

THE CONCEPT OF SURVIVAL OF BODILY DEATH AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF PARAPSYCHOLOGY¹

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ABSTRACT

Some historians of psychology and medicine have argued that concepts and movements considered today to be metaphysical or pseudoscientific had significant influences on later developments. An example in parapsychology is the concept of survival of bodily death. Ideas of survival have been instrumental in defining important moments of the history of parapsychology. Two such moments were the founding and early work of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) and the development of the work of J. B. Rhine and his associates at Duke University. The concept of survival, embedded within the movement of Spiritualism, offered the SPR a set of phenomena to be investigated, including mediumship, hauntings, apparitions and other manifestations. Work on survival led J. B. and Louisa E. Rhine to Duke University and affected their later emphasis on the study of psi capacities of the living. It is also argued that survival was influential in the development of such non-spirit explanations of mediumship as psi-from-the-living and interferences from the medium's mind. The Spiritualist literature contains more discussions of these issues than is generally acknowledged. Parapsychology did not develop in spite of survival, but to some extent because of it.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of survival of bodily death has been one of the classic problems of psychical research. Such phenomena as hauntings, apparitions, deathbed visions, poltergeists, and mediumistic communications have kept this idea alive throughout the years. Survival-related phenomena, especially mediumship, have generated many positions.

Some examples are the opposing views of Charles Richet (1924) and Oliver J. Lodge (1924), and Italian psychical researcher Ernesto Bozzano's (n.d.a/1926) criticism of René Sudre (1926). Cesar de Vesme provides us with a good characterization of these debates: "When an author publishes a book to maintain the spiritualistic hypothesis, another writer publishes another book to support the contrary thesis, and vice versa. The two doctrines remain in face of one another like two china dogs." (De Vesme, 1928/1931, Vol. 1, p.283).

The debate over survival has continued to our era and it is not likely to be resolved soon.² However, the history of the interest in survival in psychical research can be more than the study of the controversies the idea has generated, and more than just an evaluation of the research conducted. In this paper I will discuss some aspects of the influence of the idea of survival of death on parapsychology. In discussing its importance I will argue that the concept of survival (through Spiritualism) was a major force in shaping fundamental moments in the history of the field, and in shaping the research agenda. In

¹ This is a revised version of the Gwen Tate Lecture sponsored by the Society for Psychical Research, and presented in London on October 4, 2001.

² See, for example, the discussions between Braude (1992a, 1992b) and Stevenson (1992), and between Cook (1996, 1997) and Almeder et al. (1997).

addition, the survival question has contributed to the development of alternate psychological or parapsychological processes as explanations for survival-related phenomena.

OVERARCHING CONCEPTS IN SCIENCE AND IN PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

The history of science has shown that scientific research is not guided solely by an abstract quest for truth, nor by the mere following-up of our empirical findings with further studies. One of the extra-scientific factors which affects the development of science is the influence of overarching concepts and ideas. These concepts influence the generation of hypotheses, the topics studied, and especially the way in which observations and experimental results have been interpreted. Materialistic and spiritualistic philosophy, for example, have affected science in different ways. Some examples of these are the 'mechanical philosophy' of the seventeenth century and the *naturphilosophie* of the nineteenth. A myriad of such concepts as vitalism and evolution have been influential in the development of the natural and the behavioral sciences. One such overarching concept in parapsychology has been the concept of survival of bodily death, and more widely, the concept of transcendence of physical limitations.

There is no question that much of what we call psychical research and parapsychology has been inspired by the search for the transcendental. Catherine Crowe (1848) wrote about the "night-side of nature", by which she meant a spiritual world revealed to us through premonitions, clairvoyance, apparitions of the living and of the dead, poltergeists, and other phenomena. The publications of later researchers have clearly shown that the search for the transcendent, or a spiritual, or non-physical, aspect of humanity has inspired many to become involved in parapsychology. In fact, many of these authors argue that the findings of psychical research support the concept of the soul or of non-physical dimensions of human existence.

In his book, *The Unknown*, French astronomer Camille Flammarion (1900) presented many examples of apparitions and other phenomena. He wrote: "These phenomena prove, I think, that the soul exists, and that it is endowed with faculties at present unknown" (p.485). Similar statements about the implications of psychical research may be found in Frederic W. H. Myers' *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903), in William McDougall's *Body and Mind* (1911), and in Ernesto Bozzano's *Discarnate Influence in Human Life* (n.d.b). In his book, *The Reach of the Mind*, J. B. Rhine (1947) argued that: "The psi researches show the natural human mind can escape physical boundaries under certain conditions . . . Accordingly a distinct difference between mind and matter, a relative dualism, has been demonstrated by the psi experiments . . ." (p.205).

Some may consider these perspectives to be at best, metaphysical, and at worst, unscientific. But regardless of how they should be viewed, such considerations have had important roles to play in the development of scientific research on psychic phenomena in a variety of ways. While this may seem obvious to some, such approaches to the history of science have generated much controversy. In fact, I get the impression that many current parapsychologists seem to think that modern parapsychology represents successful attempts to

overcome Spiritualism, the interest in survival and the like. I view the history of the field as complex and interactive, one in which parapsychology developed as a science not in spite of the survival question and Spiritualism, but to some extent because of these factors.

THE INFLUENCE OF MYSTICAL AND OCCULT IDEAS ON SCIENCE

Traditionally, the history of science has been conceptualized as the triumph of reason and rationality over old mystical and occult ideas. Nonetheless, the historiography of the scientific revolution and the seventeenth century has been changing during the last three decades or so. Some of the new historiography holds that Hermeticism, Neoplatonism, astrology, alchemy and other areas of the occult were influential in the development of modern science.

One of the first voices in the new historiography was Frances Yates (1972/1978), who argued in her book, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, that "the Hermetic-Cabalistic tradition . . . in the background of Renaissance science . . . did not lose force with the coming of the scientific revolution, . . . it was still present in the background of the minds of figures formerly taken as fully representative of complete emergence from such influences" (p.232). Although some have considered Yates' position an extreme one (e.g., Vickers, 1984a), such later historians as Allan Debus (1978) have argued that the old Hermetic ideas as well as Paracelsian concepts affected the development of the mechanical philosophy that evolved in the seventeenth century, which had traditionally been accounted for solely by physical, astronomical and biological observations and research (Westfall, 1977). Scholarly attention to the work of Isaac Newton also shows this mixture of traditions especially in relation to alchemy. Richard Westfall (1980) and Betty Jo Dobbs (1991) have argued that Newton's alchemical studies influenced the physics of his *Principia*. However, other historians have been strongly opposed to this view of the history of science. Brian Vickers (1984a), for example, has argued that there were two separate mentalities, a scientific one and an occult one. Vickers believes that old mystical ideas did not influence the development of science in any significant way. There are still other points of view, such as those that accept the influence of the occult on the development of science but postulate a low-level impact (see the anthology edited by Vickers, 1984b). In short, some argue that modern science developed when rationality and empirical observation won out against mystical and occult views of nature (pseudoscience for some), while others see that the mystical and the occult also contributed significantly to what was later called science.

An example of the positive role of so-called pseudoscience is the influence of phrenology on neurology. At one point historians of neurology had no use for phrenology in their studies. But the early revisionist work of Ackerknecht (1958), and the later work of Young (1970), did much to contribute to the idea that phrenological concepts were important to the development of neurology in that phrenology continued to change the climate of thought and supported notions of localization of sensory and motor functions in the brain.

More relevant to our particular subject matter is the change seen in the historiography of psychiatry and of ideas of the subconscious mind as expounded by Ellenberger (1970) in his book, *The Discovery of the Unconscious*. Ellenberger

postulated that spiritism and psychical research positively influenced the development of dynamic psychology and psychiatry in that such mediumistic phenomena as automatic writing (among other factors) provided the impetus for the development of ideas of the subconscious mind. The work of Alfred Binet (1892/1896), William James (1890b), Pierre Janet (1889), and Frederic W. H. Myers (1903), among many others, are examples of this. The more recent work of historians Adam Crabtree (1993), Alan Gauld (1992), Pascal Le Maléfán (1999), and Eugene Taylor (1996) has shown how Spiritualism and psychical research actively interacted with those other fields which studied the mind and human behavior in aspects such as the development of the notion of the subconscious mind. Both Gauld and Crabtree have shown that the mesmeric and spiritualistic literatures were influential in the construction of notions of the human mind. While Taylor argued that psychical research in the United States impacted on psychotherapy around the time of William James, Le Maléfán argued that during the middle part of the nineteenth century French psychiatric nosology in some instances mirrored the claims and phenomena of mediums. Although much more needs to be done to explore the contributions of psychical research to other areas, this work shows a clear—but still not dominant—trend in the history of psychology and psychiatry in which psychical research and Spiritualism are considered to be more than cultural aberrations.

