

SURVIVAL RESEARCH: OPPOSITION AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

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ABSTRACT

Research into the possibility of survival of physical death has been one of the major interests of this Society, and our *Proceedings* and *Journal* provide an excellent record of the way in which this interest has featured in our work. This paper lists some of the reasons why survival research is nevertheless still unpopular with many parapsychologists, and virtually ignored by scientists in other disciplines. These reasons are critically discussed, and suggestions made as to how research into survival might develop in the future.

INTRODUCTION

Research into mediumship by Roy and Robertson (Roy & Robertson, 2001; Robertson & Roy, 2001) and by Gary Schwartz and his colleagues (Schwartz & Russek, 2001; Schwartz et al., 2001, 2002) demonstrates that under controlled conditions accurate messages can be given through gifted mediums without their seeing the sitters or knowing details about the sitters for whom the messages are intended. Such messages can be highly specific, which disposes of the argument that messages through mediums are so general they could apply to anyone.

These results help focus fresh attention upon survival research that, despite the evidence published by the Society, is ignored by a majority of mainstream scientists and many parapsychologists. Professor Charles Tart reminds us that research into survival is now only "a very small part of parapsychology, itself a minuscule field" (Tart, 1979, 1989). Yet the question of whether or not we survive death is of major interest to large numbers of our fellow human beings, many of whom seek to answer this question through evidence rather than faith. The question therefore arises, why this neglect of survival research? There are five obvious reasons.

OBJECTIONS TO SURVIVAL RESEARCH

I. Antipathy Towards the Possibility of an After-life

Some scientists and parapsychologists find the idea of an after-life unattractive, and may agree with Professor Broad's well-known statement that "... for my part I should be slightly more annoyed than surprised if I should find myself in some sense persisting immediately after the death of my present body" (Broad, 1962). This attitude is understandable, but dislike for an idea should not prevent us from examining the evidence upon which it is based.

II. Difficulties with the Concept of an After-life

Many find the concept of an after-life conceptually difficult, and confess themselves unable to imagine what it would be like to exist without a physical body, since so much of our present experience is mediated through the bodily senses (for a discussion, see Price, 1995). However, Sir Oliver Lodge argued

that although "a bodily vehicle of some kind [is necessary] for the practical functioning of intelligence", such a body need not "be composed of [the] opposite electrical charges that we call matter". On the contrary, it is perfectly possible to "imagine another structure just as solid and substantial as matter is, but making no appeal to our present sense organs" (Lodge, 1928). In fact we experience such a body in dreams. The dream body is typically as real to us as its counterpart in waking life. Thus it is difficult to see why there should be any great *imaginal* problem in conceptualising such an existence and endowing it with sensory experiences analogous to those enjoyed in this life.

III. Distrust of Mediumship

The third reason is that parapsychologists have been trying since J. B. and Louisa Rhine brought the subject into the laboratory in the 1930s to make psychical research acceptable to mainstream science. Anything that does not readily lend itself to laboratory protocols based upon the natural sciences is therefore seen as superfluous. Speaking of her experiences in Rhine's laboratory, Susy Smith (2000) tells us that Rhine's reaction and that of his team towards her mediumship was . . .

. . . not to get involved in anything that might spoil their other fine work by causing them to receive the label 'ghost chasers' . . . what I stirred up at Duke was a lot of complete indifference . . . nobody would admit to knowing anything about survival.

[pp. 98–99]

Even her automatism failed to impress, as the Rhines held that "there was not one iota of evidence that automatic writing ever came from anything other than the writer's subconscious mind".

However, it was not survival research *per se* to which Rhine objected, but to survival research involving mediumship and particularly physical mediumship (this after his brief experience in 1926 with the Boston medium, Mina Crandon, whom he considered fraudulent—see Fontana, 1998, for details). In his own words, "there are for some of us good grounds for allowing the survival question to survive, [but] these grounds have nothing to do with mediumship or with any cult or creed or practice" (Rhine, 1954). For him these "good grounds" were the spontaneous cases submitted to his team by members of the public and published by Louisa Rhine (1961, 1967), some of which suggested to him "the operation of some kind of spirit agency more strongly than any other explanation".

