BEYOND DEATH

Evidence for Life After Death

By

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This thought-provoking and readable review of the issue of life after death assesses the collective force, or intellectual merit, of the most convincing and best-documented cases currently available. The author examines the subject of reincarnation with discussions of memory studies and recognition, responsive xenoglossy, the case of Bishen Chand, the Shanti Devi case, and the skeptic's reply to these studies. Following chapters cover apparitions of the dead and the Watseka Wonder including sections on group apparitions, the Butler case, the ghost of flight 401, the Grey Lady and the Cheltenham ghost; out-of-body experiences; and communications from the dead. Appendices address other skeptical considerations such as the impossibility of life after death and the scientific status of belief in life after death.

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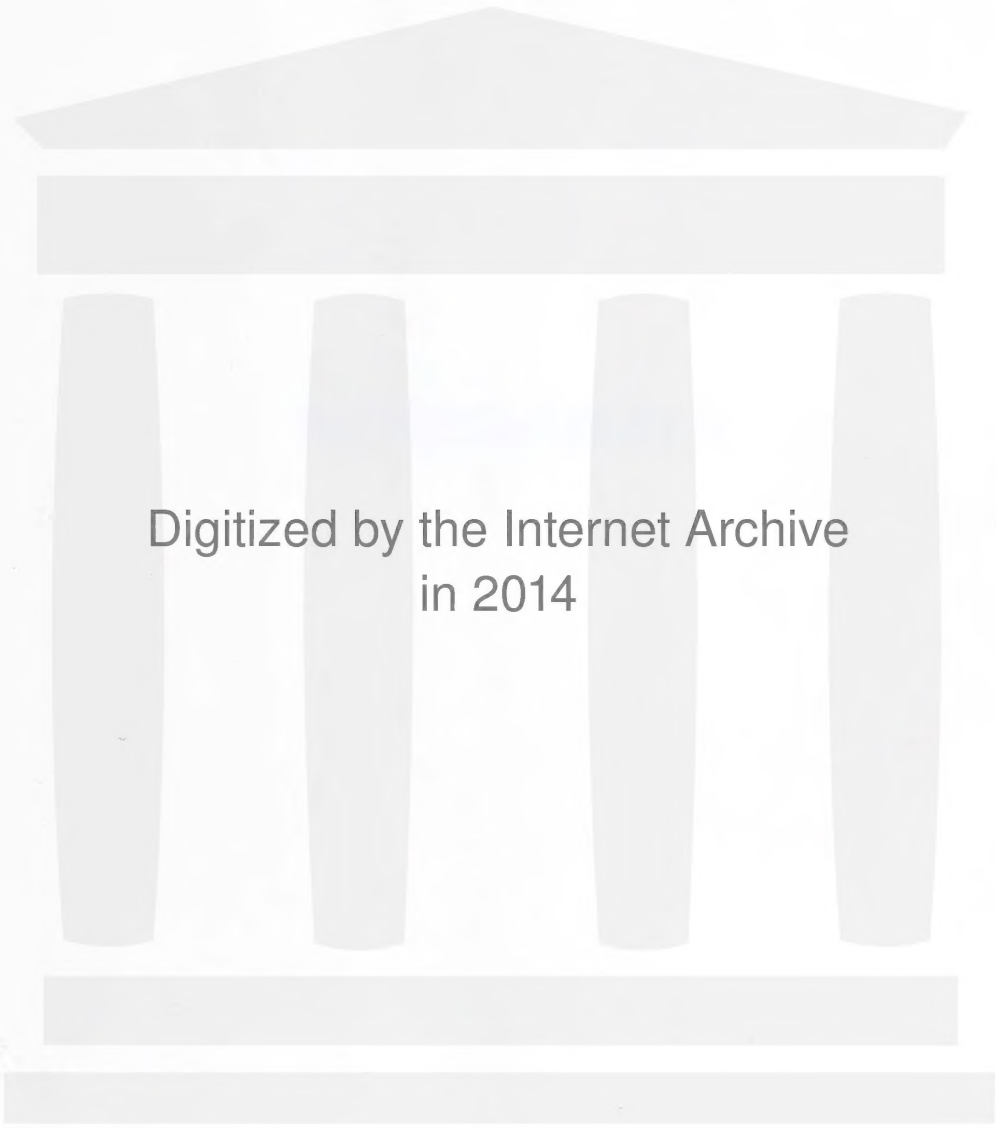

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Dr. Robert Almeder received his Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Pennsylvania and, as a Fellow of the Council for Philosophical Studies, did post-doctoral work in Logic and Philosophy of Science at Stanford University. Recipient of The Outstanding Educator of America Award in 1974 and of the Georgia State University Alumni Distinguished Professor Award in 1984, Dr. Almeder has published over fifty philosophical essays in such journals as *Philosophy of Science, Synthese, The American Philosophical Quarterly, Philosophia, Erkenntnis* and *The History of Philosophy Quarterly.* He has published, or co-published, eight other books including *The Philosophy of Charles Peirce: A Critical Introduction* (Blackwell, 1980).

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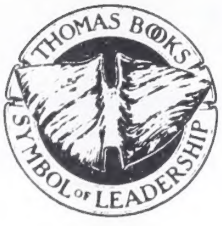

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To the Memory of

Patty Ann Hooke

Philosophy is the history of man's endeavors to come to terms with death.

Anonymous

The first question, then, which I have to ask is: Supposing such a thing to be true, what is the kind of proof which I ought to demand to satisfy me of its truth.

C. S. Peirce (Collected Papers, 2.112)

Don't you see, Crito, it is not you that I am trying to convince with these arguments for life-after-death, it is myself.

Plato (Phaedo)

PREFACE

FOR THE FIRST TIME in human history we have a body of factual evidence strongly supporting belief in some form of life after death. Until recently, belief in life after death rested upon theological or philosophical grounds and as a result has never secured the same universal assent generally accorded certain factual beliefs. In the past few decades, however, the scientific method has been applied to testimony regarding reincarnation, apparitions of the dead, spirit possession, out-of-body experiences, and communications from the dead. The results of this examination are philosophically striking and constitute, I believe, strong evidence for belief in some form of personal survival after death.

Because of the universal importance of the issue of life after death, I have written this book for the general reader. Thus, while the tone is somewhat reflective in spots, this book is not intended for scientists or philosophers. My concern here is to offer a thoughtful and readable review of the issue by confronting the strongest objections to all the best evidence presently available for belief in some form of life after death. My conclusion is that the belief survives the onslaught of the strongest skeptical arguments. It is more reasonable to believe in some form of life after death than it is to believe in nothing after death.

At any rate, the purpose of this book is not to generate any new case studies on reincarnation, apparitions of the dead, out-of-body experiences, communications from the dead or possessions; nor is the purpose to offer a collection of interesting case studies on these topics. *The purpose, rather, is to assess the collective force, or intellectual merit, of the most convincing and best-documented cases presently available on these topics.* And, although many of the cited case studies occur in various journals unfamiliar to the general public, I make no apology for citing them. They provide the best available evidence.

To be sure, there has always been testimony about memories of past lives, ghosts, out-of-body experiences (including near-death experiences)

and communications with the dead. But until such testimony was considered worthy of being taken as evidence for life after death, rather than as first-class evidence for the lunacy, depravity or stupidity of those who testified to such experiences, the belief based upon such testimony could not be taken seriously. But recently, for reasons we shall see, we have had to take this testimony seriously, and, consequently, we have made dramatic advances in examining the belief by asking what it would take to show that such a belief is true.

Even if we take seriously the evidence that there is life after death, however, we must remember that extraordinary beliefs require extraordinary evidence, and the belief in life after death is surely an extraordinary belief.

Some philosophers and scientists may think this book is too popular and not critical enough. Lay readers may find it too reflective. Such are the predictable responses to any effort seeking the middle ground to meet the challenge of saying something reasonably reflective that also has some fundamental appeal on an issue of vital importance.

In writing this book I have received a good deal of encouragement and assistance from my colleagues, Mark Woodhouse, Barton Palmer, Susan Palmer and Bill Evans. Susan Palmer and Bill Evans read every line of each earlier version of this book, and their suggestions and comments were immensely beneficial.

Finally, as far as I know, I have never consciously communicated with the dead, left my body, seen a ghost or had memories of a past life. In this regard I am like the majority of persons. Moreover, unlike the late English philosopher C.D. Broad, who once said that he would be annoyed to discover that he did survive his bodily corruption in some essential way, I am not at all sure that one should be annoyed to discover as much. For all we know, an afterlife may well be more interesting than the life we now know. Presumably, we can deal with the former only when we are convinced of the latter and of what it may entail.

Robert Almeder
Atlanta, Georgia

INTRODUCTION

LET ME explain what motivated me to write this book.

In April 1979, when I was writing an essay on the nature and limits of human knowledge, a philosopher friend challenged two of my most cherished beliefs about human knowledge. The first was that all human knowledge about factual matters is the product of either direct observation or inference from other known facts directly observed. The second belief was that there is no *private* knowledge.

At any rate, the philosopher friend who challenged my two beliefs did so in a curious way. He invited me to visit a well-known psychic for what is called "a reading" or "a consultation." He was, he said, confident that whatever transpired would be sufficient to change my mind about my two beliefs.

Frankly, I had always viewed psychics as gypsy fortune-tellers in contemporary garb. Ignorant people could be excused for taking their nonsense seriously, but that a well-known philosopher could be taken in by that superstitious rot I found deplorable and quite disturbing. What could be more preposterous than to accept my philosopher friend's challenge?

But I took up the challenge, discreetly made an appointment for a reading with the recommended psychic, and thus initiated the series of incredible events that led to the writing of this book.

When telephoning to make an appointment for the reading, I gave the psychic's secretary no information but my last name. The appointment secretary told me to bring a 60-minute unused cassette tape and some photographs of family members. He also apprised me of the customary offering for this service. When I hung up the phone it was with the awkward conviction that I could never again be accused of being dogmatic about my philosophical beliefs.

The psychic's name was Paul. When I arrived at his middle-class home where he conducted readings, I was amused to find that he did not

know who I was or why I was ringing his doorbell. I refreshed his memory briefly and, after leading me to his living room, he put the empty cassette into the recorder, sat down across from me and examined the photographs handed to him without comment. Affable and informal in appearance, Paul looked more like a middle-aged accountant than a gypsy.

He made a number of predictions about events that were to soon transpire in my life, such as "You will take a trip to Europe within one year," "You will sell your home by June," and "Your father will live a long time." In fact, I never went to Europe, it took more than three years to sell the home and my father had died a month earlier.

However, many of his other equally specific predictions which *did* come to pass were hard to explain away by generalities, probable knowledge or lucky guesses. He predicted: "You will publish two books within two years," "A certain member of your family" (he mentioned the person by name), "is having the following problems and will deal with them in the following ways," "You will be working for a certain foundation within a couple of years," and so on.

Although sensitivity to family matters prohibits my going into details here, he was quite accurate in informing me of problems specifically named family members were encountering at that time. He offered specific information about their lives, information I did not then have but which I subsequently verified. He provided me with information about various distant family members, although he could have no way of knowing as much even if I granted him the power of being an accomplished mind reader.

Near the end of this perplexing and entertaining event, Paul asked if I had any questions. I asked for details attending the recent deaths of two philosopher friends, Douglas Greenlee and James Cornman. In response to my question, he closed his eyes and said that the "tall one" (Douglas Greenlee) was "around me." He said nothing about the other philosopher. In saying what he did say, he meant to convey the impression that the departed "spirit," if you will, of Douglas Greenlee was, for some reason, staying close to me. Paul then said that Douglas "had it back," that although there had been something wrong with one of his extremities, he now "had it back." Paul asked if anything he said made sense to me. Deceptively calm, I told him that Douglas had had his left leg removed (owing to an intractable case of bone cancer) prior to his death. As a result, Douglas had had a wooden leg for some time before he died. I asked Paul what he had meant by saying that "he's got it back."

He told me that although Douglas had lost his leg "on this side," he had it back "on the other side." I smiled incredulously and Paul responded, matter of factly, that Douglas was referring to the fact that his "astral body" had both legs and, as a result, he was not hampered in his coming and going by the equivalent of a wooden leg. Paul asked me if Douglas had ever complained about having to get around on a wooden leg. I said yes.

Paul then offered the amusing observation that those two philosophers would contact me later through someone else. When I asked why, he replied that my long search for the truth was going to be successful.

Several weeks later, I was asked to address a study group in Atlanta. In speaking to the group I stood with my back close to the table with an empty chair. Upon leaving the meeting, a woman I had seen on two previous occasions (although I had never spoken with her) came up to me in the parking lot. After a brief greeting, she said that she needed to tell me that while I was addressing the group there was a "man" sitting in the chair at the table directly behind me. Before I could begin to reply that there was no one in the chair behind me, she described "the man." In so doing she provided me with a perfect description of my deceased friend, Douglas Greenlee, who the philosopher Paul had said was "around me."

Although stunned, I asked her what Douglas was doing as he sat there. Her reply: "He was just sitting there with his legs crossed and he was shaking his left foot." She told me this, she said, because she was a medium and, as such, felt obliged whenever a spirit or spirits appeared around certain people to tell the people involved about it; she said the appearance of such spirits is invariably a sign that there is something the deceased wants the living to do. She further noted, without any assistance on my part, that usually the people involved were friendly with the deceased, worked with the deceased or took up the same endeavors.

Like me, Douglas Greenlee wrote on the philosophy of Charles Peirce (the father of American philosophy). Like me, he had been a past president of the Charles S. Peirce Society. (The Charles S. Peirce Society is a society of scholars and philosophers who are dedicated to the study and explication of the philosophy of Charles Peirce.)

She suggested that there was something Douglas wanted me to do and, although she was not quite sure what it was, she felt confident that that was the reason he was around me. Perplexed, I asked her advice and she recommended a seance. Moreover, although she herself did not conduct seances (she was a "closet" medium), she had heard of a reputable

medium (whom I shall call Virginia) who had formerly been hired by MGM to get "in touch" with Agatha Christie to determine the validity of parts of the film *Agatha.* The film was about the events of Agatha Christie's life during the period of her disappearance, a period she would never discuss when she was alive. Virginia lived in Atlanta and was affiliated with a local foundation. In addition to conducting occasional seances, Virginia taught courses in psychic development.

The woman in the parking lot left me with the promise that she would send me some information on seances at a later date. I stored all this information and went on a previously scheduled business trip to the state of Maine.

One week later at a family outing in Maine, I quite coincidentally encountered a developing psychic and, in the interest of pleasant conversation, enthusiastically conveyed to her the above story about the woman in the parking lot. Intrigued, she asked me for the full name of the "spirit" involved, because she would, if I wanted, take the name back to her meditation group to see whether they could "contact" Douglas. This she offered to do in the interest of finding out what, if anything, Douglas wanted me to do. I agreed. Incidentally, in all this I had said nothing about the other philosopher, James Cornman.

When I returned to Atlanta the following week, two events had occurred in my absence. The first was that my wife enrolled us in an evening course entitled "Psychic Development I" at the local foundation. The instructor was Virginia, the medium (certified by the Arthur Ford Foundation in Miami) mentioned by the woman in the parking lot, the woman who had subsequently sent us a brochure of courses offered at the foundation. The second was that the psychic in Maine had called to say that she and her friends had succeeded in "contacting" Douglas.