Following this conceptual tradition I will argue—and I make no claim to be original in this assertion—that Spiritualism in general, and the concept of survival of bodily death in particular, have been a factor affecting the development of parapsychology in different ways.

THE INFLUENCE OF SPIRITUALISM ON IMPORTANT MOMENTS IN THE HISTORY OF PARAPSYCHOLOGY

This part of the paper is perhaps the most obvious and self-evident, particularly for those acquainted with the history of psychical research. The concept of survival was basic for the beginning and development of such key moments in the history of parapsychology as the early work of the Society for Psychical Research and the work of J. B. Rhine and his associates at Duke University.

The Society for Psychical Research

We should do well to keep in mind that Spiritualism was the end process of previous movements and beliefs. The concept of communication with the spirits of deceased persons as well as records of psychic phenomena of all sorts have considerable historical precedence. To find relevant antecedents one only has to study such historical works as J. -E. de Mirville's *Pneumatologie: Des Esprits et de leurs Manifestations Fluidiques* (1854), William Howitt's *The History of the Supernatural* (1863), Frank Podmore's *Modern Spiritualism* (1902), Cesar de Vesme's *A History of Experimental Spiritualism* (1928/1931), and the work of other historians (Dingwall, 1930; Inglis, 1977; Paton, 1921). Clearly the phenomena of modern Spiritualism can be found in previous epochs and were strongly influenced by other movements such as mesmerism, among others. Be that as it may, it was Spiritualism, acting on its own and as a filter and conveyor of older beliefs and observations, that dictated the agenda for psychical research.

Alan Gauld (1968) makes it clear that the early SPR researchers — such individuals as Frederic W. H. Myers and Henry Sidgwick — were motivated to study a variety of psychic phenomena by Spiritualism and its non-materialistic tenets. Their work represented an attempt to use systematic observation and experiment to determine if there was more to the universe than materialism dictated. As J. Fraser Nicol (1972) reminded us in his review of Gauld's book, some of the men who formed the council of the first SPR were spiritualists, among them William Stainton Moses, Edmund Dawson Rogers and Hensleigh Wedgwood.

The first volume of the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* presented the agenda of the Society in its now classic "Objects of the Society" (1882). Out of six committees established, the fourth and fifth — on apparitions and haunted houses, and on physical phenomena — were a direct outgrowth from the concerns of British spiritualists during the late nineteenth century.

By the time the SPR was founded in London in 1882, England had had a few decades of both physical and mental mediumship.³ Mediumship was an important area of discussion in British circles. Books such as the Reverend Charles Maurice Davies' *Mystic London* (1875), a collection of memoirs of the occult in London, remind us of how confusing and incredible Spiritualistic practices looked to some observers in Britain. Davies (1875, p.290) refers to D. D. Home's famous body elongations, and to such other phenomena as Mrs Guppy's flights, the materializations of Katie King, and the trance lectures delivered by such well-known spiritualist orators as Mrs Emma Hardinge Britten and Mrs Cora L. V. Tappan. Georgiana Houghton (n.d.) recollected in her book, *Evenings at Home in Spiritual Séance*, how in 1859 she was told by her cousin that "there were some persons living near her by whose means the spirits of those we had lost could communicate with us who were still remaining upon earth" (p.1). This started a lifelong commitment to Spiritualism and to the development of Miss Houghton's own mediumship. During the next years, England saw the performances of such mediums as Florence Cook, William Eglinton, Francis Ward Monck, William Stainton Moses, and a host of others, some of them quite disreputable.

The SPR did not ignore all this interest in mediumship, popularly said to be directed by discarnate entities. An analysis of the content of the *SPR Proceedings* by type of paper shows that, out of 204 papers published between 1882 and 1900, 23% were séance reports. However, this does not reflect the actual number of papers in which survival themes were included. These topics were discussed as well in the other categories, such as theoretical and literature review papers.

Although both Barrett (1886) and Crookes (1889) reported positive evidence for physical mediumship in the *SPR Proceedings*, overall the evaluations of some of the SPR researchers were negative. Eleanor Sidgwick's (1886b) paper "Result of a Personal Investigation into the Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism", which discussed mediums Kate Jencken (Kate Fox), Annie Eva Fay, Catherine Elizabeth Wood, Annie Fairlamb, and Henry Slade, is an example of this. The paper focused on sittings which took place during the 1870s, before

³ On Spiritualism in England see Oppenheim (1985) and Podmore (1902).

the founding of the SPR. Other negative evaluations of physical mediumship written by Mrs Sidgwick were her discussion of medium William Eglinton (Sidgwick, 1886a) and of the phenomenon of spirit photography (Sidgwick, 1891).

Mental mediumship was discussed somewhat later, as can be seen in papers about the mediumship of Mrs Leonora E. Piper published by Richard Hodgson (1892), Walter Leaf (1890), Oliver Lodge (1890), and Frederic W. H. Myers (1890) in the Society's *Proceedings*. This work was essential for the development of all kinds of theoretical issues (although we will see later that, before the SPR was founded, spiritualists discussed these issues in their writings). The SPR work with Piper started to study the possibility of spirit communications, became the first *systematic* attempt to study mediumistic communications under some conditions of control. It was also the first *detailed* analyses of the trance personalities published in the psychical research literature. William James (1886, 1890a) conducted some preliminary work, but his efforts could not compare with the SPR's in terms of organization or detail.

The SPR workers asked such questions as: What was the source of the veridical information that came through Mrs Piper? Were Mrs Piper's controls spirits or secondary personalities of the entranced medium? As SPR member Walter Leaf commented on Phinuit, one of Mrs Piper's controls:—

That Dr. Phinuit is only a name for Mrs. Piper's secondary personality, assuming the name and acting the part with the aptitude and consistency which is shown by secondary personalities in other known cases; that in this abnormal state there is a quite exceptional power of reading the contents of the minds of sitters; but that this power is far from complete. [Leaf, 1890, p. 567]

Many others commented on the consistency of the communicator, studies which give us pioneering insights into the dynamics of mediumship. Oliver Lodge wrote in 1890 that:—

The messages and communications... are usually given through Phinuit as a reporter. And he reports sometimes in the third person, sometimes in the first. Occasionally, but very seldom, Phinuit seems to give up his place altogether to the other personality, friend or relative, who then communicates with something of his old manner and individuality; becoming often impressive and realistic. [Lodge, 1890, p. 453]

In addition, many instances of automatic writing and talking led Frederic W. H. Myers (1884, 1885, 1887, 1889a) to begin his exploration of the subliminal mind and to argue that such mediumistic phenomena could be explained without recourse to the notion of discarnate agency. The title of his 1884 paper, "On a Telepathic Explanation of some so-called Spiritualistic Phenomena", represents an early statement of his ideas. While Myers was not unique in his appeal to unconscious processes as an explanation of such phenomena as mediumistic automatism (e.g., Carpenter, 1877; Von Hartmann, 1885) his concepts had a depth and effectiveness of argument that those of his predecessors did not have. Myers (1903) eventually developed a model that was certainly different from the more mechanical conceptions put forth by the unconscious cerebration theorists. He, in fact, came to argue for the supremacy and independence of the mind in relation to the body. In addition, he conducted unprecedented, careful and detailed analyses of material provided to him by

piritualists. His analysis of the Reverend P. H. Newnham's wife's automatic scripts (Myers, 1885) is an example of this.⁴

Regarding apparitions and hauntings, one has only to turn to the pages of Catherine Crowe's *The Night-Side of Nature* (1848), William H. Harrison's *Spirits Before Our Eyes* (1879), and Robert Dale Owen's *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World* (1860) to find a variety of ghost stories that were known to the early SPR pioneers. One still remembers with appreciation the reports by the SPR committee on haunted houses (Barrett et al., 1882; Bushell et al., 1884). This committee recorded many fascinating cases that were influential in later thinking about the subject (e.g., Bozzano, 1919/1925). For example, in the second report of the committee the vicar of a parish house stated that he and his wife heard a sound "like the crash of iron bars falling suddenly to the ground" (Bushell et al., 1884, p.145). This was the most dramatic of several auditory manifestations. The sound was heard collectively and by visitors who did not know about the haunting. In addition, the sound showed periodicity. It was heard only on Sunday morning at 2:00 am.

