
AFTER DEATH—WHAT?

BY J. B. RHINE

THROUGHOUT the history of recorded thought few questions have occupied more universal attention than that of human survival of death. To-day, although it is kept further in the background than it once was, since it does not fit into the world picture of the machine age, it is, I think, all the more acutely asked in silence. This clash of mechanism with the older tradition has only raised the problem the more sharply.

It is true, modern education is training us not to expect post-mortem existence, and for a fast-growing portion of the race the question of survival is thus quashed before it can fairly be raised. Along with this influence of mechanistic science, goes the declining respect for the merely traditional support of theology. But this transition is not answering the question — it is only laying it aside.

In the minds of many of those who raise the question to-day it is more than a personal question, much more than the problems of heart-rending separations at the graveside. It is tied up intimately with that most fundamental problem of social life, the problem of conduct — of ethics. This is not to refer merely to the cruder concept of possible rewards and punishments in after life but rather to recognize the significance for mankind of a larger perspective, based on definite knowledge of wider personal horizons — of at least a partial independence and dominance of personality in the universal scheme. The ethical guidance value of such a living concept can hardly be realized.

But can the question of survival ever be answered? This cannot be said, with safety, until all means have been tried and exhausted. Until they have been, it is a perfectly open question. Let us see what means have been tried in the past and then, as far as possible, review those that may remain.

Most of the larger questions raised by the

mind of man have in general been answered by three broad methods. First and most primitive is that of revelation — mystic, prophetic, inspired, and the like. This is the religious contribution to the beliefs of mankind. Second, there has been the speculative and unverified reasoning of the philosophic approach. And, third, the methods of critical observation and experimental verification that characterize the scientific procedure.

The first of these broad approaches gave us most of our existing concepts of the survival of man and the so-called spiritual world. The second has been brought into service mainly as a defense for these beliefs when serious doubts began to assail them. The third method has not as yet been fully brought to bear directly upon the question.

The influence of the first method, that of revelation, has seriously declined during modern times. An essential link in this way of answering questions was that of the authority granted the seer. With the decline of this authority through skepticism, this method has fallen into disrepute. Although there are still many who feel that they are the recipients of revelations, they possess small authority for the modern world. There were, it is true, many movements in the nineteenth century that showed that even in our western world there was still until lately, in certain quarters, strong inclination to respect revelation. The followings drawn by revelations such as those of Joseph Smith, Andrew Jackson Davis, Madame Blavatsky, and Mary Baker Eddy illustrate this. But the twentieth century has shown very little patience with prophets and seers. To-day few among our critical young people look to inspired revelationists to answer the important question of survival.

Speculative philosophy has been since the days of Origen the rationalistic handmaid of

religion and with its various arguments, ontological, moral, and of other varieties, has staunchly endeavored to bolster up the waning strength of revelationistic authority. But in latter days armchair philosophy too has lost much of its authority as a method, and with the growth of science the need for the verification of its logic has become more apparent. So to-day its arguments serve mainly for the reassurance of those who already believe. The skeptic is rarely won over by them.

II

WHAT THEN has scientific method contributed on the problem of survival, and what has it to promise? The first systematic effort toward a controlled scientific study of the question was made by representatives of the English Society for Psychic Research in the 'eighties using the "medium," Mrs. Piper, as principal subject. In the course of these studies some of these representatives, one of them the famous exposé of Mme. Blavatsky, Dr. Hodgson, and another, Professor Oliver Lodge, became convinced from their studies that not only did human personality survive death in some form or fragment but also that it could, in a feeble way, communicate with the living.

By what type of evidence were these men and others of their circles persuaded? The method begun by William James (who was himself almost persuaded) and developed to approximate perfection by Professor Hyslop of Columbia was essentially this. The medium went into trance in the presence of the investigator, and a few minutes later a person unknown to the medium was admitted to the house and seated behind the medium. The identity of the visitor was not disclosed throughout the experiment. He was not allowed to speak or give himself away in any manner. He left the house before the termination of the trance. All the utterances of the sensitive, as well as remarks of the observer, were taken down in full for later verification and study. After a large number of experiments of this type, with many different visitors or sitters, it was discovered that the trance utterances were in general very meaningful and appropriate for the particular visitor present and that knowledge was shown in these utterances that the medium herself could not nor-

mally have obtained. The peculiar personal quality of this knowledge and the appropriate attitudes expressed gave to the visiting sitters and to the observers the impression that the personalities who claimed to be communicating were indeed present.

