual is in possession of all his or her usual faculties. We are even told of a so-called etheric body, which is a replica of

the physical body, if made of a finer substance. And the environment - referred to as Summerland by some communicators - closely resembles that of the physical world, with plants and animals much as here.

It is for each individual to read the literature and make of it what he or she will, but one of the important points to arise from these descriptions is that survival is not a uniquely human thing, that in fact all life survives its earthly death (a point which has been confirmed in some DRV communications). This is not difficult to accept. If the life force within us, with all the sense of individuality it develops during its time on Earth, survives the change called death, then it would be both arrogant and unrealistic to assume that the life force in other forms of existence does not also survive. The belief that survival is unique to humans is in fact as damaging in some ways as the materialist-reductionist philosophy that claims nothing survives. It leads to a disregard for the spiritual sanctity of the vegetable kingdom and for the rest of the animal kingdom. If it is only we humans who are worth the gift of survival, then it is only we humans who really matter, and we can exploit everything else virtually as we choose.

The knowledge that animals survive death arises not only from reasoning such as this, but from the abundant literature on animal apparitions and on communications through mediums. Time and again mediums report seeing not only human spirits surrounding sitters, but also the spirits of former pets, many of whom are described with great accuracy. The evidence that animals have psychic abilities (and that therefore, like humans, they have qualities that operate outside space and time) is also overwhelming (see for example Bardens 1987, Steiger and Steiger 1992, Sheldrake 1999).

Conclusion

Let me end on a speculative note. I have said that the evidence for survival is so strong that anyone who cares to study it is likely to end up convinced. But why do we not yet have evidence so conclusive and so repeatable that even the most hardened sceptic has to accept its reality, evidence so compelling that it would sweep away the materialist-reductionist philosophy that dominates society and so much of Western civilization, and which as I said at the outset has done such terrible damage to almost every aspect of life on this planet? Why isn't the final piece of the jigsaw in place? Why is

there still opportunity for the sceptic to suggest a normal explanation for the phenomena observed, however far-fetched and unlikely this normal explanation happens to be? The presence of these normal explanations and our failure so far to produce the final clinching piece of evidence led William James, one of the founding fathers of psychology and probably the finest mind ever to be attracted to the study of the paranormal, to say in exasperation over a century ago that it rather looks as if the Almighty has for ever decreed that this area should retain its final mystery.

The answer that occurs to me is that the search for evidence of survival - and thus for an answer to the fundamental questions about the nature of our own being - is of value in and of itself. If the case for survival were so demonstrable that it became just another chapter in a school textbook, something would be taken away from man's eternal quest to understand himself and the rest of creation. But why, we might ask, is this quest of importance? Perhaps the answer is that the whole process of questioning, probing, studying, observing, meditating and of wanting so desperately and enduringly to know, is part of the development of mind itself, and that by going through this process we are in some sense enhancing the very self that we seek to understand - even perhaps helping to create its destiny.

There is also the rather more prosaic consideration that if survival was a known and unarguable fact, those who found this world unappealing would be far too inclined to leave it and seek their fortune elsewhere, thus perhaps missing out on learning experiences which may only be possible in this world. But whatever the reasons for the present state of affairs, the evidence we already have for survival is more than adequate to convince many of those - including some of the UK's greatest scientists (see Fontana 1998 for a summary) - who have taken the time needed to study it and to add to it through their own research endeavours.

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