Over the years interest in hauntings and apparitions of the dead continued. R. C. Morton's (R. Despard) classic "Record of a Haunted House" (Morton, 1892) and Eleanor Sidgwick's (1885) earlier paper "Notes on the Evidence, Collected by the Society, for Phantasms of the Dead", are clear examples of this. Mrs Sidgwick said that the SPR had collected about 370 narratives "of phenomena, not clearly physical, and which believers in ghosts would be apt to refer to the agency of deceased human beings" (p.70). She outlined several possible explanations for these cases while pointing out that she could not fully accept nor completely reject any particular one. Among these were ideas of spirit influence, such as a physical presence or a telepathic hallucination caused by deceased individuals. Other ideas included telepathic communication between living individuals, and the idea of physical influences on the house perceived by the experients. The latter concept came to be known later as the psychometric theory of hauntings, and was discussed many years later in the pages of the *SPR Proceedings* by H. H. Price (1939; see also Bozzano, 1919/1925).

Later publications about apparitions of the dead included fascinating theoretical papers that charted future discussions of apparitions of the dead. The SPR pioneers essentially took the idea of survival that was apparently expressed by these apparitional phenomena and analyzed the problem from the point of view of a variety of possible explanations. Myers' (1889b) paper "On Recognised Apparitions Occurring More than a Year After Death", is one example. In this paper, Myers conceptualized these manifestations in terms of supposed gradations of post-mortem activity and the activity of living spirits. He wrote:—

In the first place, I believe that telepathy . . . exists both as between embodied spirits and as between embodied and disembodied spirits. I hold that there is a continuous series of manifestations of such power, beginning with thought-transference experiments and hypnotism at a distance, proceeding through experimental apparitions and apparitions coincident with crisis or death, and ending with

⁴ It is interesting to notice that contemporary spiritualists were critical of what they believed were Myers' attempts to reduce spiritualistic phenomena to subliminal processes (e.g., Houghton, 1886; Noel, 1886; Wedgewood, 1886).

apparitions after death;—the results, in my view, of the continued exercises of the same energy by the spirits of the departed. [Myers, 1889b, pp. 63–64]

Frank Podmore (1889) proposed a different model in a paper entitled “Phantasms of the Dead from Another Point of View.” Following up on one of Mrs Sidgwick’s initial ideas, Podmore argued that evidential cases of apparitions of the dead were telepathic hallucinations. The actual explanation could be found, he wrote, “in the prolonged latency and subsequent emergence of an impression received from the dead man himself before his death; or in telepathy from the minds of other persons still living . . .” (Podmore, 1889, p. 308).

This interest in hauntings and apparitions of the dead within the SPR was paralleled by an interest in hallucinations, especially hallucinations of the living. The work of the Literary Committee was certainly influenced by accounts of spontaneous ESP and apparitions of the living from such spiritualistic sources as the above-mentioned books by Crowe, Harrison, and Owen. The third report of the Literary Committee stated:—

Apparitions . . . are an element in nearly every religion known among men; and the discussion of their reality has been a perpetual feature in religious controversy. But the apparitions who have been most associated with religious ideas have been those of the *dead*, and we shall do our best to avoid controversial ground, and also keep our subject within manageable limits, by altogether excluding this class. Let us take only the alleged apparitions of living persons, the commonest of which are death-wraiths, or apparitions of persons near the moment of death. [Barrett et al., 1884a, p. 111]

The early telepathic model of hallucinations, now classically associated to the early SPR work, was discussed in two papers produced by the Literary Committee in 1884 (Barrett et al., 1884a, 1884b). Eventually, these efforts led to the first SPR survey of hallucinations and to studies of the varieties of features of these apparitions of the living, Gurney, Myers and Podmore’s *Phantasms of the Living* (1886). As is well known, this interest culminated in the famous “Census of Hallucinations” (Sidgwick et al., 1894). One of the purposes of the ‘Census’ was to scientifically establish a relationship between a hallucination and the death of the person represented by the hallucination. The notion of survival was the original impetus behind all this work, even if eventually the SPR researchers developed different explanatory models such as that of telepathic hallucinations.

While it may be argued that what I have just discussed is well known, and that such an effect of ideas of survival and of Spiritualism is obvious, we should remember that the sense of what is obvious is often an afterthought. Psychical research would have been very different if it had been affected by movements other than Spiritualism. If mesmerism had had more influence than it had (and it had considerable influence), perhaps the SPR would have paid more attention to the idea of animal magnetism and to similar concepts of force, which might have resulted in an emphasis on the measurement, detection and use of such forces. There were some studies of mesmeric action conducted by the Committee on Mesmerism (Barrett, Gurney, et al., 1883) and by Gurney (1884), but they were not continued beyond the first three years of the SPR’s existence. A more mesmerism-based approach might have included more interest in and research on Reichenbach’s (1849/1851) Od, which Reichenbach

believed was a universal force. Od was perceived by sensitive individuals primarily as lights emanating from crystals, minerals, magnets, and the human body. The SPR abandoned this research topic soon after the founding of the Society (Barrett, Close, et al., 1883). In addition, an animal-magnetism-based psychical research might have had more interest in healing, which was generally assumed to involve some form of subtle energy transfer.

If Christianity had been more influential on nineteenth-century SPR work, psychical research might then have had more emphasis on such miracles as healings in shrines (e.g., Myers & Myers, 1893) and Marian apparitions (e.g., Marillier, 1891). Similarly, the work of the SPR would have been different if Theosophy had been more influential than Spiritualism. Instead of mediums and the study of the purported agency of discarnate human beings, the field might have paid more attention to the so-called powers of adepts or spiritual masters and to the study of effects produced by 'non-human spiritual beings' (e.g., Hodgson, 1885).

J. B. Rhine and Associates

Another moment in its history, generally recognized to be crucial for parapsychology, comprised the studies Joseph Banks Rhine and his colleagues conducted at Duke University. Rhine—and his colleague and wife Louisa E. Rhine—was deeply influenced by the idea of survival and the movement of Spiritualism, even if he later came to suggest that parapsychology could not deal with the concept scientifically in any meaningful way (e.g., J. B. Rhine, 1974).⁵

In his book, *New Frontiers of the Mind*, Rhine (1937) recounted how he heard a lecture by Arthur Conan Doyle about Spiritualism in the early 1920s. Although he was not convinced of the tenets of Spiritualism, Rhine was impressed by Doyle's zeal and positive attitude. Rhine wrote, "if there was a measure of truth in what he believed . . . it would be of transcendental importance" (p. 54).

In 1926, the Rhines had important experiences with mediums. One was a séance with physical medium Margery, who claimed that her dead brother Walter could produce materializations and other phenomena through her. This single séance convinced the Rhines that the performances were fraudulent (Rhine & Rhine, 1927).⁶ The same year psychical researcher Walter Franklin Prince offered to pay the Rhines if they would sit with mental medium Minnie Soule (L. E. Rhine, 1982, pp. 104–105), known in the previous literature as Mrs Chenoweth.⁷ Dennis Brian (1982, p. 53), in his biography of Rhine, *The Enchanted Voyager*, noted that in these sittings, J. B. and Louisa had different tasks. While Louisa took verbatim notes in a separate room, J. B. was in the room with Mrs Soule, questioning the medium. The results, Louisa recorded in her diary, were disappointing (L. E. Rhine, 1982, p. 105).

⁵ On the early work of the Rhines see Brian (1982), Mauskopf and McVaugh (1980), Rhine and Associates (1965), and L. E. Rhine (1982). On Rhine and the survival issue see Chari (1982).

⁶ On Margery's mediumship see Tietze (1973). Regarding Margery and the Rhines see Brian (1982, chapter 4), Matlock (1987), and Tietze (1973, pp. 107–114).