But there were among the scientific students of the field at the time some who urged the so-called telepathic hypothesis as a preferable one. This view held that telepathy, from the sitter and from distant relatives, to the medium might, in conjunction with the trance personality of the medium, which they regarded as possibly a split-off or dissociated state, account for the utterances given during the experiments. That is, that the trance personality of the medium would impersonate the appropriate discarnate personalities, using knowledge gained telepathically from the sitter and other persons. The French school headed by Professor Richet substituted the hypothesis of cryptesthesia (a hidden or sixth sense) for that of telepathy, which the former included in its scope.

After the beginning of the century and following the death of Frederick Myers, a classical scholar much devoted to this problem, a new type of evidence arose in which there appeared, through one medium, fragmentary classical references found later to be completed or added to through another medium who did not normally know of the first references. After a number of somewhat intricate cases of this type, called cross-correspondences, still others of the English Society group were at last convinced of the survival theory. But again there were other interested scholars who withheld conviction.

Several advances in method have been made during the post-war period of the century. One of the most important of these is called the book test. The method consists in a "communicator" giving a page-and-line reference to a book, located in a specified bookshelf to which the medium has not had access, and then tying up this reference with a personal experience known only to the visiting sitter and the deceased personality which it is claimed is communicating. The advance in method here is claimed to exclude telepathy and to tie up the supernormal knowledge with appropriate memories; but it will be seen that it does not exclude from application the Richet hypothesis

of cryptesthesia.

Still more striking are the newspaper tests, in which the reference is made not to an existing book but to a newspaper not yet in type. This requires capacities not included under common telepathy and cryptesthesia, unless we add precognition to them. But, since the French school does include this precognitive aspect as accompanying cryptesthesia, the evidence of the newspaper tests is still not crucial in proving the survival hypothesis.

The "absent sitting" procedure has been developed lately, with a view to making the evidence more difficult to explain by the telepathic hypothesis, since under this method the experiment is held in the absence of the sitter for whom the communication is desired and who remains supposedly unknown to the medium. There are, however, students of the subject who still hold that, if the medium is granted the capacities of telepathy and clairvoyance, independent of space and time, and if her secondary trance personality is developed so as to be able to impersonate sympathetically whatever personalities her supernormal cognition tells her are appropriate to the sitter, she could well carry out the rôle of the medium without the help of discarnate personal agencies. Even the still more remarkable instances in which the same communicating personalities seem to follow a sitter about as he goes, incognito, from one medium to another, as happened in the recent John F. Thomas case, still appear to leave the final clear-cut answer to the question wanting.

Finally there is the method adopted from general psychology by Whately Carington, in which the trance personality and the medium's normal personality are compared by psychological and physiological tests. Although these tests do show great personality differences, no one has yet shown adequately *what extremes of difference to expect from impersonation* in the trance states of a medium of long training and of spiritualist philosophy. To assume differences in such a case due to the intrusion of independent personal agencies would be in our present state of knowledge to beg the question.

III

THERE HAVE been, then, almost fifty years of more or less scientific studies of the

problem of mediumship. And during this half century some of the ablest minds of the times have participated. A good portion of these has been convinced that something occurred in the studies made that could not be explained by the usual known laws; that is, that something supernormal happened. Many of the latter were persuaded by the evidence that the causation of these phenomena required the assumption of the survival of human personality after death. Yet few if any, even of the most vigorous of these, would claim that their convictions rested upon undebatable proof; and not all of their evidence together can be taken as making a clear and final case for the survival hypothesis.

On the other hand no clear and final case has ever been made against survival. It has remained in spite of the improvements in method still an open question. This situation strongly emphasizes the need for a still better approach to the solution of the problem, and while there is no assurance that the next one tried will be the final and crucial one that is needed, there is no other way but to go on seeking it.

First, in the search for the ultimate solution of the problem it is *necessary that every other possibility be exhausted* before the hypothesis of spirit agency is considered. If mediums are to be used, the first need is to know thoroughly all that can be produced by the natural personal endowment of the medium herself. This appears so simple and sensible that the reader will be surprised to learn that no study of such capacities has ever been made. Even those who have pushed the telepathic hypothesis have not tested the mediums for telepathy. It is only within the last year that the first systematic examination of a recognized medium, Mrs. Eileen Garrett, was carried out. In this study conducted at Duke University the first capacities measured were those of clairvoyance and telepathy, the special abilities that would come nearest to accounting for the results usually produced in the trance state by purported communication. These capacities were both found to be present in the normal waking state in Mrs. Garrett and in almost precisely the same measure found present in her primary control or trance personality, Uvani.