Nevertheless, the budding science of parapsychology was wary of survival research not only because of its association with mediumship but because belief in survival was at variance with the materialist reductionist philosophy that still dominates much scientific thinking (e.g. Fontana, 2003; Ravindra, 2000). Charles Tart comments critically that the first commandment of this philosophy is that "the material universe is the only and absolute reality, a universe controlled by fixed laws and blind chance" (Tart, 1994). In fact even before Rhine there was resistance among some psychical researchers to investigations involving mediumship. Arthur Findlay (1951) tells us that Sir William Barrett, who along with the respected journalist, Dawson Rogers, had proposed the foundation of the SPR, arranged for a series of sittings in London in 1925 with the physical medium, John Sloan, with whom Findlay had been

working successfully for many years. The sittings went well, whereupon Findlay offered to pay the expenses for Sloan to remain in London and be thoroughly tested by the SPR. Barrett put the offer to the SPR Council, who to his disappointment turned it down. No reason was given, and Findlay consequently resigned his membership of the Society and in his will left his stately home, Stansted Hall, and a large sum of money to the Spiritualist National Union.

This does not mean no serious research into mediumship took place in the decades before the Second World War. Much of the work of Drayton Thomas and others with Gladys Osborne Leonard was carried out during these years (Smith, 1964), while the Boston Society for Psychical Research, founded in 1925, featured her work in their *Bulletins* and also published Thomas's study of her mediumship and that of Minnie Soule (Thomas, 1937). Eileen Garrett, who founded the Parapsychology Foundation in 1951, did much of her best work during this period (see Garrett, 1949). Geraldine Cummins was also active at this time (Fryer, 1990). But 50 years later, and in spite of recent attempts to explain how materialism might be able to accommodate survival (e.g. Merricks, 2001), difficulties still remain. Tart (1989) is correct in saying that these difficulties are caused by the reluctance of materialistic science to recognise that there are areas of vital importance to our understanding of ourselves that lie outside its remit. This reluctance stems from the fact that "if materialistic science and philosophy simply claimed to be a specialised branch of knowledge, useful in its own area but not especially relevant to things outside its area, it would lose most of the power it claims by virtue of being all-embracing". Wilber takes a similar view, stressing that questions to do with the survival of consciousness address inner realities, while those to do with materialistic science address only outer ones. Research into one can complement research into the other, but their separate identities must be recognised (Wilber, 1998, 2000). Grosso (1992) makes a similar point when he comments that "life in the inner habitat obeys its own laws".

It has frequently been argued that the attempt to force parapsychology into a materialist-reductionist paradigm ignores the fact that much of the material it studies appears to operate outside the space-time continuum that defines and limits material reality, and sporadic attempts to develop a physical theory of the paranormal that would place it within space-time remain unconvincing. One of the best known of these attempts is that of Professor Dodds (1967), who took issue with Professor Price's claim (1967) that we "cannot account for [ESP] in terms of entities and processes that are physical [and] located in physical space-time" because the power of telepathy is not diminished by an increase in distance. Firstly, Dodds objects that we do in fact have an instance of a physical force that does not diminish in relation to distance, namely the intensity of flow of an electric current through superconductors. Secondly, he points out that even if the strength of telepathy does not vary over distance, *the frequency* of its occurrence may do so. And thirdly, he draws attention to the fact that short-wave radio transmissions may at times produce a stronger signal over long distances than over short.

However, in citing superconductors, Dodds is referring to the medium through which energy flows, rather than to a quality of energy (or force) itself.

Secondly, the available evidence suggests that the frequency of telepathy and clairvoyant effects is not in fact influenced by distance. Russell Targ, one of the scientists who led the remote viewing experiments in the Stargate programme, emphasises that remote viewing trials, "which cover ever-increasing distances between viewer and [target], suggest that distance does not affect the quality of remote viewing results" (Targ & Harary, 1985). Radin (1997), in reviewing Stargate, makes the same point—"neither the use of electromagnetic shielding nor the distance between the viewer and the target seems to affect the quality of remote viewing". If a significant interaction between distance and frequency exists it would surely have been identified during Stargate. McMoneagle, the remote viewer most involved in the programme, also makes no reference to such an interaction (McMoneagle, 1997, 2002). Thirdly, the distance that short-wave radio transmissions travel is influenced by the varying reflective properties of the upper atmosphere rather than any quality of the short-wave energy itself. Again Dodds is confusing energy with the medium through which it flows. Some physical factors, particularly sidereal time (Spottiswoode, 1997) and the earth's geomagnetic field (Berger & Persinger, 1991), do indeed appear to correlate with manifest psychic abilities, but so do exhaustion, illness and alcohol intake, and the effect may be more to do with inhibiting or facilitating access to psychic abilities than with the operation of the abilities themselves.