The psychic in Maine later told me that Douglas was around me because his wife (Douglas had married shortly before he died) was having some problems that I ought to help her with. It was not clear just what the problems were. She also told me that "incidentally, there was another spirit around Douglas; this was a heavyset, Irish fellow who apparently laughed a lot and wrote much." She described his "other fellow" as having close-cropped brown hair and said that he looked a bit like a marine. I found this information astonishing because the description was an adequate description of James Cornman (the other philosopher whom the psychic Paul said would contact me after the reading), and because I had said nothing about Cornman to either this psychic or the woman in the parking lot (the woman in the parking lot said nothing about Cornman).

On the basis of this last information, I telephoned Douglas's widow (whom I had never met) to determine whether there was something I could do for her, something only I would be suited to do. I told her nothing of any of the foregoing events. I simply said that I had been a friend of her former husband and that I was calling to offer my services in any way that might prove helpful. I recall expecting her to say that she was having trouble editing Douglas's papers and that my call came at the right moment for that purpose. Instead, however, she noted no particular problem that I might be helpful in solving. She had not even begun editing Douglas's works. However, she did express a strong desire to talk with anyone who knew anything about Douglas. She had known him only a short time before his death, and her expressed desire seemed quite natural at the time.

When I later returned the call to my psychic friend in Maine and told her that Douglas's wife did not seem to have any particular problem that I might be helpful in solving, she corrected me and said that the problem was that Douglas's wife was having trouble in accepting Douglas's death and "letting go" of him. Although this observation seemed to fit with Douglas's wife's desire to talk with Douglas's friends, I saw no commanding reason to call her back. I still didn't know what Douglas was supposedly interested in having me do.

My interest in psychic phenomena bloomed in Virginia's "Psychic Development I," which began a couple of weeks after my return from the Maine trip. Here again, however, I made a point of remaining as anonymous as possible, and at no time did I ever tell Virginia (or anybody else, for that matter) anything of the preceding events. Near the end of the course, Virginia held a seance for her students which, including me, numbered about 13 adults of various walks of life.

The evening of the seance came and we all entered the room. I had never been to a seance before and remembered feeling that this whole business was perfectly vulgar, something out of an Agatha Christie story. Visions of Houdini exposing all the fraudulent mediums haunted my mind. It was a candlelight seance.

In a candlelight seance, the medium, after suitable instructions to the participants, lights a candle in the room and offers some prayers while all the participants sit in a circle, eyes closed and holding hands. The medium is also in the circle of those holding hands. The room is darkened, the only light being thrown by the candle. Virginia, who was not a trance medium, told us she would be just as conscious as the rest of us and that each of us, when requested by her, should call out the full

name of the deceased person whom we were interested in contacting. Thereafter, the medium would call the deceased spirit to the group to communicate with both the person who initiated the call through the medium *and* the other participants in the seance. On this last point, Virginia instructed us to say precisely whatever came into our minds after the spirit of some deceased person had been called. In this sort of seance, the participants sometimes "pick up" as much information as the medium does depending on the psychic receptivity of the various participants.

When Virginia finally got to me and asked whom I wanted to contact, I said "Douglas Greenlee." I hasten to add once again that I had never said anything about Douglas to Virginia or any other class member. Virginia promptly announced that Douglas was present. But then she said that something unusual was happening. Douglas, she said, brought with him another man who had not been summoned. I asked her to describe the other person and she said that he was heavyset, had close-cropped hair (brown), was very happy and a writer. He told her, she said, that he and I had socialized together. She then asked me if I knew this other person and if I wanted both Douglas and this other man to stay. I answered yes and told her that the other fellow's name was Jim. I had no idea what was going on in that room, but whatever it was it held me with vice-like fascination.

When this happened, a young woman on the other side of the circle said, "Douglas was in the real estate business." Although Douglas was a philosopher, he had a real estate business at the time of his death. She then went on to ask me if Douglas had a wife. When I said yes, she replied that Douglas wanted me to know that he missed his wife very much. Virginia then added that Douglas and Jim were happy and that both wanted me to know that on my birthday I would receive a green package in the mail and that they were both happy about the contents. Shortly thereafter, Douglas and Jim left. The course "Psychic Development I" ended the next week or so.

About three weeks later, on my birthday, a green package was delivered to my office. It contained the offprints of an essay I had recently published. The essay, written a full two years earlier, was entitled "Peirce on Meaning" (*Synthese,* vol. 41, 1979) and was about the nature and limits of scientific reasoning. In it I had argued essentially that belief in the existence of unobservable entities (like spirits) is capable of being established as scientific fact.

As a result of all these autobiographical events, I began to seek ways of explaining the above without resorting to belief in life after death. One impulse led to another and the results of that effort are herein contained. I leave it to the reader to determine whether the above autobiographical items can *in toto* be explained without our having to believe in life after death. In the light of the contents of this book, my personal belief is that they cannot and I am, as a result, happy to abandon the two beliefs that my philosopher friend challenged.

R.A.

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BEYOND DEATH

CHAPTER ONE

REINCARNATION

I. INTRODUCTION

DO HUMAN BEINGS reincarnate? That one's personality could survive the death of the body, thus implying that one's body may not be essential to one's full personality, and then some time later take up a new body for some purpose or other, seems philosophically fantastic. Nevertheless, serious philosophers of no less stature than Plato have argued for reincarnation on non-religious grounds. Of course, most of those who believe in reincarnation do so for religious reasons, and this is apparent as far back as the ancient Pythagoreans for whom belief in reincarnation (or transmigration of souls) was simply a belief accepted on religious faith.

Apart from its religious inspiration, however, the belief has been relatively unattended by serious philosophical discussion. This is because most philosophers have been preoccupied with what they consider a more pressing problem: the problem of whether we can successfully equate human personality with the corruptible body. If human personality should turn out to be identified with some non-physical, and naturally incorruptible principle (like a soul), then there would be nothing absurd about the belief in reincarnation. But the truth of the belief in reincarnation would not follow from that fact alone. After all, even if one's personality could in some way survive one's biological death, it would not thereby follow that the personality will reincarnate.

At present, the philosophical debate on the nature of human personality is quite complicated. Anyway, in this chapter we can assume at the outset something I shall prove in the Appendix, namely, that belief in personal survival after death is at least not absurd or factually impossible. Given this assumption, let us examine the best evidence for belief

in reincarnation. For reasons we shall see later, many philosophers manage to ignore this evidence when trying to determine whether human beings are more than just sophisticated bodies.

II. MEMORY STUDIES AND RECOGNITION: THE SWARNLATA CASE

In his *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation,* Ian Stevenson provides us with three striking cases that we can examine in the light of predictable skeptical replies.[1] We shall also consider a fourth case not presented by Stevenson. The first case is the case of Swarnlata.

In 1951 an Indian man named Mishra took his three-year-old daughter, Swarnlata, and others, on a 170-mile trip south from the city of Panna (in the district of Madhya Pradesh) to the city of Jabalpur, also in the same district. On the return journey, as they passed through the city of Katni (57 miles north of Jabalpur), Swarnlata unexpectedly asked the driver to turn down a certain road to "her house." The driver quite understandably ignored her request. Later, when the same group was taking tea in Katni, Swarnlata told them that they would get better tea at "her" house nearby. These statements puzzled her father Mishra because he knew that neither he nor any member of his family had ever lived near Katni. His puzzlement deepened when he learned that Swarnlata told other children in the family further details of what she claimed was a previous life in Katni as a member of a family named Pathak. In the next two years Swarnlata frequently performed for her mother (and later in front of others) unusual dances and songs which, as far as her parents knew, Swarnlata had had no opportunity to learn. In 1958, when she was seven, Swarnlata met a woman from the area of Katni whom Swarnlata claimed to have known in her earlier life. At this time Mishra first confirmed numerous statements his daughter made about her "previous life."

In March 1959, a professor Banerjee (a parapsychologist from the University of Rajasthab in Jaipur) began to investigate the case. From the Mishra home in Chhatarpur, Banerjee traveled to Katni, where he became acquainted with the Pathak family of which Swarnlata claimed to have been a member. He noted before journeying to Katni some nine detailed statements Swarnlata had made about the Pathak residence. These statements he confirmed upon his arrival. Incidentally, before Banerjee went to Katni, the Mishra family did not know about the Pathak family.

Banerjee also found that the statements made by Swarnlata corresponded closely to the life of Biya, a daughter in the Pathak family and

deceased wife of a man named Pandley who lived in Maihar. Biya had died in 1939—eight years before the birth of Swarnlata.

In the summer of 1959, members of the Pathak family and of Biya's marital family traveled to Chhatarpur (where the Mishra family lived). Swarnlata, without being introduced to these people, and under conditions controlled by the parapsychology investigators, recognized them all, called them by name and related personal incidents and events in their various lives with Biya, events that, according to these relatives, only Biya could have known. For example, Swarnlata claimed that, as Biya, she had had gold fillings in her front teeth. Biya's sisters-in-law confirmed as much. The Pathaks eventually accepted Swarnlata as Biya reincarnated, even though they had never previously believed in the possibility of reincarnation.

After these visits, in the same summer of 1959, Swarnlata and members of her family went first to Katni and Maihar where the deceased Biya had spent much of her married life and where she died. In Maihar, Swarnlata recognized additional people and places and commented on various changes that had occurred since the death of Biya. Her statements were independently verified. Later, Swarnlata continued to visit Biya's brother and children for whom she showed the warmest affection.

The songs and dances that Swarnlata had performed presented some problem, however. Biya spoke Hindu and did not know how to speak Bengali, whereas the songs Swarnlata had sung (and danced to) were in Bengali.

After a careful examination of this case, Ian Stevenson concludes that it is very difficult to explain the facts of the case without admitting that Swarnlata had paranormal knowledge. After all, how otherwise could Swarnlata have known the details of the family and the house? These details (including the fact that Biya had gold fillings in her teeth—a fact that even her brother had forgotten) were by no means in the public domain. Moreover, how otherwise could we explain her recognition of members of the Pathak and Pandley families? How can her knowledge of the former (as opposed to the present) appearances of places and people be explained? Her witnessed recognitions of people amount to 20 in number. As Stevenson notes, most of the recognitions occurred in such a way that Swarnlata was obliged to give a name or state a relationship between Biya and the person in question. On several occasions serious attempts were made to mislead her or to deny that she gave the correct answers, but such attempts failed.

Could there have been a conspiracy among all the witnesses in the various families (the Mishras, the Pathaks and the Pandleys)? Might not

all of them have conspired to bring off a big hoax? Well, according to Stevenson, a family of prominence such as the Pathaks, with far-reaching business interests, is unlikely to participate in a hoax with so many people involved, any one of which might later defect. If a hoax occurred it is more likely that it came from the Chhatarpur side. But even here, Sri M. L. Mishra had nothing to gain from such a hoax. He even doubted for a long time the authenticity and veridicality of his daughter's statements, and he made no move to verify them for six years. Most agree that they had nothing to gain but public ridicule.

But even if we suppose that there was some attempt at fraud, who would have tutored Swarnlata for success in such recognitions? Who would have taken the time to do it? Sri M. L. Mirsha, apart from Swarnlata, was the only other member of the family who received any public attention from Swarnalata's case. And what attention he received, he was not too happy about. Also, how could Sri Mishra have gotten some of the highly personal information possessed by Swarnlata about the private affairs of the Pathaks, e.g. Biya's husband taking her 1,200 rupees, or the incident at the wedding party with Srimati Agnihotri?

Might Swarnlata have been tutored by some stranger who knew Katni and the Pathaks? If so, how could he have access to Swarnlata? As Stevenson notes, like all children in India, especially girls, Swarnlata's movements were very carefully controlled by her family. She never saw strangers in the house alone and she was never out on the street unaccompanied. (See pages 80-83).

Apart from the legal documentation and methods used in Stevenson's examination of this case, what is interesting about this case is that it is one of very many similar cases.[2] Is there a plausible explanation of the facts in these cases without our having to appeal to the belief in reincarnation to explain them?

Before examining the skeptic's arguments with regard to whether the Swarnlata case presents us with good evidence for belief in reincarnation, let us consider two more cases.

III. RESPONSIVE XENOGLOSSY: THE LYDIA JOHNSON CASE

Xenoglossy refers to an ability to understand a foreign language not learned by the speaker in any normal way. This phenomenon has occurred in cases similar to the Swarnlata case and constitutes a special

kind of evidence in favor of reincarnation, evidence beyond the sort offered in the Swarnlata case. In *Xenoglossy,* Stevenson presents the case of Lydia Johnson.[3] The case is referred to as an instance of *responsive* xenoglossy, rather than a case of *recitative* xenoglossy. The latter occurs when a person can actually speak a language not previously taught to him and not knowing what the words mean or how to respond in the language, whereas the former occurs when the person can respond in the language and thus showing the ability to understand the language spoken.

In 1973, Lydia Johnson agreed to help her husband with his experiments in hypnotism. As it turned out, she was an excellent subject because she could easily slip into a deep trance. Doctor Harold Johnson (not his real name) was a distinguished and quite respected Philadelphia physician. He had taken up hypnotism in 1971 to help some of his patients in treatments they were receiving. As his experiments with his wife were working so well, he decided to try a hypnotic regression, taking her back in time. In the middle of the regression, she suddenly flinched (as if struck) and screamed. She clutched at her head. He ended the session immediately, but his wife had a headache that would not go away. Twice Johnson repeated the session and the result was the same. Each time Lydia awoke from the trance, she said she visualized a scene with water in which old people seemed to be forced into it to drown. She had felt herself being pulled down, and then the blow, her scream, and the headache. As a result of all this, Doctor Johnson then called in another hypnotist, one Doctor John Brown (not his real name). Doctor Brown repeated the regression, but, before the pain could strike again, he told her: "You are ten years younger than that." And then it happened. She began to talk—not in sentences but in words and occasional phrases. Some of it was in broken English, but much of it was in a foreign language that nobody there could understand. Her voice, moreover, was deep and masculine. Then from the mouth of this 37-year-old housewife came the words "I am a man." When asked her name, she said "Jensen Jacoby." In this trance she began in hesitating-English punctuated with foreign words to describe a past life. In this session (and in others that followed) she told, in her low masculine voice, of living in a small village in Sweden some three centuries ago. The sessions were tape-recorded and careful notes were kept. Swedish linguists were called in to translate Jensen's statements. In the later sessions he spoke almost exclusively in Swedish, a language totally foreign to Lydia. When asked "What do you do for a living?" he answered in sixteenth century

Swedish, "A farmer." "Where do you live?" He answered: "In the house." And when asked "Where is the house?" he answered, again in Swedish, "In Hansen." These last questions were also asked in Swedish.

According to all reports, Jensen showed a simple personality quite consistent with the peasant life he described. He showed little knowledge of anything beyond his own village and a trading center he visited. He raised cows, horses, goats and chickens. He ate goat's cheese, bread, milk, salmon and poppy seed cakes made by his wife, Latvia. He had built his own stone house, and he and Latvia had no children. He was one of three sons, his mother had been Norwegian, and he had run away from home.