⁷ Minnie Soule was an American medium studied before by Lydia Allison (1929) and James H. Hyslop (1910, pp. 722–776). She used the pseudonym of Mrs Chenoweth (see also Tubby, 1941).

In 1927, John F. Thomas, an officer at Detroit's public school system, approached Rhine to see if he would work with him on mediumistic communication records (L. E. Rhine, 1982, pp.111-113). Thomas was having séances with Soule and other mediums attempting to communicate with his deceased wife.⁸ Rhine accepted and Thomas asked him later the same year if he and his wife would go to Duke University to work with William McDougall on his mediumistic records. McDougall was then the head of Duke's psychology department. Eventually the Rhines arrived at Duke, where they were welcomed by McDougall. Their first work at Duke was centered on the Thomas material and only later did they branch out into ESP research.

The Rhines went with Thomas to continue to assist in the evaluation of mediumistic sittings with Mrs Soule, as well as with such other mental mediums as Eileen J. Garrett and Gladys Osborne Leonard. Thomas eventually obtained a doctoral degree in psychology from Duke University for his study of mediumistic communications. In his books *Case Studies Bearing Upon Survival* (Thomas, 1929) and *Beyond Normal Cognition* (Thomas, 1937), Thomas mentioned that both J.B. and Louisa Rhine helped him in various ways.

The effect of this early mediumship work was to give the Rhines first-hand appreciation of what so many other psychical researchers before them had realized, the difficulties involved in determining the source of the information produced. In a letter he wrote to Prince on November 23, 1927, J. B. Rhine said: "We are just now organizing our thoughts on the question of what we require for proof of the supernormal, how many reasonable hypotheses there seem to be for supernormal production of information, and how we may discover then which of these is the correct one . . ." (cited in Brian, 1982, p. 68).

However, later on Rhine was more positive about survival. On March 21, 1929, in a letter to Prince about Thomas' mediumistic records, Rhine said: "We have a very real appreciation for Mr. T. himself, and have been convinced that his material is in part at least, genuinely evidential, that of the hypotheses available to our knowledge certainly the spirit interpretation is the most acceptable" (cited in Mauskopf & McVaugh, 1980, p. 328).

This positive attitude towards survival and its study was also reflected in an idea Rhine developed around 1928 to 1929. This was the establishment of an 'Institute for Experimental Religion' (Mauskopf & McVaugh, 1980, p. 87). Part of the work to be conducted at this Institute was the study of evidence for the existence of the soul, including reports of such phenomena as apparitions suggestive of survival. A few years later, in a 1933 paper published in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* in which he commented on an article about survival written by H. F. Saltmarsh (1932), Rhine (1933a) argued that survival studies should focus on evidence of purpose or motivation. In his words:-

The types of evidence to which I refer as offering superior proof-value to the survival theory are those which clearly show purposes that are appropriate only to one individual, the supposed spirit identified. The point in mind is that peculiar motivation is more identificative of the 'agency' involved than are data from the past life of the

⁸ On Thomas see Dale (1941).

individual concerned, facts describing his personality, or physical manifestations claimed to be due to his efforts. [p. 36]

Of course this was nothing new. The point of purpose and intention had been argued before by such researchers as Hyslop (1919) and Myers (1903), to name only two prominent examples. While Rhine was not offering anything new, nor any solution to differentiate spirit and psi from the living sources, the paper shows his willingness to consider survival as late as 1933. In fact, it is interesting to notice that in a further communication published later in the same year in the *SPR Journal*, Rhine referred to survival as a question "among the most important we have to discuss in this field" (Rhine, 1933b, p. 125).

While Rhine continued to be interested in survival throughout his life (e.g., Rhine, 1943, 1956, 1960, 1974), when he published his now classic monograph, *Extra-Sensory Perception*, in 1934 he clearly had decided that the survival issue needed to be shelved. Rhine discussed survival in the first chapter of his book. He started classifying the types of parapsychological phenomena. Parapsychical phenomena included ESP in general, including dowsing, psychometry and veridical spirit communications. Such physical phenomena as telekinesis, lights, temperature changes and apports, he designated as parapsycho-physical. The parapsycho-physiological category included materializations, elongation, and stigmatization. Negative possession and healing were considered to be part of parapsycho-pathological phenomena. Finally parapsycho-literary phenomena included the production of writing or art apparently beyond the means of the individual.

This classification interacted with agency. Corporeal agency was meant to refer to effects from the living and incorporeal agency referred to effects from discarnate spirits. Rhine wrote:—

There seem to be four general cases possible on this principle: one corporeal agent may influence another, as in telepathy, or the one corporeal may be the only personality concerned, as in clairvoyance. The incorporeal agent . . . may influence a corporeal one, as in the so-called 'mediumistic' experiences. Or, fourth, the incorporeal personality may seem to produce phenomena without the aid of a corporeal one with parapsychological capacities, and in the seeming 'invasions' called 'hauntings'.

[J. B. Rhine, 1934a, pp. 8–9]

Rhine stated that his book dealt only with ESP effects by the living produced by two individuals (telepathy tests with a sender) and one individual (clairvoyance tests with no sender). He was unsure about how to classify effects in this system, especially in regard to incorporeal agency. Later in the book Rhine argued that the task at hand was twofold. First, to learn about telepathy and clairvoyance through attempts to relate each phenomenon to the other and to other parapsychological phenomena such as dowsing. Second, to find out more about other variables related to their functioning. Once these tasks were completed the incorporeal phenomena could be explored in more detail following a similar procedure (J. B. Rhine, 1934a, p. 147; see also Rhine, 1934b). But this later step in Rhine's research program, the shifting to a focus on incorporeal agency, never took place — perhaps because the corporeal area proved to be more difficult to explore and map than expected. As Rhine wrote later, the question of survival had to wait for a better understanding of the psi

abilities of the living: "For one thing, it is necessary to know the limits and conditions of the operation of the psi process before we can design adequate experiments dealing with the survival hypothesis. It is only when we have evidence of something beyond the range of explanation by ESP and PK that a case for survival begins" (J. B. Rhine, 1947, p.214).

Unfortunately for proponents of survival, Rhine (1974) ended up arguing that survival was untestable. Nonetheless survival was an important motivator of his early work and a reminder of how certain ideas or movements have had important, but unexpected, effects on the historical development of parapsychology.

Finally, there is another way in which Rhine was affected by Spiritualism. This was his belief that psychic phenomena in general could show us evidence for a non-physical aspect in human beings, that is, for the independence of mind from the body. Rhine discussed these views in his books, *The Reach of the Mind* (1947) and *New World of the Mind* (1953), among other publications.

These ideas did not come only from the results of his experiments, as Rhine (1947) himself argued. Rhine was interested in religion early in his life and planned to be a minister, and thus was led, early on, to beliefs in the non-physical. Rhine's ideas on this topic can be found in Louisa Rhine's (1982) autobiographical account of her life with J.B., *Something Hidden*. But Rhine was also influenced by the implications of Spiritualism and its phenomena. Being aware of the writings and ideas of such spiritualists as Arthur Conan Doyle, both he and Louisa knew that spiritualists believed that human beings were more than their bodies, that there was a component of human beings that did not depend on physical limitations. As far back as 1865 British spiritualist Benjamin Coleman stated: "Let it be at once recognized that spirit is a living entity when separated from the fleshly body, having a dynamic power over matter, and the great difficulty which enshrouds the materialistic mind vanishes" (Coleman, 1865, p.128). Similarly, T. P. Barkas (1876) argued from the pages of the *Spiritualist Newspaper*: "If these phenomena be true they suggest very important reflections. Mind is not a mere property of ordinarily organised molecular matter, secreted by the brain . . . but is independent of any ordinary physical brain . . ." (p.261). As mentioned in the introduction, later writers such as Bozzano (n.d.b), Flammarion (1900), and Myers (1903) all argued along similar lines.

Rhine was familiar with some of this literature. In a letter he wrote to the President of the American Society for Psychical Research in 1923 he stated: "Having read Myers' *Human Personality* and some other books of the kind, I have been deeply impressed with the importance of the subject to the human race" (L. E. Rhine, 1982, p.92). The Rhines were aware of a clear conceptual tradition that certainly gave them hope to find answers about the nature of human beings, and non-physicality. The latter idea was in fact the main tenet of Rhine's ideas about the nature of psi (Beloff, 1982; Iannuzzo, 1983).