IV. The Brain-Mind Relationship

Does brain generate mind or does mind work through brain? The array of findings linking brain activity to mental functions is regarded by many as demonstrating that brain does indeed generate mind, and that when brain dies so does mind. However, although too many issues are involved to be fully addressed here, it is incorrect to assume that because brain and mental activity are linked the former necessarily causes the latter. This link would equally be present if mind works through brain. The link simply demonstrates correlation, and correlation alone does not tell us which of two variables is primary. The point was effectively made over a century ago by Professor Schiller, who was SPR President in 1914. Schiller wrote in 1891:-

... Materialism is a hysteron proteron, a putting of the cart before the horse, which may be rectified by just inverting the connection between Matter and Consciousness. Matter is not that which produces Consciousness, but that which limits it . . . material organisation does not construct Consciousness out of arrangements of atoms, but contracts its manifestation within the sphere which it permits. This explanation . . . [fits] the facts alleged in favour of Materialism equally well, besides enabling us to understand facts which Materialism rejected as 'supernatural'. It explains the lower by the higher . . . and thereby attains to an explanation which is ultimately tenable, instead of one which is ultimately absurd. [p. 293]

William Roll, former President of the Parapsychology Foundation and former head of the Psychical Research Foundation, makes a similar point:-

The brain is a filtering organism. Many scientists believe that its primary function is not to produce experiences but to filter them out. The brain stem . . . regulates the flow of sensory information . . . If we were sensitive to all the energies that surround us . . . we would be unable to find our way in the world . . .

Roll proposes that "as death approaches, the filters in the brain dissolve, and the Self becomes aware of realities formerly blocked out, such as the fact

that it is part of a living universe of Love and Light" (Duncan & Roll, 1995).

Until we have conclusive evidence that the brain's electro-chemical activity can give rise to complex mental events, we are unjustified in assuming that brain is primary to mind. In the meanwhile, it might be argued that the occurrence of psychokinesis (PK) gives at least some hint that mind may be able to influence matter directly. In the light of present knowledge, the conclusion reached by Velmans, one of the leading psychologists involved in consciousness research, is appropriate: "no discovery that reduces consciousness to brain has yet been made" (Velmans, 2000). Nobel Prizewinner, Sir John Eccles (1989), put it even more strongly: "Regardless of the complexity of electrical, chemical and biological machinery" in the brain there is "in natural laws" no statement as to how the mind can emerge. "The self-conscious mind must have some non-material existence". Tart (1996) points out that that good science must take account of all the facts, and the . . .

. . . equation of the mind with nothing but brain simply does not [do this] . . . the brain has a lot to do with mind . . . But it is not all that there is to mind. It is bad science simply to accept materialism without having looked at all the evidence . . . It is clear to me that whatever mind is—mind, soul, essence, whatever you like to call it—it is not equivalent to the brain, or the body.

V. *Super-ESP*

The fifth, and a rather different, reason for a dismissive attitude towards the findings of survival research is the claim that these findings can be adequately explained in terms of Super-ESP (or Super-psi) without resorting to suggestions of an after-life. The term Super-ESP was coined by Hornell Hart in 1959 following earlier work by Podmore (e.g. 1898) and by Richet (1923). Proponents of Super-ESP argue that the facts given by mediums may come not from the deceased but from the mediums' own psychic abilities—i.e. from telepathy with sitters, clairvoyance, or from precognition of the future occasions when these facts are checked and confirmed correct. Rhine considered that there is nothing on record from mediums "that cannot be explained by the sort of 'omnibus hypothesis' into which we have expanded the old counter-hypothesis of telepathy (Rhine, 1949), while Dodds argued that Super-ESP accounts for the limited degree of relevance and continuity in most trance communications (Dodds, 1934), and Gardner Murphy insisted that we have evidence for the ability of mediums to 'filch' evidence from the minds of living people (Murphy, 1945).

My experience of mediumship began over 35 years ago, and I have witnessed and interviewed any number of mediums and sitters. To date, I have met no medium who considers Super-ESP rather than survival as the explanation for veridical information obtained during sittings. As a psychologist, I necessarily take note of what people tell me about their own experiences. There are, of course, many reasons why mediums and sitters may prefer survival to Super-ESP as an explanation, but supporters of Super-ESP may show equal bias in the opposite direction. In addition, mediums, the only ones with first-hand experience of mediumship, generally draw clear distinctions between mediumship abilities (which depend on spirit help) and psychic abilities (which depend solely on the medium). The sample of over 50 mediums surveyed by Montague

Keen, Professor Archie Roy and myself for an unpublished study for the Prism research group were emphatic about this distinction and their ability to identify the difference between the two in their own work. In an area where we have so little objective information upon which to rely, it is right to give mediums some credit for holding informed opinions about their own gifts. An important lesson for the psychologist is that there are certain dangers in insisting that the gifts or experiences people have are not what they themselves think them to be.