Certain objects were brought in while Lydia was entranced. She was asked to open her eyes and identify the objects. As Jensen, she identified a model of the seventeenth century Swedish ship which she correctly identified in Swedish; so too a wooden container used then for measuring grain, a bow and arrow, and poppy seeds. She did not, however, know how to use modern tools, for example, pliers.

Apart from the fact that cases like this are somewhat rare, generally no one outside of trance states gives evidence of responsive xenoglossy. However, there are other cases of responsive xenoglossy in which the subject demonstrates a clear knowledge of historical events that neither the subject nor any interviewer could have had natural knowledge of in this life, because the truth of the claims made could be established only after the subject's testimony."[4]

IV. MEMORY EVIDENCE AND ACQUIRED SKILLS: THE CASE OF BISHEN CHAND

Bishen Chand was born in 1921 to the family of Ghulam in the city of Bareilly, India. At about one and a half, Bishen began asking questions about the town of Philbhit, a town some fifty miles from Bareilly. Nobody in the Ghulam family knew anybody in Philbhit. Bishen asked to be taken there, and it became obvious that he believed that he had lived there during an earlier life.[5]

As time passd, Bishen talked incessantly of his earlier life there in Philbhit. His family grew increasingly distressed with this behavior. By the summer of 1926 (when he was five-and-one-half years old), Bishen claimed to remember his previous life quite clearly. He remembered that his name had been Laxmi Narain, son of a wealthy landowner. He

claimed to remember an uncle Har Narain, who turned out to be Laxmi Narain's father. He also described the house in which he lived, saying it had a shrine room and separate quarters for women. Frequently, he had enjoyed the singing and dancing of Nautch girls, professional dancers who often functioned as prostitutes. He remembered enjoying parties of this sort at the home of a neighbor, Sander Lal, who had lived in a "house with a green gate." Indeed, little Bishen one day recommended to his father that he (the father) take on a mistress in addition to his wife.

Because Bishen Chand's family was poor (Bishen's father was a government clerk), Bishen's memories of an earlier and wealthier life only made him resentful of his present living conditions with the Ghulam family. He sometimes refused to eat the food, claiming that even his servants (in his former life) would not eat such food. He demanded meat and fish, and when his family would not provide it, he sought it out at the house of neighbors. He threw aside cotton clothes given to him by his family and demanded to be dressed in silk (cotton clothes were not fit for his servants). He demanded money from his father and when his father would not give it to him, he cried.

One day Bishen's father mentioned that he was thinking of buying a watch, and little Bishen Chand said: "Pappa, don't buy. When I go to Philbhit, I shall get you three watches from a Muslim watch dealer whom I established there." He then provided the name of the dealer.

His sister, Kamla, three years older than he, caught Bishen drinking brandy one day (thus explaining the dwindling supply of alcohol kept in the house for medicinal purposes only). In his typically superior way, the child told her that he was quite accustomed to drinking brandy. He drank a good deal of alcohol in his earlier life. Later, he claimed to have had a mistress (he knew the difference between a wife and a mistress) in his former life. Her name, he said, was Padma and, although she was a prostitute, he seemed to have considered her his exclusive property, since he proudly claimed to have killed a man he once saw coming from her apartment. Bishen Chand's memory claims came to the attention of one K. K. N. Sahay, an attorney in Bareilly. Sahay went to Bishen Chand's home and recorded the surprising things the young boy was saying. Thereafter, he arranged to take Bishen Chand, along with his father and older brother, to Philbhit. Not quite eight years had elapsed since the death of Laxmi Narain, whom this little boy was claiming to have been in his earlier life. Crowds gathered when they arrived at Philbhit. Nearly everyone in Philbhit had heard of the wealthy Narain

family and the profligate son, Laxmi, who had been involved with the prostitute, Padma (who still lived there), and how in a jealous rage Narain had shot and killed a rival lover of Padma's. Although Narain's family had been influential enough to get the charges dropped, Narain died a few months afterward of natural causes at age thirty-two.

When taken to his old government school, Bishen Chand ran to where his classroom had been. Somebody produced an old picture and Bishen recognized in it one of Laxmi Narain's classmates who happened to be in the crowd; and when the classmate asked him about the teacher, he correctly described him as a fat, bearded man.

In that part of town where Laxmi Narain had lived, Bishen Chand recognized the house of Sander Lal, the house which he had previously described (before being brought to Philbhit) as having a green gate. The lawyer, Sahay, when writing the report later for the national newspaper *The Leader* in August 1926, claimed to have seen the gate himself and verified that its color was green. The boy also pointed to the courtyard where he said the Nauch girls used to entertain with singing and dancing. Merchants in the area verified the boy's claims. In the accounts published by *The Leader,* Sahay wrote that the name of the prostitute with whom the boy associated in his previous life was repeatedly sought by people in the crowd (following the boy). When he mentioned the name "Padma," the people certified that the name was correct. During that remarkable day, the boy was presented with a set of *Tablas,* or drums. The father said that he (Bishen Chand) had never seen the Tablas before; but to the surprise of his family and all assembled, Bishen played them skillfully, as did Laxmi Narain much earlier. When the mother of Laxmi Narain met Bishen Chand, a strong attachment was immediately apparent between them. Bishen Chand answered the questions she asked (such as the time in his previous life when he had thrown out her pickles), and he successfully named and described Laxmi Narain's personal servant. He also gave the caste to which the servant had belonged. He later claimed that he preferred Laxmi Narain's mother to his own. Laxmi Narain's father was thought to have hidden some treasure before his death, but nobody knew where. When Bishen Chand was asked about the treasure, he led the way to the room of the family's former home. A treasure of gold coins was later found in this room giving credence to the boy's claim of having lived a former life in the house.

In examining this case, Stevenson urges that the case is especially significant because an early record was kept by a reliable attorney when most of the principals were still alive and capable of verifying Bishen's

memory claims. Many of the people who knew Laxmi Narain were still alive and well when Bishen was making his memory claims. They verified nearly all the statements Bishen made before he went to Philbhit. Moreover, according to Stevenson, the possibility of fraud is remote because Bishen Chand's family had little to gain from association with the Narains. It was well-known that the Narains had become destitute after Laxmi Narain had died. Like most families in cases similar to this, the events could not be explained in terms of anticipated financial gain.

V. THE SHANTI DEVI CASE

Another case should be considered. It is similar to the Bishen Chand case, and some researchers believe it offers the best available evidence of reincarnation. This is the celebrated Shanti Devi case.

However, owing to the inaccessibility of the original case study, and because some question remains about the method used in gathering and corroborating the facts of the case, I will not include this case for critical discussion along with the three cases listed above.[6] But, because it is an interesting case and shows what would be strong evidence, it is worthy of being considered.

Shanti Devi was born in 1926 in old Delhi. At three, she began to entertain her family with "stories" about a former life in which she had been married to a man named Kendarnarth, lived in nearby Muttra, had two children, and died in childbirth bearing a third child in 1925.

Like Swarnlata and Bishen Chand, she also described in detail the home in Muttra where she said she had lived with her husband and children. She said her name in that life was Ludgi. She further described the relatives of her former family and those of her husband, what her former life had been like, and how she had died. Unlike Swarnlata and Bishen Chand, however, her alleged reincarnation had occurred so quickly (one year after her death) that there was the possibility of extensive corroboration by extant relatives with fresh memories.

When her parents could no longer turn her from these "stories," her grand uncle, Kishen Chand, sent a letter to Muttra to see how much, if any, of the little girl's story might be true. He sent it to the address Shanti told him to send it to. The letter reached a startled widower, named Kendarnarth, who was still grieving the loss of his wife, Ludgi. Ludgi had died in childbirth in 1925. Even as a devout Hindu, he could not accept the fact that Ludgi was reborn, living in Delhi, and in

possession of an accurate picture of their life together. Suspecting some sort of fraud, Kendarnarth sent his cousin, Mr. Lal (who lived in Delhi), to investigate and interrogate the girl. If she were an imposter, his cousin would know. When Mr. Lal, on the pretext of business, went to Devi's home, Shanti opened the door and, after screaming, threw herself into the arms of the astonished visitor. Her mother came to the door and before the visitor could speak, Shanti (now nine) said: "Mother, this is a cousin of my husband! He lived not far from us in Muttra and then moved to Delhi. I am so happy to see him. He must come in. I want to know about my husband and sons."

With the Shanti family, M. Lal confirmed all the facts Shanti testified to over the years. As a result of this, they all agreed that Kendarnarth and the favorite son should come to Delhi as guests of the Devi's.

When Kendarnarth arrived with the son, Shanti showered them with kisses and pet names. She treated Kendarnarth as a devoted wife would be expected to, serving him biscuits and cheese. When Kendarnarth began to weep, Shanti began to console him using endearing little phrases known only to Ludgi and Kendarnarth. Eventually, the press featured the case and more distinguished investigators appeared on the scene.

The investigators decided to take Shanti to Muttra and have her lead them to the home where she had claimed to have lived and died in her earlier life.

When the train pulled into Muttra, Shanti cried out in delight and began waving to several people on the platform. She told the investigators with her that they were the mother and brother of her husband. She was right. More importantly, however, she got off the train and began to speak with and question them using, not the Hindustrani she had been taught in Delhi, but rather the dialect of the Muttra district. She had not been exposed to, nor had she been taught, this dialect. But she would have known this dialect if, like Ludgi, she had been a resident of Muttra.

Later, she led the investigators to her home and conveyed other information that only Ludgi could have known. For example, Kendarnarth asked her where she had hidden several rings before she had died. She said they were in a pot and buried in the ground of the old home where they had lived. The investigators subsequently found the rings where she had said they would be.

The case went forward, was celebrated in the international press and became the subject of extensive speculation by scholars everywhere. At

last notice, Shanti, for various reasons, never returned to Kendarnarth and is still living in Delhi with her Devi family. As far as we can tell, all those who had known Ludgi well accepted Shanti as Ludgi's reincarnation.

VI. THE SKEPTIC'S REPLY: AN ANALYSIS

A. Clairvoyance Plus Subconscious Impersonation

Is there any possible way of explaining the facts in the above cases without appealing to reincarnation? Apart from the question of hoax or fraud (both of which we can set aside for the good reasons offered above by Ian Stevenson on pages 5-6), some skeptics have offered various alternative explanations. The first consists in appealing to *clairvoyance plus impersonation.*

Under this explanation, in the Swarnlata case, for example, the skeptic may claim that (a) Swarnlata is *unknowlingly clairvoyant,* that is, although she does not know it, Swarnlata has paranormal knowledge (ESP) of certain past events and persons without having lived then, and without anybody having told her what happened; (b) Swarnlata, for some reason or other, *subconsciously identifies* with a particular person (Biya) who lived in the past, a person whose life and beliefs Swarnlata clairvoyantly understands; and (c) Swarnlata *subconsciously impersonates* or *dramatizes* that person (Biya) because Swarnlata sincerely but mistakenly believes that she is in fact that person.[7] In spite of the sweet plausibility of this explanation, however, there is much wrong with it.

As Pratt has pointed out, the children with memories of an earlier life do not, as a rule, show any signs of being generally gifted with clairvoyance.[8] Furthermore, if their "memories" are instances of clairvoyance (or ESP), what would account for its being exhibited in such a specialized, narrow way? As far as we know, clairvoyance is a *general* ability, and people who are clairvoyant are not generally clairvoyant with respect to *one* past event or series of past events in one person's family.

Moreover, as Pratt also notes, even if we were to explain the content of the "memories" by appeal to some highly specialized form of disguised clairvoyance (or ESP), these children, like Swarnlata, would need to be credited with *super psi* (or super ESP) in order to acquire such a large number of correct details about the life, relatives and circumstances of a dead person. Clairvoyance (or ESP) of this special kind does not occur

without a great deal of practice. Therefore, then, what seems problematic about this part of the skeptic's alternative explanation is that it requires a highly restricted form of ESP or clairvoyance not generally encountered in cases of successful clairvoyance.

Besides, even if narrowly restricted forms of clairvoyance existed, the very best of clairvoyants make a predictable number of mistakes, whereas Swarnlata and Bishen Chand made virtually no mistakes in their memory claims.[9] As one critic of the skeptic's position has noted, the frequency of error associated with the memories of Swarnlata and Bishen Chand is just too low to fit with our general understanding of clairvoyance (Pratt, p. 245). Hence, the evidence strongly suggests that clairvoyance is out of the question as a way of explaining how Swarnlata and Bishen acquired knowledge of the past events they so accurately described.

When we turn to the other components of the skeptic's alternative explanation, things don't go any better. After all, can anybody honestly believe that Swarnlata was so good at impersonating Biyạ that nobody in Biya's family (brothers, sisters, father, mother and husband) could detect it as a clever bit of impersonation? It seems very unlikely that she could have duped the whole family. Of course, some will suggest that they were all duped because they all believed in reincarnation. But in this case, as in most other similar cases, the family members did not believe in reincarnation.

Moreover, we cannot forget that some parts of a person's character defy successful impersonation over a long period of time. A look, for example, or a way of walking, or a peculiar sense of humor, or the way one laughs, are all sufficiently personal to require only the most competent of impersonators to imitate or dramatize. Can we plausibly attribute such an ability to Swarnlata, when she never showed a general ability to imitate successfully anybody else? In short, if the skeptic's explanation were credible, we would expect to find in subjects like Swarnlata and Bishen Chand a *general* ability to imitate successfully the difficult traits of other personalities as well. But that is not what we find. The skeptic's explanation requires the existence of a very specialized ability, the ability to impersonate flawlessly the most personal traits of only one person. Apart from making the skeptic come out right, there is no reason to think that such a specialized ability exists. So, even if we accept the general phenomenon of clairvoyance and "multiple personality," the skeptic's alternative explanation is unconvincing. Moreover, the case for reincarnation is even stronger when we consider, as we will now, the cases involving xenoglossy.

B. Clairvoyant Xenoglossy and Clairvoyant Skills

What is important about the Lydia Johnson case, the Shanti Devi case and other similar cases in which the subjects show an ability to converse in a foreign language not learned, is that the skeptic cannot begin to explain such an ability by appealing to ESP or clairvoyance. Knowing *how* to do something (like knowing *how* to speak a foreign language) is quite different from knowing *that* something or other is so. Knowing *how* to speak a foreign language (or a different dialect), unlike knowing *that* something or other happened in the past, defies explanation in terms of ESP or clairvoyance. If we are able to explain the acquisition of such skills by appeal to clairvoyance, then we would be distorting the nature of clairvoyance. And we would be doing this solely to account for these cases when, in fact, outside such cases, clairvoyance has no history of ever being associated with acquired skills, such as speaking a language or playing the instrument.[10] But might the skeptic still have some other explanation?