SPIRITUALISM AND THE COMPLEXITY OF PSYCHIC PHENOMENA

Survival has influenced psychical research in other, more subtle, ways. One of these is the contribution of spiritualists to our understanding of mediumistic and other phenomena. We sometimes think that spiritualists had simplistic,

unitary views about the nature of psychic phenomena. Bruno Fantoni (1974), in *Magia y Parapsicología*, his history of magic and parapsychology, wrote:—

At the beginning spiritists argued that all paranormal phenomena were produced by discarnate beings . . . With time, they started to admit the possibility of a collaboration between the spirit from the beyond and the medium . . . Finally, they were forced to admit the existence of paranormal phenomena without the intervention of the dead and that even in those phenomena that supposedly originated in the beyond there may be elements coming from the unconscious of the living.

[pp.319–320, my translation]

While Fantoni's view may represent many individuals, I believe that a study of the primary literature supports a modified view of this process. That is, the writings of some spiritualists show an awareness of theoretical explanations of survival phenomena other than discarnate agency. Indeed, the spiritualist literature contains a rich intellectual discussion of the different possibilities. The history of psychical research sometimes has been written as the history of the triumph of science over the trappings of Spiritualism, but there is room to argue that, from the beginning, Spiritualism was providing us with a variety of alternative explanations for the phenomena in question. More importantly, Spiritualism provided the context for the development of many ideas that actively shaped psychical research conceptually. One of them was psi-from-the-living ideas as an explanation of mediumship.

Psi-from-the-Living Ideas to Explain Mediumship

In her *Journal of Parapsychology* paper "Parapsychology, Then and Now", Louisa E. Rhine (1967) suggested that explanations through ESP from the living were only available or were only realistic after experimental work that started in the 1920s. Rhine gave particular attention to later ESP work at Duke University. In her view: "It was not lack of method that brought to an end the era of mediumistic research on the survival question. It was the establishment of ESP that did it" (p.238). L. E. Rhine goes as far as to say that those interested and positive about survival in the 1920s "could not then realize that an alternative explanation existed" (p.248). In this view ESP was not established well enough in the old days to be an effective counter-explanation for the content of veridical mediumistic communications. There is some truth in this in that later experimental ESP work provided more evidence for the existence of this phenomenon and additional information about its workings. But Louisa Rhine exaggerated, especially when she said that no alternative explanations were thought to exist. Rhine did not take into account the fact that from the beginning of Spiritualism and of psychical research there was a long tradition of using ESP explanations to account for mediumistic communications. The fact that the evidence for ESP became better later is not the issue here. What is important in historical terms is that observers of mediums were convinced of the validity of these ESP explanations, a process that was a reality for them. I am arguing here that the early spiritualist literature provides examples of psi-from-the-living explanations, clearly showing that these ideas originated from spiritualists themselves, and in some cases from non-spiritualists who believed in survival.

In his book, *An Exposition of Views Respecting the Modern Spirit Manifestations*, Adin Ballou (1853) wrote: "I believe that departed spirits cause many

of these phenomena, but not all of them. I believe that spirits in the flesh,—*i.e.*, the mind of the medium, or the mind of the persons surrounding the medium—sometimes thwart, warp, peculiarize, or modify the manifestations and communications made" (p. 3). For Ballou it was clear that the minds of individuals around the medium could influence the content of the communications, a process he referred to as "mesmeric and psychological influences, from controlling minds near [the medium]" (p. 29).

These ideas were not unique to Ballou. They can also be seen in Andrew Jackson Davis (1853). In his book, *The Present Age and Inner Life*, Davis wrote that "owing to the extraordinary attributes of man's mind, many experiences are by some individuals regarded as spiritually originated; which in truth, are only caused by the natural laws of our being . . ." (pp. 160–161). Davis presented a table in his book which listed the possible causes of mediumistic phenomena. In his view 40% were due to "departed spirits". The rest included fraud, neurological, or hysterical explanations, "nervo-psychology" or imaginationists, and "cerebro-sympathy" or epidemic diseases. Eighteen percent referred to what we would call the psychic abilities of the living. This included "vital electricity" coming from the body of mediums, and clairvoyance. While these figures, as most of Davis' writings, were obtained through clairvoyant inspiration, the important point here is that a leader of the early American spiritualist movement offered alternative explanations of mediumship other than spiritual-based ones.

Davis argued that one of the main causes of apparent contradictions in mediumistic communications—meaning confusions and apparent errors—was the simultaneous reception of impressions from two different sources: spirits and the minds of living persons. He wrote: "A medium may obtain thoughts from a person sitting in the circle, or from a mind even in some distant portion of this globe . . . , and still be wholly *deceived* as to the source of them" (p. 202).

In later years, Henry J. Atkinson (1871, p. 535), in a paper entitled "Science and Spiritualism", argued that it was important to be clear about the agency behind the phenomenon. That is, was it the action of spirits of the dead or spirits of the living? A later author discussed the problems involved in establishing spirit identity. He said: "The difficulties in respect to spirit identity are very various; as for instance, in the double, or Spirit-issues from the living person; from clairvoyance and thought-transference, or knowledge or memory transference . . ." (Atkinson, 1882, p. 249).

English spiritualist William Harrison argued that the thoughts of sitters could affect the content of mediumistic communications. He referred to "thought-reading, or . . . the influence of one mind to another" (Harrison, 1873, p. 434) to account for the phenomena.

Helen Dallas (1916), another writer who may be described as a spiritualist, in her book, *Objections to Spiritualism Answered*, commented on the "fact that thoughts telepathically received from those still in the flesh may blend with, or be mistaken for, messages from the discarnate" (p. 70). Similarly, well-known French researcher and theoretician Gustave Geley (n.d.) stated that mediumistic communications sometimes seemed to depend on elements "evidently taken from the *medium* and the sitters of the session, all of them in variable proportions" (p. 102, my translation).

Another interesting example was that of Ernesto Bozzano, probably the best-known European spiritist of his times. Bozzano stated more than once that ESP could account for some cases. In his book, *Animism and Spiritism*, when referring to phenomena suggestive of spirit identity, Bozzano said that "many episodes are explicable by manifestations usually animistic" (Bozzano, n.d.a, p.47). In his study of hauntings, Bozzano (1919/1925) favored explanations related to discarnate agency for the majority of the cases. However, he accepted telepathic explanations from the living for a small number of cases. In his view, because "not all manifestations between the living are of telepathic origin . . . also not all hauntings manifestations seem to have a spirit origin" (p.305, my translation).

Regarding poltergeists, Bozzano also accepted some agency from the living. He wrote that:—

There are a small number of cases that may be explained through the 'animistic' hypothesis . . . the sporadic emission of telekinetic or mediumistic energy controlled by a rudimentary will of subconscious origin. Some cases of little complexity may be classified in this category, . . . but it may be said that, in general, 'poltergeist' manifestations are almost never completely 'animistic' nor completely 'spiritistic' . . .

[Bozzano, 1919/1925, p. 311, my translation]

Others believed that the thoughts of sitters could affect materialization phenomena. So, for example, in the *Spiritualist Newspaper* G. W. Stock wrote that the forms that appeared in séances were "very pliable and capable of being moulded by the thoughts and affections of the sitters" (Stock, 1877, p.188). A similar view was stated in an unsigned paper, "The Influence of Sitters Upon Spiritual Manifestations", which was presumably written by William H. Harrison (*The Influence*, 1877).

In fact, the spiritualist publications presented a variety of ideas about the nature of materializations which highlight the complexity of the discussion, one that was not limited to ideas of discarnate agency. Several writers speculated on the exteriorization of the medium's double to account for materializations (e.g., Coleman, 1876; Kislingbury, 1876a, 1876b; Reimers, 1876). One author writing about Katie King's materialization said that Katie "is not an independent spirit, but the spirit, or 'double' of the medium . . ." (*Spirit Forms*, 1873, p.452). Illustrating the variety of ideas about materializations at the time, spiritualist Emily Kislingbury (1876a, 1876b) suggested that transfiguration of the medium could explain some supposed cases of materializations.