Another objection to the Super-ESP explanation is that no feasible explanation has been offered as to how a medium can unconsciously rummage through obscure areas of a sitter's mind in order to come upon forgotten facts, or on what basis and by what method she can then select these facts from the mass of competing information held in the sitter's unconscious. Dodds's suggestion that rummaging is unnecessary because the emotional charge that the material holds for the sitter may render it particularly accessible to the medium is unconvincing in that many of the facts that come through mediums, although accurate, carry little emotional charge for the sitter at the time. Many sitters have told me they had in their conscious minds far more emotionally charged facts that they hoped might come through than those that actually did, and were surprised that the former were neglected in favour of the latter. Another argument against Dodds is that it may be the communicator rather than the sitter for whom the facts have emotional appeal. It is unlikely, for example, that the material communicated during the 30 years of the Cross-Correspondences (e.g. Johnson, 1908; Saltmarsh, 1938; Verrall, 1906) had more emotional charge for the automatists receiving it than for the communicators. Indeed, with exceptions such as the Palm Sunday Case (Balfour, 1960), the communications were not personal to mediums or sitters, and their meaning was only subsequently identified by investigators such as Piddington, Lodge, Mrs Sidgwick, and Gerald Balfour.

Similarly, no convincing explanation exists as to how mediums can identify clairvoyantly facts unknown to medium or sitter from the environment if no links to these facts are given by communicators. And no explanation exists as to how mediums can, again without any link, identify precognitively the moment when facts relevant to the allegedly fictitious communicator are confirmed, ignoring the countless other future events competing for their attention. Furthermore, the information given by mediums, although correct about relevant details, may be incorrect about the circumstances surrounding the future confirmation of these details, throwing doubt on the claim that precognition was involved, a point I argue more fully elsewhere (Fontana, 1999).

In his excellent review of the evidence, Alan Gauld concludes that Super-ESP does not suffice to "explain the quantity of correct and appropriate information [relating to survival] sometimes furnished" (Gauld, 1982). Sir Cyril Burt (whose eminence as a thinker is undimmed by the alleged errors found after his death in his treatment of data on the inheritability of intelligence), in an analysis of the relationship between psychology and parapsychology, writes that "a moment's reflection is sufficient to show that any such omnibus theory [as Super-ESP] involves assumptions which strain credulity to the very limit; it is one of those ingenious skeleton-keys that open

every lock, and consequently provides a genuine fit to none" (Burt, 1967). These assumptions are that ESP abilities exist of a power and complexity far beyond anything demonstrated in the laboratory. Such power and complexity were not demonstrated even in the sender-absent remote viewing experiments included in the Stargate programme, since even here percipients were given clues as to where to direct their clairvoyant attention (see, for example, McMoneagle, 1997, 2002; and Graff, 1998).

Recently Professor Stephen Braude (2003) has put forward further arguments in support of Super-ESP. Three of the main ones are, firstly, that those who claim we have no evidence for the extensive psychic abilities essential to the Super-ESP explanation neglect the "decent evidence for psychic functioning . . . outside the laboratory". Secondly, that we have "no warrant for imposing any limits on the scope and functioning of paranormal abilities" — thus although information produced by mediums may appear so obscure that it stretches credibility to suppose it to be the result of Super-ESP, "we're in no position to insist that normally obscure information is also psychically obscure". Thirdly, it may be wrong to think of psychic abilities as a number of separate processes when it may simply be sufficient to have a need or make a wish under efficacious circumstances, and "virtually *anything at all* can happen . . ."

In reply to the first point, there are practical difficulties in seeking support for Super-ESP from evidence obtained outside the laboratory. The reason for relying upon laboratory evidence is that it is obtained using normal subjects and there are no claims that spirit communicators are involved, which is not the case for non-laboratory evidence. Certainly in one of the two examples of the latter evidence to which Braude appeals, 'physical mediumship', there are few instances where mediums and sitters do not claim, with supporting evidence, that the phenomena are not due to mediumship and spirit activity (even Stella C, perhaps the least spiritualistic of successful physical mediums, spoke of her 'spirit guides'—see Turner, 1973). Consequently, physical mediumship represents some of the very survival evidence that Professor Braude regards as under threat from the Super-ESP explanation. One can hardly use physical mediumship both as accused (evidence for survival) and as prosecutor (evidence for Super-ESP). Physical mediumship is too entangled with supposed spirit agency to count as an example of ESP from the living.