C. Genetic Memory

A skeptic might suggest that we need only suppose that everybody is born with a certain genetic memory; that just as one inherits the genetic traits of one's ancestors, the memories of our ancestors are coded in our genes. Then, the skeptic urges, under certain circumstances the inhibitors of these traits are relaxed and the memories of our ancestors emerge. When these memories emerge, they are experienced by the subject as though they were the subject's own memories. On this explanation, the skeptic would want us to believe that Swarnlata, for example, had inherited Biya's memory and mistakenly identified the memories of Biya as her own. Similarly, Lydia Johnson had inherited the memory of Jacob Jensen, and this extends to her remembering how to speak Jensen's language. In each case both subjects obviously mistakenly believed that what they were remembering was events in their respective lives. In fact, however, they were remembering events in the lives of others, who passed those memories on to their ancestors in and through the gene pool. Of course, the skeptic would also offer the same explanation to account for the Bishen Chand case. Is this explanation any more forceful than the skeptic's earlier explanations?

Not really. If appeal to the phenomenon of genetic memory were the proper explanation of Swarnlata's knowledge of Biya's life, then we would expect Swarnlata to be in Biya's genetic line, though clearly she

was not. This point was emphasized by Stevenson (*Twenty Cases,* p. 342), and this seems to be the most important factor in other cases in which no genetic connection is discernible between the subject and the alleged ancestor whose language the subject can speak. In the case of Lydia Johnson and Jacob Jensen, tracing the genetic line is pretty much out of the question. But as the explanation of genetic memory does not apply in all three of the cases noted above, it seems that the appeal in general will not work. After all, we know that in some of the strongest cases no genetic line connects one person to the allegedly reincarnated person. In the Bishen Chand case, for example, there was no genetic link between Bishen Chand and Laxmi Narain. In sum, of all the alternative explanations offered by the skeptic, the suggestion that we somehow inherit the memories of others and that these memories extend to remembering *how* to do certain things (like speak a language or play an instrument) seems most promising. Still, there is no evidence outside these cases that we do in fact inherit memories. And even if we did inherit memories, the skeptic's genetic explanation could account for the phenomenon in question only if we could establish a genetic line or relationship between the subject and the earlier person supposedly reincarnated in the subject. Clearly, in the case of Bishen Chand and Laxmi Narain, as well as in the case of Swarnlata, there was no genetic line. This is a decisive reason for setting aside the genetic explanation offered by our skeptic.[11]

VI. STEVENSON'S RESERVATIONS

As is evident in the title of this book, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation,* Stevenson is reluctant to say that the cases he examines prove the point. On the contrary, he believes the case for reincarnation would be proven only if we could secure a case which would be ideal in that it is:

(a) rich in verified memory claims not accountable in terms of clairvoyance, ESP (Telepathy) or Cryptomnesia;[12]
(b) attended by the presence of a complicated skill (such as speaking a foreign language or playing an instrument) that demonstrably could not have been learned by the subject in his or her present life;
(c) attended by appropriate birthmarks corresponding to wounds received in the earlier life remembered by the subject and the occurrence of the wounds in the pevious life independently verified;[13]
(d) a case wherein the memory claims are not very much diminished with age nor need to be induced under hypnotic trance or regression;[14]

(e) a case in which the subject's identification with a past personality is recognized by the subject as continuous with his, or her, present personality rather than as substitutive of the present personality, and the identification is maintained over a long period of time—preferably into adulthood;[15]

(f) a case wherein the subject's identification with the past personality cannot be explained by the influence of parents or other persons;[16]

(g) a case wherein the subject, as a result of his identification with a past personality manifests predictable emotional responses to specific events and persons remembered in the past life;

(h) a case wherein the subject is recognized and accepted over a long period as the past person reincarnated by many extant family members or friends (who have nothing to gain by the recognition and acceptance) of the past personality.[17]

Some of the examined cases combine many of these conditions. The case of Swarnlata, for example, is a fairly rich case, but it lacks the conditions of (b) and (c). However, in no one case do all the conditions appear. For this reason, Stevenson refrains from urging that reincarnation has been conclusively established.

Understandably, on the principle that extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence, we should be somewhat cautious in our assessments of the strength of the evidence offered here for reincarnation. Even at that, however, it seems excessively cautious to think that the belief in reincarnation is not established by the above cases and that we ought to await the appearance of the idealized case. One might want more evidence, but is it necessary? At the moment, we seem quite justified in urging something stronger than does Stevenson. Indeed, the only conclusion we should endorse is that it is *unreasonable* to accept any belief other than reincarnation to explain the above cases. This conclusion is much stronger than Stevenson's. He argues that *it is not unreasonable* to believe in reincarnation in order to explain the above cases. And the difference in the strength of the conclusion follows from the above analysis of the skeptic's alternative proposals and their evident failure.

VII. CONCLUSION

Much of the world has always believed in reincarnation. Even in the West, reincarnation was widely accepted until the rise of Christianity. The ancient Pythagoreans, along with early Greek philosophers, like Plato, believed in reincarnation. While it was an item of religious belief

for the Pythogoreans, it was an item of philosophical belief for Plato. For Plato, belief in innate knowledge (knowledge one has without learning it in this life) and reincarnation is simply implied by the fact that we have some knowledge that we could not have acquired by reliance on our sensory organs. But Plato's justification for belief in reincarnation was dependent upon his claims that (a) we do have knowledge that is absolutely certain, and (b) we cannot have such knowledge and it be the product of inferences based on sensory input. As might be expected, the history of philosophy challenged Plato on both (a) and (b); and so the *philosophical* foundation for the belief in reincarnation was undermined by heavy discussion on the nature and limits of human knowledge. This discussion continued into the sixteenth century, when the whole of modern philosophy in the West was split over whether to believe in the doctrine of innate ideas (and thus by implication in reincarnation) or whether we can account for the whole of human knowledge simply by appealing to the power of the human mind to organize the data of sense experience into a coherent picture of the world. The latter alternative was adopted by the famous English philosophers, Locke, Berkley and Hume; the former was adopted by Descartes, Leibniz and Spinoza.

In more recent times, the ongoing debate between behavioristic psychology and innatist psychology suggests that the philosophical debate on the nature of human knowledge endures. By implication, the debate on reincarnation also endures.

But in the history of philosophy we will not find any evidence offered for innatism or reincarnation similar to the remarkable evidence uncovered and examined by Stevenson. This fact is important, because it is, I submit, with this kind of evidence that the debate is resolved in favor of innatism and the doctrine of reincarnation.

One reason that belief in reincarnation is only *now* being established is that the cases that establish it would never have been taken seriously in the past and, thus, would never have been examined with the seriousness so evident in, say, Stevenson's research.

Why were such cases never taken seriously in the past? Here, we can only speculate. However, the strength of organized Christianity, with its doctrinal rejection of the belief in reincarnation, certainly contributed. Moreover, in the absense of knowing what would count as a method for *showing* its truth, any person's claim to be reincarnated could only be viewed as evidence of insanity or witchcraft. In view of the doctrinal control of Christianity in the West, belief in reincarnation never got much of a foothold in the West. The strength of early Christianity's re-

pudiation of the doctrine may have had much to do with the tendency to view claims to reincarnation as instances of insanity.

But with the advent of science, regression therapy, and the general perception of the difference between insanity and moral or philosophical distinctiveness, the willingness to consider such cases under the method of science has brought forward the body of evidence that can establish the belief in reincarnation. What is impressive about these cases is that, taken seriously, their tendency to establish the doctrine of reincarnation outstrips philosophical biases and theological dogmas. By way of implication, they also tend to render obsolete long-standing philosophical disputes.[18]

Other questions will become more pressing: how long, how frequently, and to what end does the process of reincarnation occur? What will count as a method of dissolving disputes over conflicting answers to these questions? Will we need to accept the fact that in these matters the mind of man is radically incapable of providing clear answers and that, as a result, there will be more questions to be asked in this life than we can ever answer—even if we endure in a scientific spirit forever?

Finally, two interesting questions remain. First, is reincarnation a universal phenomenon, or is it that only *some* people reincarnate? Second, assuming the truth of universal reincarnation, what is the cash value of the belief? In other words, apart from rendering the traditional mind-body question obsolete and orienting our philosophical ventures more in the direction of ethics, would belief in reincarnation have any personal value or significance?

With regard to the first question, the cases examined above show that *the subjects in those cases* reincarnated; but they do not show that everyone reincarnates. Is it possible that only a few people reincarnate, namely, only those who remember their past lives? Certainly, this is possible. However, it seems reasonable to believe that if anybody reincarnates, then everybody does. This is because among the subjects examined in these cases nothing indicates that they are, in terms of moral or intellectual superiority, different from the rest of people. And if everybody reincarnates, then the interesting point seems to be that some people are able to remember their past lives and some are not.[19]

The answer to the second question bears on something we just noted. As long as one cannot remember anything of any past life, belief in reincarnation may not have any personal significance beyond satisfying one's curiosity in understanding the nature of human personality and the falsity of traditional materialism. However, if we assume that while

everyone reincarnates but only a few remember their past lives (a plausible assumption), the personal significance of the belief might well be enhanced by the use of a technique like hypnotic regression. As we saw in the Lydia Johnson case, the hypnotic-regression technique consists in placing a subject in a hypnotic trance and then asking her to recall events in her very early life and earlier. Through this technique subjects are "regressed" in time to memories of a earlier life or earlier lives. The use of regression techniques would enable many people to become aware of their past lives and understand various dimensions of their present personalities as the cumulative product of experiences in past lives. In this manner the belief in reincarnation may well lead to a deeper understanding of one's personality and the forces that shaped its history.

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CHAPTER TWO

APPARITIONS OF THE DEAD AND THE WATSEKA WONDER

I. INTRODUCTION

SOME PEOPLE think that the best evidence for life after death appears in certain ghost stories. After all, some people say that disembodied spirits exist because they "see" them. For most of us, however, such claims are surprising and perplexing. How could a disembodied spirit appear to someone so that the spirit is precisely like the deceased before death? Indeed, if being a disembodied personality means not having a body, how could such a personality appear as though it were in possession of its original body? Frequently, people claim that ghosts appear so real that they are misidentified and mistaken for the original person by a viewer who does not know that the person is dead. Is this possible? If so, is there any evidence for its occurrence? May we explain these frequently reported "apparitions of the dead" without having to believe in ghosts? In this chapter we will examine the best available evidence bearing on apparitions of the dead. Thereafter, we will examine the case of the Watseka Wonder, an allegedly striking case of possession and, as such, strong evidence for the belief in life after death.

II. GROUP APPARITIONS

Presumably, if only one person testifies to seeing a ghost on one occasion only, then we have no compelling reason to believe that person's testimony. Suppose, however, that a number of people, gathered for some specific purpose, *all* claim to see (or to have seen) the same ghost; and suppose also that this phenomenon occurred only once. Should we accept their testimony?

There is always the possibility of hoax or fraud. For the sake of argument, however, just suppose that we are able to discount the possibility of intentional deceit on the part of those testifying to the apparition. Could we then accept the testimony? Not really. After all, while collective hallucinations are rare, still there is some evidence that they do occur. Thus, the more plausible explanation for the collective sighting is that the group had a collective hallucination. For example, ample testimony indicates that a number of people have collectively hallucinated oases in the Sahara Desert. So, too, some collective desire unknown even to the members of the group may well have caused the experience of "seeing" a deceased person. Although collective hallucinations are rare, the skeptic will still remind us that it is more probable to suppose that the people who "see" ghosts are mistaken in what they claim to see than it is to suppose that ghosts exist. We have a non-controversially rich history of people "seeing" things that are not there, but we have no non-controversial history of ghost sightings. Thus, it would seem wiser to believe that these people who "see" ghosts are, for some reason or other, simply mistaken in their belief that they see (or saw) ghosts. But are there any cases that cannot be so readily dismissed by the skeptic?

III. THE BUTLER CASE

Consider the case noted by C. J. Ducasse in *The Belief in Life After Death*, a case which Ducasse thinks provides striking evidence for life after death.[1] The original account of this case was written in 1826 by the Reverend Abraham Cummings, a graduate of Brown University and a Baptist minister in Maine, in a pamphlet, *Immortality Proved by Testimony of Sense.*[2]

The apparitions were of the deceased Mrs. George Butler and occurred in a village near Machiasport, Maine. The specter of Mrs. Butler appeared *a number of times over a period of several months*. It was seen by groups of people numbering as many as forty persons; it appeared both indoors and outdoors. It presented extended discourses and moved freely among the gathered people. It also accurately predicted both births and deaths. Moreover, as Ducasse notes, Reverend Cummings was astute enough to obtain at the time over 30 affidavits from some of the hundred or more persons who had heard and/or seen the specter.[3] These affidavits are reproduced in the pamphlet.

Furthermore, on one occasion, Captain Butler (Mrs. Butler's living husband) placed his hand "upon" the apparition and his hand passed through the apparition as if its body were made of light. Six or seven persons witnessed that event (Ducasse, p. 155).

Assuming the absence of fraud or hoax, and assuming that other similar cases exist (we shall see some of them shortly) in which we can equally assume the absence of fraud or hoax, what can be said about this case?

To begin with, the frequency of the apparition, the changing circumstances in which it appeared, and the large and varying numbers of persons involved in testifying to the apparition suggest that the likelihood of a collective hallucination on each occasion is remarkably low. Certainly, the probability of a group hallucination on each occasion is remarkably lower than it is in the case of a group sighting on only one occasion. As a matter of fact, the probability of a large group of people hallucinating the same object repeatedly under different circumstances (both indoors and outdoors) over a long period of time (many months), in which the membership of the group changes frequently, is zero. I know of no case in which a collective hallucination of precisely this sort has ever been established. Furthermore, inasmuch as the specter accurately predicted both births and deaths, we cannot easily dismiss as hallucinatory the information the group obtained in the experience.

But, before going on to consider certain skeptical replies to the Butler case, it is important to see that the Butler case is not an isolated one. In more recent times we have a case much like it in which the ghost appeared to a number of different people under different circumstances over a long period of time. Moreover, as in the Butler case, this ghost made certain predictions that were borne out. Let us consider this case, the case of the Ghost of Flight 401.

IV. THE GHOST OF FLIGHT 401

In the dead of night on December 28, 1972, Eastern Airlines Flight 401 plunged into the Florida Everglades, killing 101 passengers and crew. Two months later the ghosts of its pilot and its second officer began to appear on sister ships carrying or using parts salvaged from the original crash. The pilot's name was Captain Loft; the second officer's was Don Repo. According to John Fuller (the principal investigator of the case), testimony regarding the apparition of the two ghosts grew to

alarming proportions. Most of the sightings occurred in the galley of Eastern plane 318, which like a few other L-1011's was using some of the salvaged parts of the L-1011 that crashed in Everglades.[4]

One incident occurred on plane 318 as it prepared to depart Newark for Miami. The second officer had completed his preflight walk-around check. The captain and the first officer were in the cockpit. The food had been delivered to the plane and everything had been set for takeoff.

In the first-class section, the senior stewardess was making the usual head count, and her count was off by one passenger. An Eastern captain in uniform was in one of the seats. She inferred that he was deadheading (going back) to Miami, where the flight originated; but he was not on her list, thus accounting for the extra passenger. It was necessary, however, to confirm the count, and she advised the captain that he was not on her list. She asked if he would be riding in the jump seat back to Miami. The captain did not respond, looking straight ahead. She asked him again whether he was a first-class traveler in the jump seat. Still, he did not answer and looked straight ahead. Perplexed, she brought the flight supervisor over to ask the same question, and both of them received no response. The captain seemed normal in every respect except that he seemed to be in some sort of daze. It worried both of them, and one of them went into the cockpit and told the flight captain what was transpiring. The flight captain was also perplexed. He left the cockpit and went to the first-class compartment.