Another way of seeing Spiritualism's theoretical contributions is as a context in which skeptics about survival also developed an important theoretical model. There were many writers who suggested that fluidic substances emanating from the medium's body — animal magnetism, Od, nervous forces—could explain many of the mental, and especially the physical, phenomena of Spiritualism, without recourse to spirit agency. Using the spread of Spiritualism as a justification, and especially the performances of physical mediums that suggested spirit influences, such as movement of objects and materializations, a variety of skeptics of the spirit agency hypothesis postulated a different explanatory model. They believed the phenomena could be explained by a force coming from the medium's nervous

system. This literature included John Bovee Dods' *Spirit Manifestations Examined and Explained* (1854), Edward C. Rogers' *Philosophy of Mysterious Agents* (1853), Asa Mahan's *Modern Mysteries Explained and Exposed* (1855), and George Samson's *Spiritualism Tested* (1860). Somewhat later in the nineteenth century such other authors as Edward W. Cox (1872), Gerry G. Fairfield (1875), and Eduard von Hartmann (1885), continued this line of thinking in which they sought to explain phenomena without recourse to discarnate agency. This line of thought was continued by early twentieth-century researchers such as Joseph Maxwell (1903/1905), Enrico Morselli (1908), Schrenck-Notzing (1920/1925), and René Sudre (1926). All these writings I have mentioned represent the beginnings of what some modern authors call the super-psi explanation of survival phenomena.

Many of the controversies arising from these ideas were instrumental in outlining the assumptions of spiritualists and their opponents. In his book, *Outlines of Ten Years' Investigations into the Phenomena of Modern Spiritualism*, Thomas P. Barkas (1862) argued that in these concepts of nervous forces "man is converted into a kind of electro-odylic-cerebro-spinal machine" (p.65). In Barkas's view these ideas of psychic forces were not enough to explain the phenomena. Many critics of the psychic force model expressed this viewpoint. They questioned the ability of these forces to produce intelligent effects, such as those seen in some movements of objects and in materialization phenomena (e.g., Aksakof, 1890/n.d; Dr. Dods and Spiritualism, 1855; Force v. Spiritualism, 1867; Mary Jane, 1863; Review of *What Am I?*, 1874).

However, it is important to recognize that spiritualists themselves also supported the existence of fluidic forces, but emphasized that they were manipulated by the spirits of the dead. An influential concept was that of the perispirit popularized in France by Allan Kardec, the founder of spiritism. In his well-known "*Spirits' Book*", first published in 1857, Kardec (1875) presented mediumistic communications referring to a "universal fluid which plays the part of intermediary between spirit and matter . . ." (p.9). This substance was called the perispirit. It made the spirit's interaction with the body possible and was the vehicle the spirit used to create apparitions and such phenomena as movements of objects. In a later book, Kardec (1876) gave more details about the production of psychic phenomena via the perispirit. He wrote:—

When an object is set in motion, carried away, or raised into the air, the spirit does not seize it, push it, or lift it, as we do with our hands; the spirit, so to say, *saturates* it with *his own* fluid combined with that of the medium, and the object, being thus vivified for the moment, acts as a living being would act . . . [and] it follows the impulsion communicated to it by the will of the spirit. [Kardec, 1876, pp. 76–77]

In an 'inspirational address' about the topic of Spiritualism as a science which was published in the *Spiritualist Newspaper*, British trance medium and trance speaker J. J. Morse (1876) discussed ideas similar to Kardec's notion of the perispirit. In France, this line of thought was further articulated by Gabriel Delanne (1923) and Leon Denis (1922). Similarly, well-known British spiritualist and publisher J. Burns argued in 1872 that there was a force in constant operation in living beings that could come out of the body under certain conditions and with certain individuals so to produce phenomena such as movement of objects. This energy was the same as nerve energy and

it conveyed the will to the human organism. In Burns' view: "The peculiarity of the medium is, that he gives off a magnetism with which the spiritual atmosphere surrounding the spirit may become intersphered . . . , of the one becoming involved with that of the other . . ." (Reed & Woodward, n.d., p. 33).

In some of the pamphlets he published, Burns included leaflets giving instructions about how to conduct séances. One of them was called "How to Investigate Spiritual Phenomena". This leaflet said: "The phenomena are produced by a vital force emanating from the sitters, which the spirits use as a connecting link between themselves and objects" (Appendix, n.d., p. 51).

The spiritualist literature includes many other mentions of these forces. In his book, *The Debatable Land*, American spiritualist Robert Dale Owen (1871) referred to "invisible exudations from the human organisations" (p. 404) to account for materialization phenomena. In reference to vapor observed in materialization séances, William Stainton Moses stated in a meeting of the British National Association of Spiritualists held in November of 1877: "It is the universal pabulum, the raw material used in all operations of its nature . . . It is the medium's vital force" (Moses, 1877, p. 254).

Spiritualism-oriented writers also discussed these ideas in the twentieth century. In England, in his book, *Spirit Intercourse*, James Hewat McKenzie (1916) wrote that there was a "psycho-plastic matter" that came out of mediums' bodies to form materializations. In France, Geley argued that ectoplasm consisted of the "anatomy-biologic decentralisation in the medium's body and an externalisation of the decentralised factors in an amorphous state, solid, liquid, or vaporous" (Geley, 1924/1927, p. 358).

As we can see, these ideas of forces and fluids were not unique to the anti-spiritualist writers. Spiritualists were actively involved in the discussion and development of these ideas from the beginning of Spiritualism to our day. This is an important point because this notion—that a force comes from the medium's body to produce the phenomena—was one of the main theoretical models of psychical research between the nineteenth century and the 1920s (Alvarado, 2001). Because the concept has been identified with anti-discarnate-agency explanations, we need to remember that it was not only skeptics who contributed to the literature outlining these influential ideas.

Psychological Influences on Spirit Communications

Spiritualists always have recognized that the medium may influence the communications in different ways. In an article called "Cerebral Influence on Revelation" published in the American journal, *The Shekinah*, S. B. Brittan (1853) argued that mediumistic communications could be influenced by the mediums' thoughts. Brittan asserted: "In all ages, revelations from the Spiritual World have been essentially modified by the physical and mental characteristics of the persons through whom they have been given to mankind. In the process of influx, the elements of two minds are blended, and the revelation is the result of their mingled action" (pp. 39–40).

In Andrew Jackson Davis's (1853) book mentioned above the author argued for the influence of the medium's mind on the communications, especially reflecting the medium's education and customs. The medium's mind, Davis wrote, "is almost certain to unconsciously *alter, modify, and arrange* all

impressions, from whatever source received, invariably in accordance with the state and style of its own growth and individual culture" (p.203). This influence could be completely undetected by the medium.

In his *Experimental Spiritism: The Medium's Book, or Guide for Mediums and for Evocations*, Kardec (1876) wrote about the limitations placed on spirits' ability to communicate by the resources of the medium, including such aspects as knowledge of languages. Others also talked about these issues (e.g., Ballou, 1853; Dallas, 1916). Dallas, for example, argued that, even during trance, the "medium's mind . . . is not an *inanimate* mirror upon which other personalities can easily cast the impression of their thoughts; it may rather be compared to a sea moved often by internal currents and ruffled by external winds" (p.65).

There were also discussions by such authors as Aksakof (1890/n.d.) and Delanne (1902), who, while defending spirit agency, admitted that dissociative mechanisms could account for some phenomena. In Delanne's *Recherches sur la Médiurnité* (1902), a study focusing on automatic writing, he pointed out that there could be different explanations for mediumistic communications. While he believed the source of communications could be distinguished by focusing on their content, even in the best mediums pure psychological automatism could get mixed with mediumship (p.500). Similarly, Geley argued that, while in trance, the medium's capacity for free will was diminished to the point that mediumistic communications could be affected by "more or less voluntary suggestions of the sitters and will often reflect their own thoughts" (Geley, n.d., p.108, my translation).

In the United States, James H. Hyslop was well known for his systematic and detailed studies of mental mediumship. In his book, *Contact with the Other World*, Hyslop (1919) argued that even in communications with spiritual entities there could be contamination from the living. He wrote:—

There is nothing clearer to the investigators than the fact that all messages are affected by the mind of the medium, normal or subliminal, according to the conditions under which communication takes place. If the messages come through normal consciousness, the form of the message will be deeply affected. Memories, interpretation, and language determine the form of the message. To some extent the subconscious will affect it in the same way in a trance, when normal consciousness is suspended.