Similar studies should be carried out on all the principal mediums, always of course under

appropriate and favorable conditions. The other elemental capacities which might conceivably contribute to the phenomena of trance mediumship, such as precognition and retrocognition and the capacity for trance impersonation, should next be thoroughly estimated over a number of successful mediums. So long as the natural capacities of the medium in these directions remain unexplored it is not scientifically safe to draw a conclusion about the survival hypothesis.

Suppose we find that mediums as a general class do *not* possess the unusual capacities mentioned. It would, I believe, be the greatest advance toward proof of survival in the history of the subject. Such a study in order to be exhaustive would have to be laboriously long. It would have to meet the psychological requirements necessary to permit these probably delicate processes to function. Failure should not be too quickly taken to indicate absence of the capacity, especially in view of the successful work with Mrs. Garrett already published.¹

On the other hand, let us suppose that it is found that the medium does possess all these unusual capacities. It is quite within the range of possibility, since there is increasingly strong evidence that some of these capacities are quite natural common assets of at least a large portion of the species.² This would suggest strongly that ordinary mediumistic utterances could well be the product of the natural endowment of the medium concerned. It would not *prove* this explanation; it would, however, make it certainly the more economical and favored hypothesis. And none of the types of mediumistic phenomena reviewed above would be proof of the exclusion of this interpretation.

But to go on with the supposition that the natural capacities of the medium may account for all the ordinary mediumistic phenomena. This would, I believe, mean almost as much for the survival hypothesis as for its competitors, since it would help to give a rational basis of possibility for the survival theory. Many have been baffled by the very inconceivability of discarnate personal existence. Without the sense organs, how could minds intercommunicate? If we find that telepathy is a natural capacity

of the human mind, that is one answer to the question. How can the incorporeal personality know what is going on in the objective world, without brain and sensory endings? One answer would be clairvoyance, if clairvoyance is truly a natural property of mind. And so we might go on if we had the facts. The very survey, then, that serves to make it more difficult for the survival theory gives it what may be ultimately much more important to it, a partial rational foundation in conceivability.

IV

FOLLOWING the suggestion of the purposive psychology of Dr. McDougall, I would next call attention to the principle that the most identifying characteristic of an individual personality is the peculiarity of his purposes. As the detective traces the criminal and identifies him often by the peculiar thread of his motivation, so I think agency may be traced in these complex mediumistic phenomena. The actual set-ups required I have suggested elsewhere, and they are too lengthy for repetition here. Reduced to a few words, they involve the experimental production of phenomena of the general mediumistic type, but under circumstances that exclude the range of purposes peculiar to the medium and to other living individuals possibly concerned, thus narrowing the possibility of origin to the one discarnate personality under investigation. This type of phenomenon has been reported to occur spontaneously, and, assuming but a small part of the co-operation frequently assured by purported spirit personalities, the experimental results suggested might reasonably be hoped for. The most valuable experiment would be that in which the purpose shown by the results led to an intrusion into a strange and indifferent field, to which this purpose would be entirely foreign.

As an example of the above suggestion, suppose that a surviving personality should suddenly *intrude* into the mediumistic utterances intended to represent another discarnate agent, using a strange medium who would normally have no motive for evoking his presence and to whom such intrusion could be only a disturbance. Then suppose he projects into the recorded utterances, in addition to the necessary identification material, a peculiar appeal or

¹ Character and Personality, December issue, Duke University Press.

² See "Are We 'Psychic' Beings?" December FORUM.

warning concerning the welfare of a living friend who is entirely disconnected with any of those present at the séance yet who is amply identified, and that he expresses in this appeal a point of view and purpose attributable to none but the purported intruding communicator himself. Given good identifications, and clear demonstration of a purposive concern peculiar to the one discarnate agent identified, there is as yet, I think, only one hypothesis reasonably adequate as an explanation for such cases; this is the survival hypothesis. This brief example presents only the main features of the proposed approach to the problem. Besides amplification of details, many variations and repetitions would be needed for satisfactory proof of the hypothesis.

To many the clearest manifestations of the independent agency of discarnate intelligences have been given in the instances of so-called hauntings or "invasions" that are sometimes seemingly carefully and impressively reported. At least the survival hypothesis has much poorer competition in application to this type of phenomenon. I recognize the scorn with which such a suggestion will be received by most fellow scientists but I insist that the only credence needed (and all that I can myself give) in the situation is that which simply recognizes that the more seriously reported cases

might well be worth thorough examination especially if systematic observation can be applied. Although there is always about these cases an aspect of "spirit pathology" which the spiritualists attribute to personalities being "earth-bound," it may well be that behind the queer disturbances lies a principle of tremendous human significance. If not survival, something else of importance. We have only to recall the history of Jenner, Mesmer, and Freud to remind ourselves that out of the "messy" and mysterious and pathological spring many of our greatest insights.