In reporting this incident, John Fuller notes that a half-dozen regular first-class passengers were in the immediate vicinity of the silent deadheading captain, and all of them were curious about what was going on (p. 138). As the flight captain approached the seat, he was puzzled that there was no record of another Eastern captain listed as a jump seat occupant, and this one apparently had no pass for the flight.

With both stewardesses and the flight supervisor beside him, the captain leaned down to address the other captain and just as he did, he froze. "My God, it's Bob Loft," he said. The cabin was totally silent and then, as it is reported, the captain in the seat disappeared before the eyes of all.

The captain returned to the operations officer and after a delay the plane was totally searched. The missing captain could not be found. As plane 318 took off for Miami, the passengers and crew were still stunned.

When the three attendants who returned from Newark to Miami later sought to examine the flight log (in which, by FAA regulation, every

unusual incident had to be recorded) they found the log page for that flight missing, even though the entire flight crew reported the incident. All the pages up to and including the incident had been removed, contrary to general practice. The captain's and the crew's comments were completely missing (p. 141). Thereafter, every 318 log book was removed after every flight—a practice not followed in any other planes at Eastern.

Captain Loft was later sighted again on the same plane, in the galley simultaneously by two stewardesses and the captain. After this incident, however, the flight was cancelled (p. 150).

Don Repo, Captain Loft's second officer, was seen even more frequently on plane 318. Indeed, whereas Loft's appearances faded after a short while, the specter of Don Repo continued to be visible for at least two years after the crash. Here are some of the incidents which John Fuller records. I select only a few of the more interesting ones in which Repo appeared to a number of people. In no fewer than two dozen incidents by the end of 1973, various people reported seeing Repo. In general, he appeared in order to do little repairs for the stewardesses or to advise the flight crew of potential mechanical problems. He was a friendly and helpful ghost, who was frequently reported to have had discussions with various people on the plane.

Then there was the incident involving a woman passenger in the first-class section of plane 318, scheduled for a New York to Miami flight. The plane was at the ramp, and the head count had not yet been taken by the flight attendant in the first-class section. The woman passenger was seated next to an Eastern flight officer, who wore the uniform of a flight engineer.

Something about the officer worried the woman. He looked so ghastly pale and ill, and when she said something to him he would not respond. She asked him if he felt all right and if she should call the stewardess to help him. Still no response came from the sickly looking flight officer. The woman called the stewardess, who agreed that he seemed ill. The stewardess asked him if he needed any help. Other passengers also noticed him. Then, in front of the group, as before, the flight engineer disappeared. The woman became almost hysterical. Later, she and the flight attendant picked out a picture of Repo as the officer who had been in the first-class seat.

In 1974 an Eastern Captain allegedly told John Fuller (p. 159) that he was warned by a flight engineer riding in the jump seat of his L-1011 that there was going to be an electric failure. The captain ordered a

re-check, which revealed a faulty circuit. Later, after a second look, the cockpit crew identified the intruding second officer sitting in the jump seat as Don Repo.

Finally, there is the Mexico City incident. In February 1974, plane 318 was readied for a flight to Mexico City. During the preparations one of the flight attendants, working in the galley below, looked at the window of one of the ovens and clearly saw the face of Don Repo looking out at her. She ran to the elevator, went up a deck and grabbed another flight attendant. Together, they went down into the galley and approached the oven. The second flight attendant also saw the image. It was not a reflection. They called the flight deck and gave the story to the flight engineer. Immediately, he came down. He also recognized Repo's face in the oven window, and, as he gazed at Repo, Repo spoke audibly to the engineer and said, "Watch out for fire on this plane." Then he disappeared. Later that day the plane's third engine broke into flame on takeoff and it returned on one engine.

Eastern Airlines' official position on the Ghost of Flight 401 (which principally refers to the sightings of Repo) is that it is gossip, and that nobody ever reported seeing any such ghosts. But the logbook of plane 318 has not been made available to anyone. The sightings of the ghosts subsequently stopped after all the salvaged parts were removed from plane 318.

Like the Butler case, this case involved various persons, sometimes in groups, under various circumstances and over a long period of time, who saw the same ghost. And nobody had anything to gain by reporting such stories. For reasons we shall see later, however, the ghost of flight 401 is a somewhat weaker case than the Butler case because it involved fewer predictions.

Before examining the skeptical response to the Butler case, however, let us review two others. Like the case of the ghost of flight 401, these are similar to the Butler case, in that they involve the frequent sighting of the same apparition over a long period of time by different individuals. But, unlike either the Butler case or the case of the ghost of flight 401, these two cases do not involve diverse collective sightings and the acquisition of precognitive information from apparitions that speak with the living. I include these two cases here because they are strong cases, even though they are not as strong as the Butler case or the case of the ghost of flight 401.

V. THE GREY LADY AND THE CHELTENHAM GHOST

A. The Grey Lady and the Dying

In September 1956, nurse E. L. was making her evening rounds in a ward of a large London hospital, a ward designated for treating malignant diseases. She was filling the water dispensers at each patient's bedside. The dispenser was empty at the bedside of a seventy-five-year-old man, who had been admitted with cancer of the lung and Paget's disease. As the nurse reached to fill the dispenser, the old man told her that there was no need to do so because he had already been given a glass of water. Nurse E. L., wondering how that could be (as she knew no other nurses were dispensing water), asked him who had given him the water.

He replied that the nice lady standing at the foot of the bed, and dressed in grey, gave him the water. Nurse E. L., however, could see no one else in the room. The man died a week later.

At the behest of Doctor Paul Turner, nurse E. L. signed the account she wrote of this incident. In 1957, Doctor Paul Turner began investigating the long-standing legend to the effect that in this particular ward of the hospital a lady in grey frequently appeared in order to comfort dying patients. Invariably, the patients died a short while after her ministrations.

The nurses in this hospital used to wear grey, but in the 1920s the uniform was changed to an Oxford blue dress with white apron and collar.

Doctor Turner published the results of his investigation in *The Journal of the Society for Psychic Research* (1959) under the title "The Grey Lady, A Study of Psychic Phenomenon in the Dying."[5] Here are some of the results of his report.

The woman in grey was generally said to be of a gentle disposition and middle-aged. Part of the legend was that she had helped dying patients in various ways and made them comfortable. Although the identity of the apparition remains a mystery, some surmise that she was the ghost of a nun who fell down an elevator shaft at the turn of the century. Others thought that the ghost was an administrative nun who was found dead in the hospital.

Doctor Turner obtained six separate accounts of patient "encounters" with the grey lady from nurses willing to sign their names to the record.

Many other similar experiences were reliably conveyed by mouth, but, since they were not written down, they did not form part of the record of the investigation. Here are some of those accounts.

Nurse J. F. K. signed a statement that in November 1956 she was bathing the back of a patient who, although ill with a malignant disease, was expected to recover. This patient asked the nurse whether she always worked with the other nurse. The question puzzled nurse J. F. K., because she knew no other nurse was with her. When she asked him what he meant, he pointed in the direction in which there was nobody. He also said that the "nurse" was dressed differently from the other nurses and frequently came to visit him. Shortly afterwards he died.

Nurse J. M. P., in another signed statement, related how in December 1957 she was asked by a 37-year-old male patient dying of cancer, "Who is that lady warming her hands by the fire?" In fact, no one was by the fire. When the nurse asked him what he saw, he said, "That person in the grey uniform." He also died shortly thereafter.

Nurse S. T. related that, in February 1958, a woman suffering from a malignant disease told her that during the night a very kind lady dressed in grey gave her a cup of tea. A year later in the same ward, a patient, a young woman of 28 with myelomatosis, told nurse R. A. C. that a kind lady was standing at the foot of her bed during the night. This patient died three to four weeks later.

A number of years earlier than this last reported incident, a Sister E. F. was night nurse in the same ward and asked a dying patient if she could make her more comfortable. The patient replied that the other sister had already done so. No other sister was on duty at the time, nor had the night nurse attended to the patient recently. This patient died the following day. Sister E. F. signed the account of this incident.

In reflecting on this case, Andrew McKenzie grants that the patients who experienced "drinking tea" or "drinking water" were hallucinating that part of their experience. But could each of them have been hallucinating the grey lady? Even if they were all being medicated in some way (and some of them were not medicated at all), we know of no drug that would allow a large number of people to hallucinate the same object described in the same way, even to the same color. Besides, these events took place in only this ward of the hospital. Such events were not reported in other hospitals treating people with the same diseases.

Might not the nurses be conspiring to create a wonderful hoax? Well, of course, that is possible, but it does not seem likely. With nothing to gain, how would all these nurses (including some nuns) lie? And, if they

did lie, we'd expect certain elements of testimony to be the same. As Andrew McKenzie notes, if the nurses were hoaxing us, we'd expect them to describe the actions of the grey lady in the same way. But significant differences occur in the descriptions, indicating that they were not in collusion in their accounts (p. 49).

Finally, might it not be possible that these sick people all learned about the legend of the grey lady and that that information helped to form the same hallucinatory object? Doctor Turner's response to this question is that, although the legend of the grey lady was widely known by the hospital staff, it was a secret guarded closely from the patients.

Could the information reported by the patients have been telepathically and unwittingly conveyed to them by the nurses? Possibly, but is there any reason to think that likely? And if so, why would all those people who had the experience die? Nobody who survived from that ward reported seeing the grey lady. If the information had been telepathically conveyed, then we'd expect some of the survivors to have had this experience, but none did.

The grey lady was never seen collectively, and only sick people saw her. The possibility of hallucination in which the content of the apparition was telepathically conveyed cannot be ruled out. Some telepathic leak may have occurred from one or different nurses to only those who precognitively knew they were going to die. As we shall see, however, this same sort of objection cannot be used against the Butler case or the case of The Ghost of Flight 401, because these last two cases involve frequent collective sightings by relevantly diverse groups with little or no possibility of telepathic leakage. But more on this objection later.

B. The Cheltenham Ghost

The story of the Cheltenham Ghost was first noted by F. W. H. Meyers in *The Proceedings of the Society for Psychic Research* in 1892. Meyers interviewed the involved individuals and took written testimony from firsthand witnesses. Later, a book by B. Abdey Collins *The Cheltenham Ghost* examined the case.[6]

The Cheltenham Ghost first appeared in 1882 to Rose Despard, who was then a 19-year-old medical student residing at Cheltenham, her home. Rose heard someone at the door, but when she got there nobody was there. On returning along the passage, carrying a candle, she saw a figure of a tall lady dressed in black, standing at the head of the stairs. The figure began to descend the stairs but vanished when the candle

burned itself out. Two months prior to this event, Captain F. W. Despard had moved his family into the house that had remained unoccupied for the previous six years, except for two short periods.

The appearance of the tall lady in black occurred most frequently between 1882 and 1886. Thereafter, the appearances gradually faded away. But during the active period, at least seven different persons saw the apparition, and numerous others heard strange noises that they attributed to the ghost.

Rose Despard, who saw the figure many times, described the figure in her diary as

> a tall lady, dressed in black of a soft woolen material, judging by the slight sound in moving. This is all I noticed then; but on further occasions when I was able to observe her more closely, I saw the upper part of the left side of the forehead and a little of the hair above. Her left hand was nearly hidden by her sleeve and a fold of her dress. As she had it down, a portion of a widow's cuff was visible on both wrists, so that the whole impression was that of a lady in widow's weeds. There was no cap on the head, but a general effect of blackness suggests a bonnet with a long veil or hood.

Rose's sister, Edith, saw the ghost and described one of her encounters, after having seen the ghost earlier:

> The next time I saw the ghost was one evening at about eight o'clock in July 1885, a fine evening and quite light. I was sitting alone in the drawing room singing when suddenly I felt a cold, icy shiver and I saw the figure bent over me, as if to turn the pages of my song. I called my sister who was then in another room, she came at once and said she could still see it in the room, though I could not.

On August 12, 1884, the apparition was seen by two of the sisters independently at 8 P.M. when it was still quite light.

On one occasion, during tea time, the charwoman followed the apparition around the house.

The visual apparition never seems to have appeared to more than one person at the same time. But it was once seen by the four Despard sisters (Captain Despard never saw the apparition) in quick succession in four consecutive positions on its route from the drawing room to the orchard.

Rose Despard, reported that

> Once while coming up the garden, I walked toward the orchard, when I saw the figure cross the orchard, go along the carriage drive in front of the house and in at the side door, I following. She crossed the drawing room, and took up her usual position behind the couch in the bow window. My father came in soon after, and I told him she was there. He could not see the figure, but

> went up to where I showed him she was. She then went swiftly around behind him, across the room, out the door and along the hall, disappearing as usual near the garden door, we both following her.

Some unanticipated evidence of the haunting came to light nearly 60 years later when a solicitor wrote to The Society for Psychic Research to note that as a small boy, he had lived at Cheltenham with an aunt and frequently played with one of the Despard children in the haunted house. He had a clear recollection of seeing the figure in the garden in bright sunlight and also of joining hands around it in the drawing room, when it seemed to walk out between two people and disappear. He also said that he, and apparently others like him, were not alarmed by the figure.

Who was the lady in black? Nobody is sure. It was surmised that she was one Imogen Swinhoe, the second wife of Henry Swinhoe, a retired official. She died four years before the haunting started. Although some people think the evidence for the Cheltenham ghost is good (but by no means perfect), others are quick to note that, after Rose Despard's first experience had become known to other members of the Despard family, ordinary suggestion might have induced hallucinations in them. Indeed, inducement is quite possible. However, it seems implausible to think that the power of suggestion explains all the appearances of an apparition seen frequently by a number of people over a period of years in daylight as well as dark. It certainly would not account for the independent evidence offered by the solicitor.

At any rate, let us focus more fully on the skeptic's response to the strongest case, the Butler case, keeping in mind that the logical similarities between the Butler case and the case of The Ghost of Flight 401 require that whatever we conclude about the Butler case applies with equal force to the other.

VI. THE SKEPTICAL RESPONSE: THE DOMMEYER CRITIQUE

Perhaps, the strongest skeptical response to the Butler case comes from Frederick Dommeyer, who, for the sake of argument, does not dispute the facts of the case but goes on to offer a probing alternative explanation that does not require belief in the afterlife.[4] Dommeyer's explanation of the case asks us to suppose that (a) one member of the group consistently induced the same auditory and visual hallucinations

on repeated occasions in differing circumstances in different groups of people; and (b) this same person was clairvoyant and communicated precognitive and postcognitive information to all the members of the group during the induced hallucinations. Thus, everybody who claimed to see the specter of Mrs. Butler was having visual and auditory hallucinations, but the information they allegedly received from her was correct because it was conveyed to them by the clairvoyant who was inducing the hallucinations in all of them.

Furthermore, for Dommeyer, this alternative explanation (he calls it "The ESP explanation") is more plausible than the explanation that appeals to the existence of disembodied spirits. And this for two reasons. First, it is just too implausible to think that a disembodied spirit could be seen, could speak and be heard. Second, because a disembodied spirit is not made up of matter (and thus could not speak), it would need to communicate telepathically, thus requiring what is distinctly implausible, namely, that all the witnesses were capable of telepathic communication.