[Hyslop, 1919, p.107]

Hyslop (1906a) devoted his book, *Borderland of Psychical Research*, to those phenomena that were not parapsychological but had the appearance of being so. Among these he included memory problems, hallucinations, and a variety of such dissociative phenomena as secondary personalities. The book, Hyslop said, was intended to prepare future students of the supernormal to discriminate between the "normal and the abnormal, on the one hand, and between both of these and the supernormal on the other" (Hyslop, 1906a, p.viii). He clearly stated that knowledge of psychological mechanisms was essential to the proper evaluation of phenomena that may be indicative of the supernormal in general, and of survival in particular. On many occasions, he insisted, it was not necessary to go beyond conventional psychological explanations. As he wrote:—

It is not enough that a phenomenon should be involuntary or unconsciously produced. It must be much more to obtain the credentials of the supernormal. It must

bear the stamp of knowledge acquired by some other process than sensory experience. It must also show evidence of more than the imagination may produce in its subliminal creations, and we have at present no criterion for determining the limits of this function. It matters not what characteristics of independent personality are exhibited by secondary states or by the subject of the phenomena claimed to have an external source, if they do not show evidences of personal identity of deceased persons they are referable to subliminal action. Hence secondary personality explains many phenomena that formerly received another explanation, and the criterion for the belief in spirits is made far more stringent. [Hyslop, 1906a, p.284]

In another book, *Enigmas of Psychic Research*, Hyslop (1906b) stated that secondary personality was a more common phenomenon than 'spirit agency' (p.343). What is interesting about Hyslop is that he contributed actively as well to the study of these subliminal capacities, processes that he believed interacted with the supernormal. One example is Hyslop's (1913) study about the functions of the subconscious in which he summarized and criticized Myers' ideas about the subliminal mind. Other studies along these lines include Hyslop's analyses of the purported 'Martian' communications of Mrs Smead (Hyslop, 1918), and his study of unconscious fraud in the production of physical phenomena in the mediumship of Mrs Burton (Hamilton, Smyth, & Hyslop, 1911).

Another interesting example of how spiritualists contributed psychological explanations of mediumistic communications is in the reaction of some spiritualists to Kardec's ideas about reincarnation. The tenet of reincarnation was a prominent part of Kardec's system. Kardec based his teachings about spiritism and reincarnation on mediumistic communications (Kardec, 1875, 1876). But the idea of reincarnation was not well received by many readers, particularly in England. In 1875 a number of discussions of reincarnation were published in the well-known English *Spiritualist Newspaper* (e.g., Home, 1875; J., 1875; Kislisbury, 1875; Rouse, 1875). In the pages of this publication, medium D. D. Home (1875) ridiculed the concept based on the presence of too many people claiming to have been Napoleon and the absence of people who claimed common previous lives. More importantly, mediumistic communications with a reincarnationist content were attacked by two well-known spiritualists: Alexander Aksakof and William Harrison.

Aksakof (1875) criticized Kardec's reliance on writing mediums because they were well known to "pass so easily under the psychological influence or preconceived ideas . . ." (p. 75). He suggested that the reincarnationist content of such automatic scripts were not truly spiritual, but depended instead on the impact of suggestion on the medium.

A much stronger attack was published in an unsigned leading article in the *Spiritualist Newspaper* on October 8, 1875. Presumably William Harrison, the editor of the publication, wrote the article. As the author stated:—

Practically speaking the doctrine has not, up to the present time, been taught through any medium of any kind residing in England, and those doctrines which have been taught here have usually (with a few striking exceptions) been strongly coloured by the opinions of the medium, or those of the sitters; in short, it may be laid down as a general principle that about ninety per cent. of spirit messages contain more of the thoughts of the medium than of the thoughts of the communicating spirit. This takes place unconsciously to the medium of course. . . . We know full well that if the

reincarnation doctrine should be agitated in England plenty of spirits will begin to teach it, the reason being that the minds of the various mediums will be set buzzing by the arguments on the subject mooted by persons around them, after which there will be plenty of spirit messages about reincarnation.

[Allan Kardec's "Spirits' Book", 1875, p. 170]

Another anonymous speculation, probably written by Harrison as well, asked: "How much of the revelations in Allan Kardec's book were due to his presence at the circles?" (The Inductive Method, 1875, p. 314). The important question here is not that of reincarnation, but the belief some spiritualists had that the ideas expressed by spirit communicators (in this case reincarnation) could be produced artifactually as a function of suggestion on the medium or through the medium's own beliefs.

Mediumistic Communications from the Living

Another contribution of the survival context to the understanding of the complexity of psi phenomena were discussions of mediumistic communications from the living. Far from being unknown or ignored by spiritualists, these communications have been discussed in the spiritualist literature from the beginning. An early mention of this phenomenon appears in Ballou's previously mentioned book. He wrote: "Responses have been made, purporting to come from the spirits of persons deceased,—giving their names, relationship to the living, and various communications,—but afterwards it turned out that the persons represented as dead were alive in the flesh!" (Ballou, 1853, p. 29).

In his *Letters and Tracts on Spiritualism*, Judge John Worth Edmonds (1874) discussed the existence of these cases. In a letter written in October of 1857, Edmonds mentioned a case of a communication from a man he had not seen for over fifteen years. He summarized the case as follows: "I had not seen him in several years; he was not at all in my mind at the time, and he was unknown to the medium. Yet he identified himself unmistakably, not only by his peculiar characteristics, but by referring to matters known only to him and me" (Edmonds, 1874, p. 116).

Later on, Allan Kardec (1876) mentioned the evocation of spirits of the living. Both Kardec and his translator Anna Blackwell presented cases of evocations of living spirits (Kardec, 1876, pp. 350–353). In Kardec's views, obtained through mediumistic communications: "The moment most favourable for the evocation of a person in the flesh is during his natural sleep; because his spirit, being then comparatively free, can come to the caller as easily as it can go elsewhere" (Kardec, 1876, p. 345).⁹ Later articles published in the 1870s by other authors discussed the existence of communications from the living. These included Nehrer's (1874) "Apparitions of Incarnated Spirits", and Damiani's (1875) "The Double", both of which appeared in the journal, *Human Nature*.

In 1881, in the journal, *Light*, George Wyld wrote: "Spirits of living bodies can, under certain conditions, enter the spirit world and act in all respects as if they were external spirits finally emancipated from the flesh."

⁹ The cases of Blackwell and Kardec—and other examples of evocations of spirits of the living in Kardec's journal *Revue Spirite* (Études, 1860/2001)—were not evidential in any way. Others, however, were (reviews of these cases appear in Bozzano, n.d.b; Curnow, 1927; Dallas, 1924).

From the 1890s on British spiritualist William T. Stead practiced automatic writing (Stead, 1893a, 1893b, 1894). He received messages from supposed deceased persons and from living ones. An example of this telepathic automatism was presented in his little book, *How I Know that the Dead Return*, published in 1909. A lady friend of Stead had spent the weekend at Haslemere, about thirty miles from London. On Monday, Stead sat down to use his automatic writing to see if he could find out if she had left for London. He received the following message:—

I am very sorry to tell you I have had a very painful experience, of which I am almost ashamed to speak. I left Haslemere at 2.27 p.m. in a second-class carriage, in which there were two ladies and one gentleman. When the train stopped at Godalming the ladies got out, and I was left alone with the man. After the train started he left his seat and came close to me. I was alarmed and repelled him. He refused to go away, and tried to kiss me. I was furious. We had a struggle. I seized his umbrella and struck him, but it broke, and I was beginning to fear that he would master me, when the train began to slow up before arriving at Guildford Station. He got frightened, let go of me, and before the train reached the platform he jumped out and ran away. I was very much upset. But I have the umbrella. [Stead, 1909, pp. 18–19]

The lady later confirmed the story with the exception of one detail. The umbrella was hers, and not her attacker's.

Another fascinating contribution came from astral projector Vincent Turvey. In his book, *The Beginnings of Seership* (n.d., ca 1909), Turvey says he projected out of his body and was able to communicate through mediums. It was reported that the sitters recognized Turvey by the content of the communication.