Braude's second set of examples, spontaneous cases, are also frequently associated with supposed spirits. For instance, it is difficult to know how many *recognised* sightings of apparitions of the deceased are telepathic projections from the living, and how many from the dead (we can discount unrecognised apparitions, many of which may be hallucinations). Apparitions of the living may qualify as projections, but many authorities (e.g. Fox, 1993; Muldoon & Carrington, 1969; and Crookall, whose work is discussed later) claim these are the result of out-of-the-body experiences (OBEs) on the part of the agent, a phenomenon itself said to support the possibility of survival. Some crises apparitions announcing the death of the person sighted may also qualify as projections, but even in a large sample such as that of Green and McCreery (1975) it is difficult to establish a substantial number of cases where it is known that the apparition appeared just before rather than just after death.

Another possibility is represented by visions seen by the dying (death-bed visions). However, in the overwhelming majority of cases these visions are of the dead rather than of the living (Barrett, 1988; Bozzano, 1998; Morse & Perry, 1994). In some instances it was not known at the time that the person concerned was dead, and their vision was greeted with surprise by the dying, suggesting that expectation may not have been involved.

What of poltergeists? Even poltergeist phenomena are frequently associated with supposed discarnate entities. Gauld and Cornell (1979), in their comprehensive survey, conclude that although there is convincing evidence that the intelligence at work in poltergeist cases is sometimes that of a living agent, there are also cases that fulfil their rigorous criteria for accepting it to be that of a discarnate entity. In my two-year investigation of the 'responsive poltergeist' case in Cardiff (Fontana, 1991, 1992), the evidence, much of it witnessed by myself, strongly supported the presence of a discarnate intelligence. If the phenomena were the result of PK from the living, we would have to suppose previously undiscovered macro-PK abilities in three of the four adults in the family group involved (there were no children or adolescents), since phenomena occurred in the sole presence of each of these three. We would also have to suppose that I had such abilities, since phenomena took place when I was alone in the building and the family were some 300 miles away. In the Enfield case investigated by Grosse and Playfair (Playfair, 1980), a discarnate intelligence also appears to have been involved, as is in many of the instances collected by Sitwell (1959).

Examples of post-mortem communications in which no mediums are involved have been collected by Myers (1918), by Gurney, Myers and Podmore (1886), and recently by LaGrand (1997, 1999) and Heathcote-James (2003). It could be argued that some of these might represent projections from the minds of the living rather than from the deceased, but how can we be sure? Even in spontaneous cases involving telepathic communication between the living or the clairvoyant discovery of lost objects, people sometimes claim that they are 'helped' by deceased relatives or spirit guides. In short, there are substantial difficulties in deciding what spontaneous cases we can accept as unequivocally representing ESP from the living.

There are also objections to Professor Braude's second point, namely that we have no warrant for imposing limits on the scope and functioning of ESP abilities in the living, or for supposing that what is obscure in normal life is obscure when it comes to psychic effects. It is true that we do not know the full scope of these abilities, but we cannot build a secure argument for Super-ESP by appealing to our own lack of knowledge. We can rely only upon what has been discovered in 75 years of careful laboratory work. As to whether our concept of what is obscure in normal life applies also to the psychic abilities of the living, I can only say that there is no unequivocal evidence that it does not. For example, even in the remote viewing experiments carried out in the Stargate programme, the highly significant details given by remote viewers of the target site fell short of those that could be provided by an observer who was actually there.

Professor Braude's third point is that there may be a stronger form of Super-ESP than was previously proposed. Under favourable conditions "It may be

enough merely to wish for something to happen, and then it does", through a combination of psychic abilities. He uses the term 'magic wand' to describe this hypothesis, and suggests that it disposes of the argument that "if one psi performance is difficult, several ought to be out of the question". Paranormal abilities in the living may indeed all derive from a common source that allows them to be used in conjunction, but what evidence is there that, even with Braude's 'magic wand', living beings have achieved results comparable to those claimed through mediumship? Can they match the data collected by Roy and Robertson (Robertson & Roy, 2001; Roy & Robertson, 2001) and by Schwartz and his colleagues (Schwartz & Russek, 2001; Schwartz et al., 2001; Schwartz et al., 2002) or those yielded by proxy sittings? Let supporters of Super-ESP mount comparable experiments using psychics instead of mediums and give us the results. We can only prefer the Super-ESP explanation to that of survival if we have evidence that telepathy and clairvoyance from the living can yield data comparable in content and quality to that produced by successful mediumship. Unless and until this evidence is forthcoming, the supporters of survival remain justified in claiming that the objections to Super-ESP remain as strong as ever.