What is initially questionable about Dommeyer's alternative explanation of the Butler case is his assertion that his explanation, the ESP explanation, is simpler and more plausible than the explanation that appeals to the existence of a disembodied spirit. It hardly seems simpler. As for its plausibility, well, never in the history of paranormal research has anyone shown an ability to induce successfully the same auditory and visual hallucinations in a large number of people (not always the same) on many separate occasions under differing circumstances and then provide them with accurate information clairvoyantly obtained.

In addition, Dommeyer's explanation would require that all the people who were party to the same hallucinations were to the same remarkable degree gifted with telepathy to secure the information from the clairvoyant inducing the hallucination in the group. No doubt this ESP explanation is logically possible, but there is not one shred of evidence to suggest that it is plausible in the light of what we presently know about ESP and clairvoyance.

Predictably, Dommeyer might be tempted to respond that no evidence favors the explanation that appeals to the existence of a disembodied spirit, and so, the more plausible explanation is the one that would explain the phenomenon by appeal to observable forces even if it might seem factually implausible. If Dommeyer were to respond in this fashion, we could only reply by noting the belief in the existence of disembodied spirits is quite plausible if one considers seriously the evidence resulting from recent studies in reincarnation.

Ultimately, Dommeyer places emphasis on the plausibility of the ESP hypothesis as a result of his belief in the extreme implausibility of thinking that a disembodied spirit could be seen or be the causal source of anything being heard by a group of people. This consideration motivates Dommeyer's belief that the visual and auditory experiences of the group must be hallucinatory.

Admittedly, if, like Dommeyer and others, we continue to construe a disembodied spirit in terms of a purely non-material object, then there would be no way to explain how such a being could speak or be seen. But, in the Appendix of this book we shall argue, along with C. D. Broad, that a disembodied spirit, principally because it is a form of energy, must be construed as an object having some properties in common with physical objects. On that basis one may suppose that disembodied spirits could be causally effective in the physical realm under certain circumstances.[9] Put somewhat differently, as long as we must construe a disembodied spirit as a form of energy (something demonstrated in the Appendix later on), then the evidence supports the view that a disembodied spirit must be something like a body.

These considerations lend some credibility to the claim, frequently made by psychics, that everybody has an "astral body," that is, a second body made up of a rare physical-like component invisible to the naked eye except under certain circumstances. This second body endures after the death of the physical body and is a replica of the physical body. Either that, or the astral body has the power to make itself appear as a replica of the physical body. At any rate, the fact that the astral body is construed as having some physical-like properties essential to the core of human personality would account for its visibility to others in certain circumstances. In short, if any form of mind-body dualism is true, the mind will turn out to be something like an energized body identical, when seen, in appearance to the original body and surviving the death of the original body. So construed, the mind would thus be able to be causally effective either by making itself appear like the physical body before death or by making itself appear so as to be readily identified with the person who had a certain body.

So, Dommeyer's reason for thinking that people were simply hallucinating in the Butler case is a result of his thinking that a disembodied spirit is more like nothing than it is like something. But as long as a disembodied spirit must be viewed as something like a body, a very special kind of body, we may suppose that it could cause auditory and visual sensations, although, to be sure, we cannot say *how* it could do this. Dis-

embodied spirits may not have voice boxes, but they may well produce auditory sensations without having voice boxes. Given the implausibility of Dommeyer's ESP explanation, the production of such auditory sensations must have occurred in the Butler case.

In the end, incidentally, we may not be able to say *how* a spirit can be causally effective in producing visual and auditory sensations. The crucial point, however, is not that we be able to explain *how* all this can happen, or even *why* it happens. We need only show good reasons for thinking *that* it happens. Demonstrating *that* it happens is no substitute for showing *how* or *why* it happens. But failure to show *how* or *why* is quite consistent with showing *that* it happens. Is the Butler case unique? Well, if it were, that would be a good reason to suspect that the case was fabricated, a hoax of some sort. Fortunately, the fact that there are other cases (like the case of The Ghost of Flight 401) very similar to the Butler case is good reason to think that the Butler case is not a hoax of some sort.[10]

The problem with the case of The Ghost of Flight 401, however, is that, unlike the Butler case, the testimony is not a matter of public record. This affords good grounds to question the data and raise the question of hoax. In this regard we can only hope that Eastern Airlines will deliver up the log of flights of plane 318.

V. THE WATSEKA WONDER

Any reasonably adequate discussion of the evidence for life after death should include a consideration of the famous Watseka Wonder. This case is not an instance of an apparition of the dead. Rather, it is a striking instance of possession, an instance that supports the belief in life after death. I include it in this chapter under apparitions of the dead, although it might equally well fit under the earlier chapter on reincarnation, because it shares some features in common with that material.

C. J. Ducasse describes in detail the case of the Watseka Wonder; it concerns two girls.[11] The first girl, Mary Roff, had died at age eighteen in 1865. She was said to have suffered from "fits" and was allegedly able to read closed books and contents of sealed envelopes.

The second girl was Lurancy Vennum, born in April, 1864, and over a year old when Mary Roff died. Lurancy seemed quite normal until 1877, when, at age thirteen, she complained of feeling queer and had a fit, "including a cataleptic state lasting five hours" (Ducasse, p. 172). On

later occasions, while in a trance state, she talked with "angels" or "spirits" of deceased persons. She also seemed to be possessed by various alien spirits, each of which took turns possessing her. Her sanity was questioned.

The most interesting (according to Ducasse) of Lurancy's "possessions" was that by the mind of Mary Roff. Indeed, Lurancy claimed to be Mary Roff and gave evidence of being homesick and wanting to see her (Mary's) parents and brothers. After a few days, Lurancy was taken and permitted to live with the Roff family.

While living with the Roffs, she seemed quite happy and knew everybody that Mary Roff had known in her lifetime 12 to 25 years earlier. She readily identified by name the persons who had been friends and neighbors of the Roff's during "Mary's" lifetime. During her stay at the Roff's residence she noted hundreds of incidents that had occurred in Mary's natural life and, unlike any reincarnation case, had no awareness of her identity as "Lurancy;" she could not identify or recognize any of the Vennum family members or their friends and neighbors. Her identity as "Mary" while living with the Roffs lasted over three-and-a-half months, and she was fully accepted by the family as "Mary."

Later, her identity as "Lurancy" returned and she recognized nothing about the Roffs but had all the memories of "Lurancy" including the usual recognitions attending her life with the Vennums. Occasionally, later on, when she visited the Roffs, the Mary Roff personality would emerge for a short while and again she would lose her identity as "Lurancy."

VI. CRITIQUE OF THE WATSEKA WONDER

Responding to the charge that this is simply a case of "alternating personality" or "multiple personality" (a personality disorder readily characterized in psychiatry), Ducasse notes that the personality that displaced Lurancy's was, by every test that could be applied, not a dissociated part of her own. Rather, it was the personality, including all the memories, of a particular 18-year-old girl who had died when Lurancy was fourteen months old (p. 173).

Moreover, Ducasse claims that in no way could Lurancy have obtained, by normal means, the extensive and detailed knowledge which Mary possessed and which Lurancy manifested. The Vennums were

away from Watseka (the town in Wisconsin where both the Roffs and the Vennums lived) for the first seven years of Lurancy's life. When they returned to Watseka, their acquaintance with the Roffs consisted of only one brief call of a few minutes by Mrs. Roff on Mrs. Vennum, and of a formal speaking acquaintance on the part of the two men, until the time when Mr. Roff brought Doctor Stevens (the principal investigator) to the Vennum's because of Lurancy's insane behavior (Ducasse, p. 173).

Can we explain what transpired in this case without endorsing the explanation that the disembodied spirit of Mary Roff "took possession" of Lurancy Vennum's body? If not, we have good evidence that human personality survives the death of the body. Naturally, we assume that the case is not a hoax or a fraud. Moreover, we could, I think, discount the case as worthy of extensive consideration if there never was another case similar to it or if we have no other documented cases like it.

Perhaps the best criticism of the "possession" explanation of the Watseka case comes from Frederick Dommeyer. His view is that we can equally well explain the facts of the Watseka Wonder case just by supposing that (a) Lurancy Vennum somehow or other clairvoyantly obtained detailed knowledge of Mary Roff and her past life, (b) subconsciously identified with, and then (c), owing to the dramatizing power of the subconscious mind, successfully impersonated Mary Roff. Granting all this, Lurancy Vennum clairvoyantly obtained all the knowledge one would expect of Mary Roff, sincerely but mistakenly believed that she was Mary Roff, and successfully impersonated Mary Roff because of the dramatizing power of the subconscius mind.[12] But is this a plausible alternative to the "possession" explanation?

Dommeyer's explanation suffers from at least one major defect. The defect was noted by Ducasse, who responded to Dommeyer's alternative explanation. He said:

> Consider for example the case of a person who has no knowledge of theoretical physics. Irrespective of whether he be awake, or in hypnosis, or in a mediumistic trance, he could not possibly enact convincingly the part Einstein would take in discussion with a theoretical physicist present on some technical point in theoretical physics.
>
> The crucial question as regards the Watseka case is whether it is possible, or not possible, for a person P to identify himself unmistakenly to another person Q who had known him intimately for years, by means of his behavior and of the contents, style, allusiveness and responsiveness of his conversations with Q. That it is not possible in only an hour or two is probably true. But in the Watseka case, the Roffs had three and a half months of day-long

> close observations of the behavior, tastes, skills, knowledge and capacity to make and understand allusions to intimate family matters, possessed by the personality which was expressing itself through the body of Lurancy during those months. And the Roffs testified that those traits were the very same as those which had together been distinctive of their deceased daughter Mary, whom Lurancy had never known.
>
> Let Dommeyer suppose that a young woman who remains constantly masked and muffled somehow comes and lives in his house; and let him ask himself whether he thinks it would be possible for that woman, through facts perceived extra-sensorily, to enact for three and a half months convincingly to him the part of his own daughter, if that woman's personality were not really that of his daughter. An affirmative answer would amount to saying that no way ultimately exists by which it would be possible for a person whose face and fingers have been disfigured by acid or by fire, to prove his identity to another who had known him intimately for many years. And this, I submit, is virtually beyond belief. (p. 38)

In sum, the very idea that Lurancy could successfully impersonate Mary Roff over three-and-a-half months in the presence of the Roff family is unthinkable, even if we were to grant the Lurancy could know extra sensorily every detail of Mary Roff's life. That sort of skill is not imparted with the gift of clairvoyance.

Here again, of course, people sympathetic to Dommeyer's critique may be willing to grant that a large dose of implausibility attends the alternative ESP explanation. But, they say, when compared with the explanation offered in terms of "possession," the ESP explanation is more plausible because there is no independent plausibility to be associated with disembodied existence and personal survival after death. To this objection we can only reply by pointing to the examination offered in the above pages and to the degree of plausibility established therein for the belief in life after death. Accordingly, unless we assume fraud, or hoax, or that the Roffs were quite stupid or ill, Ducasse's objection seems quite forceful and should be decisive. Furthermore, I know of no other objection that one may want to make to the "possession" interpretation of the Watseka Wonder.

What is mysterious about the Watseka Wonder case is why, if it is a legitimate instance of possession, we do not have many more cases like it. This fact, if it be a fact, would tend to make the case worthy of closer scrutiny for the purpose of detecting a hoax or fraud. However, there are enough other cases like it to lend strong credibility to the "possession hypothesis" and hence, by implication, to the view of personal survival after death.

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CHAPTER THREE

OUT-OF-BODY EXPERIENCES

I. INTRODUCTION

IF PEOPLE can "leave their bodies," then human personality is distinct from the body. In other words, if a person could leave her or his body, then that person must be something more than just a very complex body whose properties are revealed by physical science. That person would need to be a mysterious non-physical being that lived *in* the body. This view about persons has been called "mind-body dualism" or just "dualism." The view that persons are no more than complex bodies is "materialism." Materialists think it makes no sense to suggest that people can "leave their bodies."

Interestingly enough, there is ample testimony to the so-called out-of-body experience (hereafter, the OBE). And while testimony to these experiences is by no means new, the recent and general tendency to consider such testimony seriously is quite new. As a result, we now face certain questions about the nature of these experiences, especially because people take them as evidence for mind-body dualism and some form of life after death.[1]

The major cause of the recent interest is OBEs is Raymond Moody's delightful book, *Life After Life*.[2] In this book, Moody describes the general characteristics of the near-death experience (hereafter, the NDE) as it has been described by various individuals who have had it. These individuals invariably consider their NDE as compelling evidence for belief in life after death. Of course, not all OBEs are NDEs (although all NDEs are OBEs) because there is frequent testimony to OBEs in non-clinical and in non-traumatic contexts. Sometimes, for example, people report having an OBE simply on the occasion of falling off to sleep.[3]

In the typical OBE report, the person concerned, after falling off to sleep or after undergoing some stressful event, suddenly awakens to see her own body inert. She observes her body as if it were the body of someone else. As a rule, she also observes (usually from an elevated position above the body) other objects in the room. In some cases she perceives quite clearly, and is later able to describe, persons who entered the room while she was "out of her body." She may, or may not, find herself able to travel from the vicinity of her unconscius body. In his book, *Belief in Life After Death,* C. J. Ducasse, for example, quotes a certain gentleman who had two such experiences. The gentleman's narration reads as follows:

> The first time it was while in a dentist's chair. Under anesthesia, I had the sensation of awaking and of finding myself floating in the upper part of the room, from where, with great astonishment, I watched the dentist working on my body and the anaesthetist at his side. I saw my inanimate body as distinctly as any other object in the room . . . . The second time I was in a hotel in London. I awoke in the morning feeling unwell (I have a weak heart) and shortly thereafter I fainted. Greatly to my astonishment, I found myself in the upper part of the room, from where, with fear, I beheld my body inanimate in the bed with its eyes closed. I tried without success to reenter my body and concluded that I had died . . . . Certainly I had not lost either memory or self-consciousness. I could see my inanimate body like a separate object; I was able to look at my face. I was, however, unable to leave the room: I felt myself as it were chained, immobilized in the corner where I was. After an hour or two I heard a knock on the locked door several times without being able to answer. Soon after, the hotel porter appeared on the fire escape. I saw him shake his head after listening to my heart, and then insert a spoon between my lips. I then lost consciousness and awoke in the bed.[4]

Ducasse goes on to note that, in addition to the sorts of cases just cited, wherein the OBE occurs spontaneously and unpredictably, there are also cases of *voluntarily induced* OBEs. A voluntarily induced OBE is sometimes called a "voluntary astral projection" and refers to an OBE that the subject is capable of inducing whenever the subject so desires. For example, after considering a case report of a voluntary OBE, Jeffrey Mishlove discusses recent laboratory research into voluntarily induced OBEs. In so doing, he presents us with an interesting example of a young man, Mr. Blue Harary, who is said to be capable of voluntary OBEs. He says:

> More conclusive studies, however, have been conducted at the Psychical Research Foundation in Durham, North Carolina. This research is unique in that the subject, or projector, Mr. Blue Harary, was also a member of the

scientific team which designed the experiments. Harary was an undergraduate psychology student at Duke University and was able to voluntarily induce out-of-body experiences . . . .