The assumption made by all of these authors was that just as it was believed possible that spirits of the dead could communicate through a medium, the spirit of a living person could do the same under the proper conditions. These ideas should be seen in the context of other beliefs. In those times many writers had discussed the concept of soul excursions, or of the human double. During the nineteenth century such authors as Crowe (1848), Kardec (1876), Moses (M.A. Oxon., 1876), Nehrer (1874), and Owen (1860) discussed the idea and presented cases of such phenomena as apparitions of the living. It was clearly believed that the spirit of the living could do similar things that the spirit of the dead could do.

The discussion of these incidents illustrates how interest in survival in general, and in Spiritualism in particular, has contributed to the understanding of the complexity of mediumistic communications.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

I have argued in this paper that the concept of survival, refracted through the lenses of Spiritualism and mediumship practice, has contributed a context conducive to the development of different aspects of parapsychology. While some of this is well known, I have attempted to present material that is not generally discussed in our literature.

Both the founding of the SPR and the early involvement of J. B. Rhine in parapsychology can, to a great extent, be traced to concerns about survival and about the wider issue of the nature of human beings. Within the SPR, the idea of survival had a positive influence on research and theory. That is, the early SPR researchers appropriated phenomena such as apparitions, haunted

houses and mediumship from the survival context that Spiritualism presented in England and this shaped the research agenda of the Society.

In the case of the Rhines, there is no question that, to a large extent, interest in survival led them to the field and to Duke University. But eventually survival had a 'contrary' effect. That is, survival led to later ESP experimental work unrelated to the idea of life after death and, in fact, J. B. Rhine eventually came to the conclusion that survival was an untestable problem.¹⁰ This is an example of how a particular idea or context can be influential in the course of history by contributing to an effect that is different from what is expected. Thus, just as mediumship influenced both the development of the concept of the subconscious mind (Ellenberger, 1970) and of some psychiatric diagnoses (Le Maléfan, 1999), the survival question influenced the development of modern experimental parapsychology. I would not claim that the context of survival was the only factor which led towards the 'new' parapsychology that Rhine and his associates developed through their experimental work (e.g., Mauskopf & McVaugh, 1980; L. E. Rhine, 1971). But it was certainly one of the main initial forces and should be recognized as such.

The contributions of spiritualists to the enterprise were more direct. Among these were their discussions of psi-from-the-living and of psychological explanations for phenomena, as well as recording the existence of mediumistic communications from the living. Spiritualists actively influenced the construction of these concepts, and more broadly put, contributed to the awareness of the complexity of psi phenomena.

Another example of a 'contrary' effect was the initial work of Myers within the SPR. Early in his career Myers published papers that suggested that automatism and telepathy could account for some of the supposed evidence for survival in mediumistic communications (e.g., Myers, 1884). At this stage in his career the idea of survival led Myers to develop a psychology of the subliminal that, while prompted by survival, was not adopting such an explanation for the phenomena. While Rhine abandoned the study of mediums, Myers continued it. But like Rhine, Myers initially did not believe in survival. This was to change later in his career (e.g., Myers, 1903).

There were other direct and indirect and unexpected effects of survival that I have not discussed. Some may be the development of free-response methodology and instrumental studies. The early free-response analysis methods could be seen as a consequence of attempts to evaluate survival by establishing the presence of veridical information. The use of instruments may not have developed directly from the idea of survival, but it was certainly motivated by the study of mediumship. Such ideas await further study.

Some may say that parapsychology started to move forward when the field was able to conquer such superstitious ideas as survival, and such primitive and inefficient methodologies as séance studies. But there is a different way to see these developments. Instead of thinking that parapsychology has progressed because it has discarded the metaphysical and the spiritual, we may assert the opposite. Change has taken place thanks in part to the contributions of such

¹⁰ For discussions about Rhine's ideas about survival and his ESP research see Chari (1982) and Palmer (1982).

ideas as that of survival of bodily death, and not simply in spite of it. This is similar to the suggestions of some historians of science and medicine as regards the contribution of the role of the Hermetic tradition, mesmerism, and phrenology to science and medicine. The way the influence was transmitted and the way in which it was received is secondary to this argument. The point is that we should be careful in accepting ideas that present science as the simple conquest over what some regard now as unscientific concepts. Without denying the *essential* role of research, especially if it is systematic and programmatic, the growth of science cannot be accounted for solely by research findings, and certainly neither can the growth of parapsychology. A variety of such extra-scientific or social factors as the training and personality of scientists, and the views of what is acceptable or not are known to be influential on the course of science. Similarly, such ideas as survival of bodily death have had an effect as well.

Of course we need to be critical of the influence of survival. I am not claiming this was the only factor nor am I claiming that there is no merit in having changed from a predominantly survival-oriented parapsychology to a more secular-based one which relates psychic functioning to psychological and physical variables. I am only concerned with recognizing important aspects of our history that are sometimes forgotten by modern practitioners.¹¹

Scientifically trained parapsychologists suffer from this lack of historical memory for a variety of reasons. Some focus on issues such as fraud, which was common among many physical mediums. Others focus on methodological problems, such as the ambiguities in the evaluation of the source of veridical information and the role of chance in mediumistic communications. For such researchers, it is difficult to see beyond the reputation of fraud and the ambiguities of survival evidence. Our past is perceived to be too difficult, too dirty—to use the dirty test tube argument—to be useful for research. Consequently, not only is the area of survival ignored, but there is no interest in learning about the beginnings of our field. While I believe we need to be careful not to fall into extremes, there is certainly some truth in these perspectives.

In addition, some modern critics and parapsychologists see the connection between parapsychology and the ideas of spirituality and survival of bodily death as problematic for our field. James Alcock (1981, 1987) has argued that parapsychologists are merely interested in finding the soul and are not real scientists. In this view, interest in the concept of survival and actual research on the topic are seen as a validation of this metaphysical driving force said to motivate parapsychologists. More recently, Robert L. Morris (2000) has stated that parapsychology is connected to 'problematic' metaphysical origins. This, Morris argues, is a kind of public relations problem for parapsychology. Whether or not we personally find parapsychology's connections to occultism, Spiritualism, and the like embarrassing is a matter each of us needs to resolve. Workers in the field react to this problem according to their training, goals and

¹¹ In addition, we need to remember that many members of the general public are interested in and believe in survival of death. The point is that important issues like this one are not limited to the opinion of the scientifically trained, however capable we think scientists are to evaluate the evidence.

views of the purpose of the field. But a squeamishness about survival and its place in our history keeps us from recognizing how rich is the historical impact of survival on parapsychology, and how much beyond giving us a starting point and an initial agenda this impact, in fact, goes.

I hope that I have not been misunderstood in my goals. My purpose has not been to glorify Spiritualism nor the concept of survival. I am not arguing that these were the only factors at work. Instead, I hope that their influence will become more visible to contemporary parapsychologists. My goal is difficult to achieve because some of the points discussed in this paper are not clear unless you have access to difficult-to-obtain literature. But it is important to balance views of the history of psychical research in which survival and Spiritualism are only stages along the road to scientific parapsychology. While this is not a completely incorrect view, it is not enough. Concepts of survival in particular and Spiritualism in general are not mere antecedents nor mere stages that have been superseded. Instead they are rich and complex initiators and contributors to a variety of developments.

It may certainly be argued that a similar paper could have been written about how survival has retarded the growth of parapsychology. I am sure some arguments and examples can be found to defend this position as well. Much more work needs to be done to explore the influence of survival on the development of parapsychology in detail, not to mention the influence of other conceptual traditions such as dualism and vitalism. One approach might use biography by focusing on the lives of survival and anti-survival psychical researchers. Other work might investigate such issues as the development of the concept of mediumship and of ideas about the process behind mediumistic communications.

To conclude, it is my hope that I have been successful in reminding my readers about the importance of survival to parapsychology. While survival is not as important today as it used to be in parapsychology, its past influence is an example of the many factors that have contributed to the development of this field.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND DEDICATION

The research for this work was possible thanks to the rich library resources of the Eileen J. Garrett Library of the Parapsychology Foundation. I wish to thank Lisette Coly for useful editorial suggestions.

While I was finishing writing this paper New York City was attacked by terrorists. I wish to dedicate the article to the memory of all the victims of the attack.

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