THE FUTURE OF SURVIVAL RESEARCH

If more money were to be spent on training mediums, we might learn more about their abilities and establish a pool of successful mediums who could take part, for example, in cross-correspondence experiments and in co-ordinated attempts at identifying post-mortem messages left by serious investigators. The experiment set up by the late Susy Smith provided one model of how this could be done (Fontana, 2001; Smith, 2000). It would seem desirable to identify the experiences that successful mediums regard as of most value in their development, and the working conditions they find most conducive for the exercise of their abilities. Such identification might enable us to formalise at least some part of the training of would-be practitioners. Results from Stargate show that remote viewing abilities in suitable individuals can be developed through appropriate training (Graff, 1998; McMoneagle, 1997, 2002), and the same is likely to be true for the capacities associated with mediumship.

Such training might even encourage a more extensive resurgence of physical mediumship. Our experiences with the Scole Group (Keen, Ellison & Fontana, 1999) convinced us and our co-investigators and an expert conjuror that successful physical mediumship can still be demonstrated. Genuine physical mediumship yields macro-phenomena never witnessed in laboratory PK experiments, and if the supposed discarnates responsible can provide convincing evidence that they are who they say they are, the relevance to survival is clear. I have witnessed physical mediumship in contexts other than Scole, some of it good. I admire the years of dedication successful physical mediums put into the development of their gifts. But what are the best ways of accomplishing this development? One hundred and sixty years after the events at Hydesville we still do not know.

New Research Possibilities: Near-Death Experiences

The evidence for survival, some of it rated by Sir Oliver Lodge three-

quarters of a century ago as "thoroughly good", continues to accumulate, and new research possibilities are currently opening up. One such is Near-Death Experiences (NDEs), the reported experiences of certain people during brief interludes at or near clinical death. They were first brought to popular attention by Moody (1983), although more impressive collections of such experiences had already been published by Crookall (1961, 1964, 1974, 1978), unfortunately under titles that obscured their value. Subsequent studies by Sabom (1982, 1998), Ring (1984), Grey (1985) and Fenwick and Fenwick (1995) report that between 12 and 40 per cent of those at or near clinical death go through NDEs prior to resuscitation. Zaleski (1987) provides a historical survey of reported NDEs, while Morse and Perry (1990) present cases involving children who have suffered cardiac arrest. Ring and Valarino (1998) report cases suggesting that even those born blind have visual experiences at such times. Together with a comprehensive collection of papers on the NDE by leading researchers (Bailey & Yates, 1996), these various studies make it difficult to argue that NDEs are simply hallucinations of the dying brain, occasioned by oxygen starvation, the release of brain chemicals or clinically administered substances. Fenwick and Fenwick (1995) put forward precise medical reasons for the rejection of each of these alternatives.

Typically, adults and children report that during the NDE their consciousness appears to be located outside their bodies, and on resuscitation subjects sometimes provide accurate details of medical procedures carried out on their bodies during the period of clinical death. On occasions they also report travelling to paradise conditions and meeting deceased relatives or beings of light, who send them, often reluctantly, back to their bodies. In the Pam Reynolds case (Sabom, 1998), the patient on resuscitation reported an NDE in which she was aware of details of the instrument used in a pioneering operation on her brain, even though to carry out the operation the surgeons had had to drain her brain of blood and reduce her body temperature to that of suspended animation, thus suppressing any form of measurable mental activity.

Various studies of the NDE are currently seeking more precise data on its incidence, nature, and any veridical information obtained in the course of it. Among these studies is one being undertaken for the Horizon Research Foundation by Dr Sam Parnia of Southampton General Hospital and Dr Peter Fenwick of the Institute of Psychiatry, University of London, involving 20 UK hospitals (see Parnia, 2001, for the results of an earlier Horizon study). Another large-scale study is that by Van Lommel and colleagues at Rijnstate Hospital in the Netherlands, involving 344 cardiac arrest patients all resuscitated after clinical death. Results from this study published in the *Lancet* (15th December 2002) reveal that 18 per cent of the sample report NDEs, and the authors conclude that the medical explanations mentioned earlier, such as the chaotic activity of the dying brain, cannot account for their reported experiences, which show none of the bizarre characteristics marking hallucinatory experiences induced by drugs or psychosis.

It is true that we do not know the exact point at which physical death occurs, and that, even if clinically dead, NDE patients cannot be said to have really died, as they have proved to be capable of revival. However, Moody (1999) argues that the claim that death has not taken place during an NDE

even if there are no detectable vital signs in the body at the time is akin to "a stipulation that the goal post would be moved back if the athlete were to reach it". He refers to the large number of people now alive who have "returned from a situation that a century ago was simply designated 'death', and have informed us that, even after that point, they were very much alive, very acutely conscious . . .". Thus, "by the criteria of 1890, even those of 1930, life after death has indeed been proven". In my view, we do not know where the boundary between life and death actually lies, and the possibility remains that it can be briefly crossed in both directions during clinical death. Thus some of those reporting NDEs may indeed have died at the mental/spiritual level, and returned to a physical body that was still capable of supporting life.