In addition to monitoring physiological changes and having target material in another location for Blue to observe while projecting, the PRF team sought to determine if any animal, human or mechnical devices could detect the presence of the "second body" near the target area . . . .

The most significant results of these experiments were with the subject's pet kitten which was used in the target room as a detector. The cat was placed in a three foot deep "open field" container which was divided into 24 numbered ten-inch squares. During the non-OBE control period, the kitten was very active, meowing frequently, crossing a large number of squares, and attempting to get out of the container. However, during the times when Blue was allegedly out-of-his body visiting the target room, the cat became strikingly quiet and calm. This effect was repeated throughout four experimental sessions! Another experiment using a snake as a detector also produced a striking response—literally speaking that is. The snake was characteristically calm during the control periods, but began striking and gnawing against the glass front of his cage during the initial OBE test.[5]

Later, we shall discuss the importance and significance of this kind of research. For the moment I refer to it simply to illustrate a case of alleged *voluntary* OBE.

Finally, perhaps the most celebrated testimony for OBEs comes from Raymond Moody, who, after examining numerous cases of NDEs (no two of which are identical), offers a model indicating the general elements found in the testimony of those who have claimed to have had NDEs.

A man is dying and, as he reaches the point of greatest physical distress, he hears himself pronounced dead by his doctor. He begins to hear an uncomfortable noise, a loud ringing or buzzing, and at the same time feels himself moving vey rapidly through a dark tunnel. After this, he suddenly finds himself outside of his own physical body, but still in the immediate physical environment, and he sees his own body from a distance, as though he is a spectator. He watches the resuscitation attempt from this unusual vantage point and is in a state of emotional upheaval.

After a while he collects himself and becomes more accustomed to his odd condition. He notices that he still has a "body" but one of a very different nature and with very different powers from the physical body he has left behind. Soon other things begin to happen. Others come to meet and to help him. He glimpses the spirits of relatives and friends who have already died, and a loving, warm spirit of a kind he has never encountered before—a being of light—appears before him. This being asks him a question, nonverbally, to make him evaluate his life and helps him along by showing him a panoramic, instantaneous playback of the major events of his life. At some

point he finds himself approaching some sort of barrier or border, apparently representing the limit between earthly life and the next life. Yet, he finds that he must go back to earth, that the time for his death has not yet come. At this point he resists, for by now he is taken up with his experiences in the afterlife and does not want to return. He is overwhelmed by intense feelings of joy, love and peace. Despite his attitude, though, he somehow reunites with his physical body and lives.

Later he tries to tell others, but he has trouble doing so. In the first place, he can find no human words adequate to describe these unearthly episodes. He also finds that others scoff, so he stops telling other people. Still, the experience affects his life profoundly, especially his views about death and its relationship to life.[6]

Moody is quick to add, however, that this narrative is merely a "model," or a composite sketch, of the common elements most frequently found in the reports of such experiences. Sometimes, people report such experiences but leave out various elements found in the composite. But most of the time, most of the elements are present in such reports.

Consider the example of Renee Pasarow, who reports having had a NDE in May 1967 when she was seventeen. At the time, she was suffering from a massive allergic reaction. Let me quote from her own narrative of the events beginning on the evening when she had the NDE:

After my mother and I had eaten dinner, an old friend I had not seen for some time dropped by unexpectedly. I was rather embarrassed, because I had been covered with welts and hives for two days as a result of the allergy and looked somewhat grotesque. The swelling became substantially worse, and I had great difficulty in breathing. By the time my mother got me to the car, my friend and she realized that they could never keep me breathing on the twenty-minute trip to the hospital. An ambulance was called, but, as none was soon available in our rural district, two firetrucks responded in the meantime.

I was unconscious on the sidewalk in front of our residence, although I was aware of making a tremendous effort to keep breathing. Several firemen were working on me when at last the struggle to keep fighting for my life became too tremendous. I stopped breathing and felt a great relief to be free of the burden of trying to stay alive. I slipped into the dark of a totally unconscious but peaceful realm.

Suddenly, I found myself a few feet outside my body, watching with great curiosity as the firemen gave me mouth-to-mouth resuscitation and violently slapped my legs. I remember them thinking that if they could just get me mad enough, I might come back. My mother was splashing water on my ashen face, and the eldest fireman who was giving me mouth-to-mouth resuscitation kept pleading with me mentally not to leave and seeing his own teenaged daughter in his mind's eye.

Just as suddenly, I found myself viewing this cosmically comic scene from slightly above the telephone wires. I saw a young neighbor boy come out of his house upon awakening from his nap, and I tried screaming at his mother to go and get him before he saw all this. Just as I screamed at her, she looked up the driveway and saw him, and my mother said there was nothing she could do, so she best get her child. One of the firemen commented with a great sigh of failure that I had been without pulse for three minutes.

I felt a pang of guilt that this poor fireman should feel a failure in my death. He was especially touched because I resembled his own daughter. My mother was dazed, hopelessly without any control over the sitatuion and her shock numbed the onset of grief. I remember saying a prayer for her, in hopes that this would help to see her through the pain, but then I realized that she would come to deal with the situation. I wanted to cry out to them all, my mother, friends and the firemen, that everything was as it should be, that I was fine. I was telepathically aware of everyone's feelings and thoughts, and this seemed a burden, as their pain was as it should be.

Delighted at my newly found freedom, I began to soar. I had become the phoenix, released at last from the limitations of the physical world. I was exhilarated. Everywhere around me there was music; the ether of my new universe was love, a love so pure and selfless that I only longed for more. I became aware of my favorite uncle's presence: we gleefully recognized each other although we were now in an energy, rather than a physical form. He traveled with me for a short time, expressing even more love and acceptance. As a vast light became visible in this sea of light, however I was magnetically drawn into it. The closer I got to this light (closeness, however, not meant in the physical sense) the more love and ecstacy were mine to experience.

Finally, I was sucked into the light source, not unlike one is swept up in a whirlpool. I became one with the light. As I became one with this ominipresent light, its knowledge became my knowledge. I was in a single instant what my life had been and what had been of meaning in my life . . . .The superficial aspects of my life, what I had accomplished, owned and known, were consumed in that same instant by the energy of the light. However, those acts in which I selflessly expressed love or concern for my fellow men were glorified and permanently inscribed in the akashic record, with total disregard for however humble or fleeting those moments had been.

In the same moment, the direction of the whole of mankind became evident to me. I realized that whatever I had been before I would never be again.

Suddenly, I was ejected from the light to the other side of this new universe, where I realized I would have to make my way. I recall someone beckoning to me, although the identity of that person still remains a mystery, for also at that moment it was revealed to me that my moment in the cosmic dance was not completed, that there was something for my human race that I must achieve on the physical plane of existence. Coinciding with the moment of that revelation, the light, the universe, or God himself proclaimed

IT IS NOT TIME, and that proclamation hurled me from this magnificent universe of love.

I was pushed through a tremendous tunnel of light, through a progressive rainbow of the wavelengths of color, and catapulted back into the physical realm. It was as if the whole process was not just initiated by the proclamation, but was the proclamation IT IS NOT TIME itself.

I found myself, griefstricken and heartsick, again a few feet from my body. I felt as if I had been cast out of paradise, an Eve no longer in the Garden of Eden. The physical realm was coarse and confusing, divided and foreign. A sense of time and space was clamped down upon my being, casting upon my soul a sense of imprisonment and degradation unlike any I had ever known.

The ambulance had arrived, and the attendants were checking for my absent pulse, which still eluded them. I tried to merge again with the body that was once mine but which now seemed like a foreign substance. This required a tremendous effort on my part, and the attendants placing me in the back of the ambulance only made the merging that more difficult. I hovered over my body in the ambulance, and for a brief instant rejoined it. I felt the surge of blood through my veins, and the attendant motioned to the driver that he had a pulse.

The pain of the physical was too much for me to stand, however, and I separated from the body again, hovering both inside and outside the moving ambulance. I watched as the young attendant in the back mouthed DOA to the driver about ten minutes into the drive. My mother's pain at this announcement became my pain, and I was angered at the callousness of the ambulance attendant.

I continued watching from several feet above my body as I was wheeled into the emergency room and the first young doctor was unable to revive me again . . . . At that moment my personal physician burst into the emergency room in his tuxedo, bag in hand.

"Where is she?" he demanded.

"She was DOA," the young doctor announced.

"The hell she is!" shouted my doctor, a family friend of many years, and got down to the business of determining how many shots of adrenaline I had been given. He ordered that I be given up to six large injections of adrenaline, something the other doctors and nurses obviously considered very dangerous. He proceeded to pump me full of adrenaline and give heart massage until at last a pulse was perceived. It is interesting to note that I was fully aware of what was happening both physically and in the minds of those in the emergency room until I was revived, at which point I was very confused.

To the best of my knowledge I was without a heartbeat approximately fifteen minutes. The incident left me with some minimal brain damage, the effects of which have been totally overcome, although to this day my reflexes reflect the damage.[7]

As a final example of a OBE that is also a NDE, we can relate the account of Tommy Clack, who on May 29, 1969 was a 22-year-old

Captain who stepped on a booby trap while leading his men near Chu Chi in South Vietnam. Clack recounts his story this way:

> I remember being hit. I went flying through the air, then hit the ground. I sat up for an instant and saw that my right arm was gone, my right leg was gone and my left leg was off to the left side. I laid back down. I remember thinking what it means to die. I lost my sight, lost all sense of feeling, could feel no pain.
>
> Suddenly I realized that I was up (in the air) looking (down) at myself. I saw them pick me (my body) up, put me on a stretcher. They covered me with a poncho, which means they thought I was dead. I realized then that I was dead. I watched them take me to the helicopter. I got on the helicopter with them and went to the field hospital.
>
> I saw nurses cutting my uniform off, starting an IV. I tried to stop them. I was very happy and peaceful where I was. All of a sudden I was back on the battlefield.
>
> All 13 of the guys killed in action the day before were there. I could not see them but somehow I knew they were there. The guys and I communicated with each other—I don't know how. They were very happy where they were. They wanted me to stay with them.
>
> I felt very peaceful and tranquil. I did not see a physical form (for myself). I was a shape—almost a thought process. There was a bright light there the whole time.
>
> I tried to stop them (soldiers) from picking up those who had died earlier in the day. But they didn't even know that I was there.
>
> All of a sudden I'm back in the operating room. They were operating on me. I knew they were talking, but I don't remember what was said. Instantly I was drawn back into my body.[8]

In turning to an assessment of all this testimony for OBEs, it is inevitable that we confront a healthy dose of skepticism. As a matter of fact, skeptics often say that all such testimony can be explained without our needing to believe that persons *literally* leave their bodies. In the next few pages, then, we will examine these alternative explanations frequently offered by skeptics and seek to determine their strength. The conclusion I will draw is that the alternative explanations offered by skeptics are unconvincing. Even so, the testimony favoring OBEs will need to be strengthened in certain ways if we are to feel rationally *compelled* by it.

II. THE HALLUCINATION HYPOTHESIS

Within the medical community and the psychological community, the experience of viewing one's image outside the body is known as an "autoscopic hallucination." This kind of hallucination occurs often in

cases of drug abuse, epilepsy, liver ailments, cerebral lesions, brain tumors, alcoholism or other pathological conditions. Hence, skeptical minds find it natural to suppose that people reporting OBEs must have some mental or physical disorder inducing these autoscopic hallucinations; and in the case of NDEs, the stress-induced physiological changes makes the skeptic's supposition here attractive.

Ronald Siegler, for example, speaks for many persons when he argues that the NDE and the OBE are exactly the sort of experience we would expect of persons hallucinating as a result of some mental or physical disorder. So, Siegler believes that all such reports are really evidence of hallucination and not evidence that people could leave their bodies.[9]

Is Siegler right? Surely *some* reported OBEs can be explained in this fashion. But can we explain *all* of them in this way?

Not at all. And this is because there are some OBEs in which the subject immediately afterwards reports events that took place during the OBE and at a considerable distance from the subject's body. These same events *in fact occurred* while the subject was having the OBE and while the subject's body was being watched by independent witnesses. These are the important cases. These are the ones we cannot explain away by saying that the subject must have been hallucinating.

In one of the cases noted above, for example, Mr. Blue Harary is a person who claims to be able voluntarily to "project" to distant areas. In the presence of other persons, he can lay down and project voluntarily to an area assigned or targeted by the researcher. While remaining close to Mr. Harary's body, the researcher directs him to a targeted area Mr. Harary knows nothing about. The researcher also may not know anything about the target area. He simply tells Mr. Harary where to go. Mr. Harary is also asked to observe the target area very closely when he gets there. Later, when Mr. Harary "awakens" to find the researcher who never left his side, Mr. Harary describes in great detail the target area and what went on while he was in the target area. Subsequently, the accuracy of Mr. Harary's claims are independently corroborated by independent witnesses placed in the target area, but who do not know why they were placed in the target area.[10]

Can we explain Harary's general accuracy in these experiments and still hold, along with Seigler, that Harary's experience is simply a hallucination? How could Harary *know* (as indeed he did) about what took place in the target area during his OBE if he was simply hallucinating? Surely, then, Siegler's claim that all OBEs are hallucinations is false.

As if that were not enough, there are other cases in which the subjects accurately describe sensory events occurring during their OBEs and *near*

their bodies. But in these cases the numerous witnesses testify that the subjects were "clinically dead" or physically incapable of seeing what they accurately describe. Michael Sabom, for example, relates a case in which a patient had undergone cardiac arrest. The patient was rolled into the operating room to undergo recovery procedure. He was on his back and faced towards the ceiling throughout the procedure. Later, the patient accurately described tile patterns on the floor of the operating room. He also described other characteristics of the room, characteristics that could not be described unless we suppose that the subject had seen the room from some position other than the one in which he was throughout the recovery procedure.[11]

So, while some OBEs and NDEs bear striking similarities to what are usually considered "autoscopic hallucinations," still many of these experiences cannot be explained as hallucinations. In these more important cases what gets described as parts of the OBE are independently verified facts that we have no way of explaining how the subject knows. If these people did not leave their bodies (but only mistakenly believed that they did), how shall we account for their *knowing* what took place some distance from their bodies when numerous observers testify that the subject was in no position to witness those events? Surely, all this undermines the view that the subjects in all OBEs are simply hallucinating.

Of course, where people report OBEs and do *not* testify to facts that can be independently verified as having occurred some distance from their bodies (during the OBEs), Siegler's view would be reasonable.[12]

III. THE ESP AND PHYSIOLOGICAL CHANGE HYPOTHESIS

When the attempt to explain all NDEs and OBEs as hallucinatory experiences fails, the skeptic sometimes moves to a more subtle explanation. When this happens we get the following explanation.