The problem of survival as it stands to-day is first, then, the psychological problem of the natural capacities of the sensitive as a human subject, since this is a necessary standard of comparison. At the same time it must be ascertained if the human mind is such as *could* function to some degree independent of its body relations. These will be long preliminary studies and the work of a much needed, well-endowed institution. *Finally* will come the exploration for the agency involved in the production of any phenomena of such purposive peculiarity as could be ascribed only to a given discarnate personality amply identified. The minute technical details for this may well be left to the expert investigators of the future. The ground is not yet fully ready for them.

For Jonathan Swift

Strange and beautiful after the stormy dark
To see the gray east blossom like a flower;
After the tumult and the gusty strife
To watch the slow dawn come with tired silence.

Strange and beautiful that in the mighty earth,
Haunted by sounds of winds and roaring waters,
There lies securely hidden loveliness
Secret and dark, that no man shall discover.

More strange than these, more strange and beautiful
After the savage hatred of your laughter,
To see your bitter lips, instead of scorn
Wearing a smile of weary tenderness.

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WHITE BREAD

A Short Story

BY DORA AYDELOTTE

SOMETHING had happened to get Ma all worked up. Minnie knew it the minute she came in, cold and wind-blown, to the snug farmhouse kitchen. Knew it by the way Ma rolled out pie dough with emphatic thumps of the rolling pin, by the way she talked to Pa.

"No," she denied, "I didn't just imagine it. When I come in late to the sewing circle, the talk hushed up too sudden. Some of the ladies had a kind of guilty look. Pretty soon Miz Elmer Luppy said she wasn't naming no names but there was certain young folks setting a bad example to the church. And she looked right at me. She holds it against me yet, because I didn't ask her to the su'prise that time." Pa reached for his cap and went sneaking out.

The oven door slammed on two symmetrical apple pies. "Get your things off and set the table," hurried Ma. "The boys c'n gather up the eggs." Minnie unbuckled her clumsy ar'tics and set them under the stove to dry. "Who did Miz Luppy mean?"

"You know's well as I do she meant Barbry and Con." Light from the wall lamp shone on Ma's stooped shoulders as she turned the pot roast and put the potatoes in to brown. "No wonder they're getting talked about. . . . It's all very well for young folks to want a little fling, but they're carrying it too far, sashaying all over the country. Barbry told me herself they went some place ev'ry night last week but two."

She counted on her fingers. "Le's see — the party at Pruella Howse's, debating society at Pleasant Valley school, taffy pull at Opal Smart's, and the oyster supper at Fidelity Babtist church. Besides going in town Sattidy."

Minnie felt bad to have Ma take on so. It wasn't the first time, either. Above the cheerful clink of dishes her disapproving words went on. "You'd think Con was made of money, the way Barbry puts on style these days. Wearing

her nice brown silk for common, when she's got that old blue cashmere to hack around in. . . . Sending off for a boughten tea gown that she don't need any more 'n a dog needs two tails."

The flood of eloquence subsided as Pa and the boys came stomping in, sniffing hungrily. "My land — I clear forgot the pies!" She snatched them from the oven, browned and bubbling fragrantly.

II

RIGHT AFTER Barbry's wedding, there was a houseful of comp'ny and so much going on. Con's folks gave an infare, with all Flat Branch at the feast, and Barbry, radiant in her wedding dress, shamelessly holding hands with Con. (The piece in the *Fidelity Weekly Clarion* said that "the bride was the recipient of many congratulations and the cynosure of all eyes," whatever that meant.) There were parties and turkey dinners and pie suppers in honor of the bridal pair, until Barbry said Con turned up his nose at plain cooking and he retorted that she was spoiled for a poor man's wife. But they were just in fun.

Just because Barbry wouldn't settle down right away, it seemed like all the fam'ly ('cept Aunt Min, who never had a hard word to say about anybody, and Pa Miller, who thought his big girl was just about perfect) started to find fault.

Barbry might be young yet, fretted Gramma Warren, but she was plenty old enough to take an interest in flowers. Things ought to grow good in that sunny south bay window, where ol' Miz Tousey used to keep her flower stand. But, though Gramma donated her best slips and cuttings, they got pale and spindling for lack of care.

"You don't love 'em enough," chided the giver, laboring over the neglected sprigs.