It could be argued that activity at the cellular level is still taking place if the body remains capable of supporting life, and that this activity accounts for the continuation of consciousness during the NDE. However, activity at the cellular level—a vegetal level—is extremely unlikely to produce the coherent cognitive experiences reported by those with NDEs.

The relevance of NDEs to survival is that they appear to show that consciousness can function outside the physical body (thus supporting the argument that mind is not generated by brain), and persists even when the physical body is clinically dead or nearly so. The fact that people sometimes report NDE-type experiences even when they are not near death (so-called OBEs) does not weaken this relevance. In fact, accounts in which accurate descriptions are given of things seen during the OBE suggest, as with the NDE, that consciousness is not associated exclusively with the physical body. The most impressive scientific report of the ability to obtain information while supposedly out of the body is given by Tart (1968), who directed an experiment in which, while fully electronically controlled in the sleep laboratory, the subject during an OBE correctly read a random five-digit number placed out of her physical sight. The odds against getting a five-digit random number correct on a single reading by chance are 99,999 to one. Many case studies collected by Crookall (1961, 1964, 1974, 1978), Green (1968), Lorimer (1984) and Buhmann (1996) also contain reports of details correctly witnessed during OBEs, and although critics argue that such details are obtained by clairvoyance rather than by leaving the body, those experiencing the OBEs may be better judges of what is happening to them than are their critics.

Recent findings by Dr Olaf Blanke that an electric current passed across the frontal lobes results in reports of OBE-type experiences have been taken by some as supporting the view that OBEs and NDEs are merely brain events (see Blanke, Ortigue, Landis & Seeck, 2002), but findings of this kind have no relevance to experiences during clinical death where measurable brain activity may be completely absent (as in the Pam Reynolds case). The experiences reported in the Blanke study also differ from those occurring in OBEs and NDEs in that there are no references to awareness of veridical events remote from the physical body or even of clear sight of the body from a position apparently external to it (it would be interesting to see whether there were any differences in the experiences resulting from electrical stimulation between subjects who have previously had spontaneous OBEs and NDEs and those who have not). Furthermore, people reporting OBEs and NDEs were not being

subjected to electrical currents across the frontal lobes of their brains at the time of their experiences — although it remains possible that such currents might facilitate OBE experiences in some individuals, possibly by inhibiting brain mechanisms that normally keep consciousness seemingly localized within the physical body.

Another objection raised against NDEs as evidence for survival is that there are cultural variations in the accounts of the after-life given by those experiencing them (Zaleski, 1987). However, the nature of the after-life state may be partially determined by the thought processes of those involved, as claimed in many communications through mediums (e.g. Beard, 1980; Murphet, 1984), in which case one would expect a cultural element to be present. More importantly, in a four-year study in the USA and India involving detailed interviews with 120 terminally ill patients reporting NDEs, Osiris and Haraldsson (1997) found that, despite some cultural differences, there was a core experience common to both these cultures:—

In our judgment the similarities between the core phenomena found in the death-bed visions of both countries are clear enough to be considered supportive of the post-mortem survival hypothesis.

Furthermore, although religious belief is a prominent feature of both USA and Indian cultures, Osiris and Haraldsson found that “the [NDE] phenomena within each culture often did not conform to religious after-life beliefs”. Several basic concepts, such as those concerning judgement, salvation and redemption in the case of Christians, and reincarnation and dissolution into Brahman in the case of Hindus, were absent: “We reached the impression that cultural conditioning by Christian and Hindu teaching is, in part, contradicted in the visionary experiences of the dying”.

Professor Braude (2003) challenges the NDE as evidence for survival on the grounds that NDEs can occur not only during clinical death but when people *think* they are about to die, and maintains that even if consciousness does leave the body during the NDE this only provides evidence for short-term survival. The first of these challenges is puzzling, given that published literature on OBEs suggested long before NDEs became widely known that consciousness can temporarily leave the body even when the subject is not clinically dead or in fear of imminent death. The importance for survival is that both NDEs and OBEs suggest that consciousness can exist independently of the body, both before and after clinical death. In answer to Braude’s second challenge, it is relevant to point out that the majority of those who have NDEs retain the conviction, even many years later, that survival is more than a brief flutter outside the dying body (see the various references already quoted). However, even if NDEs do no more than suggest that consciousness can exist briefly after clinical death, the evidence this provides for long-term survival is significant. If consciousness exists briefly after death, we are faced with the difficulty of explaining why and how it should then expire completely. What further action within the body — which is already clinically dead — would take place to lead to this expiry? (The notion sometimes advanced that any surviving consciousness would consist of little more than fragments of memory and would quickly dissipate of its own accord appears to have no evidence to support it.)

Instrumental Transcommunication (ITC)

Instrumental Transcommunication or ITC, a term proposed by the German physicist, Professor Ernst Senkowski, to cover the anomalous communications received through electronic media such as audio and video tape, computers and fax machines (see, for example, Senkowski, 1995, for full descriptions; also Brune, 1996; Holbe, 1987, Schaefer, 1989) represents another area for future research. Such communications were captured extensively on audio tape by Jürgenson (1971) and by Raudive (1971) and were investigated by David Ellis (1978), who concluded, however, that there was “no reason to postulate anything but natural causes: indistinct fragments of radio transmissions, mechanical noises and unnoticed remarks, aided by imaginative guesswork and wishful thinking, to explain the ‘voice phenomenon’” (p.145). Dr Anabela Cardoso, founder and editor of the *ITC Journal*, who delivered the recent Tate Memorial Lecture to the Society on the subject of ITC research, rejects these conclusions, and referred in her lecture to evidence obtained under controlled conditions by Professor Hans Bender and others (much of it summarised by Senkowski, 1995) that clearly indicates the paranormality of many of Jürgenson’s and Raudive’s results.

The positive evidence has continued to accumulate, particularly on the Continent, principally for communications through audio tape (so-called Electronic Voice Phenomena or EVP) and radios tuned to the static in between transmitting stations (Direct Radio Voices or DRV). This evidence has attracted active attention from noted scientists and theologians (e.g. Brune & Chauvin, 1999; Chauvin, 2002), and convinced Professor Hans Bender—who conducted his own voice-recording experiments with Jürgenson, although he attributed the effects to PK from the living rather than to survival (see Senkowski, 1995, for Bender’s work). Some of this evidence has been captured on audio tape under controlled conditions, and independent voice analysis such as that carried out by the prestigious Galileo Ferraris Electrotechnical Institute in Turin in 1985 reveal the almost total absence in the voices of the fundamental frequency occasioned by the vibrations of vocal cords (Presi, 2000). Alexander MacRae, a leading voice analyst who worked for NASA on the voice communication programmes developed for the Skylab project, has also identified this absence of fundamental frequency and drawn attention to other acoustic anomalies that suggest that ITC voices are not susceptible to any normal explanation (Brune & Chauvin, 1999; MacRae, 2004).

I have been present in the studios of Dr Anabela Cardoso, who has done much to establish the scientific standing of ITC, when anomalous communications containing meaningful sentences relevant to questions posed by Dr Cardoso have been received that rule out the suggestion ITC voices are merely random radio transmissions (Cardoso, 2003). Furthermore, I have myself obtained successful results in her studios by asking the communicators to repeat short phrases after me (without previously informing Dr Cardoso that I had devised this test protocol). Such results rule out both subterfuge and the notion of random radio transmissions.

Despite Bender’s suggestion of PK from the living (the Super-Psi theory again), there is no laboratory evidence that PK can produce the clear, lengthy

and coherent effects obtained in current ITC research. In addition, there is no evidence that the investigators reporting these effects have previously demonstrated PK abilities. Furthermore, if information unknown to the investigator is received under controlled conditions, supporters of the PK theory would also have to suppose the additional operation of unconscious clairvoyance and/or telepathy on the part of the investigator.

If ITC results hold up in the face of further controlled scrutiny, the argument put forward by Senkowski, Brune and the other authors referenced above is that these results may provide better evidence for survival than those obtained through mediums, since they avoid the possibility of communications becoming unconsciously distorted or misinterpreted as they are channelled through the human mind. It is also claimed that ITC opens up research opportunities for people working on their own. It is said that with sufficient patience and commitment ITC results are potentially obtainable by those without mediumship abilities (although they should study the cautions against self-deception emphasised by many authors).

More needs to be known about ITC before firm conclusions can be reached on a number of methodological issues. One problem for monoglot English speakers is that much of the literature and most of the examples of communications recorded are in other European languages (principally French, Italian, German, Portuguese and Spanish). Further acoustic analysis of voice tapes is also needed in order to identify precise differences between ITC voices and human speech. More demonstrations of ITC in parapsychology laboratories under the conditions stipulated by independent researchers are now taking place. On the strength of existing evidence, further work of this kind is amply justified.

CONCLUSION

A survey of the current situation suggests that the possibilities for research into survival have seldom been better. In the absence of an active interest in these possibilities parapsychology risks losing one of its most important reasons for existence and abandoning the very questions that led to the foundation of this Society.

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