People who have OBEs (including those who have NDEs) and who, as a result of such experiences, have knowledge of events beyond their ordinary sensory capacity, may not have left their bodies. Rather, we need only suppose that in these states the subjects undergo dramatic changes in brain chemistry. As a result of these changes, the subjects activate unknowingly whatever neurological mechanisms that cause the phenomenon of clairvoyance. In these states, then, the subjects *mistakenly believe that they are in those places or situations that they correctly perceive clairvoyantly.*

Given this explanation, we must consider as illusory the subject's claims about leaving his or her body, whereas the subject's claims about seeing what gets independently verified are viewed as the product of clairvoyance induced in and through physiological change.

For example, suppose Smith reports having an OBE while others are watching his body. And suppose he claims, upon waking, so to speak, that he visited his cousin Sam three hundred miles away, and that during the visit (he noticed the time) Sam was eating dinner. Suppose further that we investigate the matter and find that indeed Sam was eating dinner at the time Smith said he was eating dinner. Given the present explanation offered by the skeptic, we need not suppose that Smith left his body. We need only suppose that Smith is clairvoyant on those kinds of occasions but mistakenly believes that he leaves his body to secure the information he has. In other words, the subject hallucinates leaving his body but does not hallucinate the facts he claims to know because in those states he has acquired the knowledge clairvoyantly. Can this skeptical explanation fare any better than the previous explanation?

Not really. For one thing, it seems arbitrary to select certain items for clairvoyance and other items for hallucination. Why should we count those items that get independently verified as clairvoyant hits but write the rest off to illusion or hallucination? The skeptic's answer, of course, will be that we need appeal to clairvoyance only to explain the independently verified facts, not one of which is that the person is at some place removed from his body. As predictable as this answer may be, however, it still would not seem to justify the move that the rest of the testimony is readily explicable under the hypothesis of illusion or hallucination. It still seems an arbitrary and simple refusal to consider anything as evidence for the subject's claim to have left his or her body.

For another thing, the above explanation does not quite fit the more interesting cases of OBE. For example, consider those cases in which the subject is asked to voluntarily visit a target area and then, while in the area, move some object or other.[13] This sort of case is quite different, because appeal to clairvoyance plus illusion alone does not explain how the subject is able to move objects in the target environment. Indeed, these seem to be the most important kinds of cases because, however rare they are, they do not admit of ready disposal by appeal to ESP (or clairvoyance) plus illusion.

But if this is the strongest kind of case favoring the truth of the OBE and the belief that some people actually do leave their bodies, then the

skeptic still has a reply. After all, we have ample evidence of persons moving objects at a distance, and to explain this we do not need to suppose that the person leaves his or her body.[14] Given this fact, then, we could explain these strongest cases of OBE by appeal to *clairvoyance* (to account for the subject's knowledge), *illusion* (to account for the subject's claim to see his or her own body and to have been in some place where his or her body was not), and *action at a distance* (to account for the subject's ability to move an object at some distance from his or her body when directed to do so).

Even so, there is still something unexplained in these alternative explanations offered by the skeptic. It has to do with the phenomenon that in some reported OBEs there are aspects of "autoscopic description" that defy explanation by appeal to clairvoyance as we generally understand it.

For example, in cases reported by Sabom and others, the *subjects describe the environment in a way that is only consistent with viewing the environment from an elevated position above the body of the subject.* Frequently, people reporting OBEs describe in detail the pattern and colors of floor tiles, for example.[15] Clairvoyant descriptions, however, do not have this feature generally, whereas this feature is generally present in OBE descriptions and especially in NDEs.

Inability to explain this last aspect of OBEs by appeal to clairvoyance undercuts the force of the alternative explanation just offered by the skeptic who is appealing to ESP and physiological change only. But the question is whether it undercuts it enough to carry the case in favor of the dualist's interpretation of the OBE.

Some may well feel that if this last item is the only item that separates us from accepting the materialist's version of the OBE, then, given the weight of the dualists version and its implications in general, we ought to withhold assent and keep an open mind in the hope of determining whether we can explain those troublesome features of autoscopic descriptions without having to appeal to the dualist's version.

Doubtless, it might well be a mistake to base the whole of the dualist's view of OBEs on the inability of alternative skeptical explanations to account for certain autoscopic features by appeal to clairvoyance.[16] Even so, the inability to account for such features by appeal to clairvoyance is a serious problem for the skeptic's alternative explanations. In the light of this problem, we are presently justified in holding the dualist's position on OBEs in spite of the skeptic's strongest objections.

I know of no other alternative hypothesis that the skeptic could offer to explain the OBE without adopting the dualist's position.[17]

IV. CONCLUSION

Although the evidence just examined favors the dualist's view on the nature of OBEs, the evidence is hardly overwhelming. As a matter of fact, because the evidence at hand does not seem strong enough to warrant anything like a ringing endorsement of dualism, we may well be prompted to ask what it would take to warrant to least a firm endorsement. What would it take to demonstrate beyond a reasonable doubt that the dualist's interpretation of OBEs is correct? Naturally, refusal to admit that anything could possibly count amounts to nothing more than dogmatism.

Some have suggested that if we could monitor the brain activity of subjects in both voluntary and involuntary OBEs and if the monitored subject's EEG were determined to be flat during the time of the OBE, then that would prove conclusively that the subject's independently confirmed reports about what was taking place some distance from his body could not be the product of ESP (clairvoyance) nor hallucination, because both of those explanations would require the presence of some brain activity in the subject during the OBE. Moreover, the satisfaction of this last requirement would also make it impossible to explain by appeal to *action at a distance* how the subject in a voluntary OBE would be able to move an object in the appointed location.[18]

Interestingly enough, some researchers claim that this requirement has been satisifed, but their claim has not yet been substantiated.[19] Until such ideal cases, whether voluntary or involuntary, have been well-documented and repeated frequently under control conditions, we cannot claim strong evidence warranting the dualist's interpretation.[20]

As things presently stand, the existing and available evidence seems to support the view that it is more reasonable to favor the dualist's interpretation of the OBE than it would be to favor the materialist's view. But this is only because the materialist's explanation does not account for the feature of autoscopic descriptions whereby they are the product of a physically elevated viewpoint above the subject's body. As we saw above, however, this evidence is a bit weaker than is apparently necessary to produce full-blooded conviction favoring dualism.

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CHAPTER FOUR

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE DEAD

> It is a field in which the sources of deception are extremely numerous. But I believe there is no source of deception in the investigation of nature which can compare with a fixed belief that certain kinds of phenomenon are impossible.
>
> (William James commenting on paranormal research, 1886)

> If survival is ever proved to the satisfaction of scientific orthodoxy, it will, I think, be by the mental phenomena of the seance room, and not by the physical.
>
> (Harry Price in *Fifty Years of Psychical Research*)

I. INTRODUCTION

SOME PEOPLE claim that dead persons occasionally communicate with the living through persons called mediums. Fascinated by this claim, philosophers and scientists continue to examine mediums and mediumship as a possible source of evidence for belief in some form of life after death. In this chapter we shall examine a specific form of mediumship, trance mediumship, and point to some case studies that provide unusually strong evidence for the belief in some form of personal survival after death. We shall also see a couple of cases that *seem* quite powerful but that fail when confronted by the serious skeptic. Before going further, however, let me say something very briefly about *trance mediumship*.

II. TRANCE MEDIUMSHIP

A trance medium is a person (usually female) who enters voluntarily into a trace state, a conscious but sleep-like state such as deep hypnosis. While in that altered state of consciousness, she supposedly receives

information from deceased persons and conveys the information to others (usually relatives or friends of the deceased) sitting in her presence. In this most common form of trance mediumship, the medium uses her own mental states and vocal organs to convey consciously information she receives from the deceased.

But in another kind of trance mediumship, the medium enters voluntarily into a trance state and her personality is "taken over" or "replaced" by the personality of a deceased person. In this second and rare form of mediumship, the personality taking over the personality of the medium is called *the control*. The control possesses and then "uses" the bodily organs and vocal organs of the medium to speak directly to the sitters (those present at the trance) about their deceased relatives or friends. In this form of mediumship, unlike in the more common form, the personality of the deceased allegedly uses the body of the medium whose personality is apparently totally replaced by the personality of the deceased. The medium then speaks and acts in ways totally characteristic of the deceased but quite foreign to the normal personality of the medium. After the trance is over, the medium usually has no conscious recollection of anything that transpired during the trance.

Sometimes, too, during a seance of this second type, a succession of deceased persons will emerge and speak through the medium. And each of them will manifest the individual traits supposedly characteristic of the deceased before death. This general phenomenon, wherein the personality of the medium under trance is replaced by the personality of a deceased person, is called *ostensible possession* or *possession mediumship*.[1]

III. THE LANGUAGE CASES

A. The Greek Case

The *Annales des Sciences Psychiques* in 1905 (vol. XV, p. 317) reported a case in which a medium under trance spoke a language of which, in her normal state, she was entirely ignorant. The medium was a Ms. Laura Edmunds, the daughter of the distinguished Judge Edmunds, President of the New York State Senate and later Judge of the Supreme Court of New York. Judge Edmunds was widely regarded as a person of unquestionable integrity and considerable intelligence.

At one time the Judge had undertaken the study of psychical research to demonstrate the worthlessness of the activity and the foolishness of

those who took such phenomena seriously. We can imagine the depth of his befuddlement when his daughter, Laura, a fervent Catholic capable of speaking her mother tongue only, began to shine as a developing medium.

Anyway, as the case is reported, one evening a Mr. Evangelides, a Greek, visited the Edmundses. At a sitting (a seance) held later that evening, Laura, in trance, was controlled by a friend of Evangelides', a Mr. Botzaris, who had died earlier in Greece. According to Judge Edmunds, this control (Mr. Botzaris) spoke in modern Greek to Evangelides and informed him that his son, whom Evangelides still supposed was well and alive in Greece, had recently died. Evangelides wept at this news and could scarcely believe it. But the fact of his son's death was subsequently confirmed. Judge Edmunds, who submitted an affidavit testifying to the above, made the following observations:

> To deny the fact is impossible, it was too well known; I could as well deny the light of the sun; nor could I think it an illusion, for it is in no way different from any other reality. It took place before ten educated and intelligent persons. We have never seen Mr. Evangelides before; he was introduced by a friend that same evening. How could Laura tell him of his son? How could she understand and speak Greek which she had never previously heard?

B. The Welsh Case

In *Towards the Stars* (London, T. Werner Laurie, LTd.: 1932), Dennis Bradley tells of a seance involving himself and friends with the famous American medium, George Valentine, on February 27, 1924, in Bradley's house in Dorincourt (p. 208ff.). Present at the sitting were Dennis Bradley, Mrs. Dennis Bradley, Newman Flower, Harold Wimbury, Mr. and Mrs. Caradoc Evans, Miss Queenie Bayliss, and the medium, George Valentine.

During the sitting Mr. and Mrs. Evans, who had attended earlier sittings, renewed a discussion with a deceased friend, a Mr. Wright. After awhile, however, a new voice, claiming to be that of Mr. Evans' father came forward. Then the following exchange occurred:

Caradoc Evans: Do you want me?
Voice: Yes.
Caradoc Evans: Who are you?
Voice: Your father!
Caradoc Evans: Father! Can't be. How do you know that I am here? Who told you?

Voice: Edward Wright.
Caradoc Evans: Well, look, if you are my father, *siaradwch* a fy yn eich iath.[2]
Voice: *Beth i chwi am i fy ddeyd?*
Caradoc Evans: *Eich enw, wrth gwrs.*
Voice: William Evans.
Caradoc Evans: *Yn le maro chwi?*
Voice: *Caerfyrddin.*
Caradoc Evans: *Sir?*
Voice: *Tre.*
Caradoc Evans: *Ble mae'r ty?*
Voice: Uch ben ye avon. Mae steps—lawer iawn—rhwng y ty ar rheol. Pa beth yr ydych yn gofyn? Y chwi yn mynd i weld a ty bob tro yr rydych yn y dre.
Caradoc Evans: *Nhad . . .*

Translation

. . . speak to me in your own language
Voice: What do you want me to say?
Caradoc Evans: Your name, of course.
Voice: William Evans.
Caradoc Evans: Where did you die?
Voice: Carmarthen.
Caradoc Evans: Shire?
Voice: Town.
Caradoc Evans: Where is the house?
Voice: Above the river. There are step—many steps—between the house and the road. Why do you ask me? You go to see the house every time you are in town.
Caradoc Evans: My father . . .

Before going on to our third language case, it is worth noting that the medium in this case, George Valentine, neither spoke nor understood a word of Welsh.

C. The Hungarian Case

In 1939, the November issue of *The Psychic News* (published in London) carried an account of Doctor Nandor Fodor's first encounter with a case of possession mediumship. Fodor had arrived unexpectedly in New

York a day before the seance, and a good friend, William Cartheuser, introduced him to Arthur Ford just before the seance.

When the seance began, Ford went into trance and Ford's control, Fletcher, spoke through Ford. After awhile Fodor asked Fletcher if he (Fletcher) could bring forth somebody who would speak Hungarian, Fodor's native tongue. Fletcher said he'd try. After a period of silence, Nandor's account continues:

> I hear a voice. Cold shivers run down my back. It sounds like a distant cry. It is repeated. Someone is calling my name.
>
> "Who . . . who is it? Whom do you want?" I ask hoarsely in my native tongue.
>
> The call is more explicit: "Fodor . . . Journalist!"
>
> The last word shakes me to the core. It is pronounced in German. It is the only German word my father ever used. He used it only when he spoke about me!
>
> I stammered an answer. Craning my neck in the dark . . . I listened with strained nerves to tatters of a terrific struggle for expression.
>
> "Edesapa . . . edesapa . . . " (Dear father . . . dear father.)
>
> The voice vibrates with emotion. It makes me hot and burning. I sound unnatural to myself: "Apam? Apam?" (Father, dear?)
>
> "Iges. Edes fiam . . . " (Yes, dear son . . .)
>
> I cannot describe the minutes that followed. From beyond the Great Divide somebody who says he is my father is making desperate efforts to master some weird instrument of speech, and trembles with anxiety to prove his presence by speaking in his native tongue:
>
> "Budapest . . . nem ertesz? Enekelek . . . Magyar Kislany vagyok." (Budapest . . . don't you understand? . . . I will sing . . .)
>
> I don't know the song. Two lines rhyming. Have I heard them before?
>
> I recognize the pet name of my eldest brother, to whom my father was very attached.
>
> The voice comes from near the ceiling. But it comes nearer at my request. It is still struggling for words.
>
> Fletcher takes pity and explains: "Your father wishes to tell you that he died in January 16. It is for the first time he tries to speak. That makes it very difficult for him."
>
> The interruption brings relief. The voice becomes much clearer. It gives me a message about my mother and sister.
>
> Then: "*Isten aldjon meg, edes fiam.*" (God bless you, my son.)
>
> Sounds of kisses . . . Silence . . .
>
> The voice speaks again in Hungarian: "Esti Ujsag" (Evening News.)
>
> My wife screams.
>
> *Esti Ujsag* was the newspaper on which her brother was employed before he died.
>
> "Sanyika?"
>
> "Yes."

I feel her trembling with excitement.

The voice is youthful and explosive. It speaks as my wife's brother would. He knows all about the family and is always about. He has but one regret: *'Szegeny Vilmis basci!'* (Poor Uncle Vilmos.)

"Why, what is wrong with Uncle Vilmos?"

"He is not well, he will go blind."

We receive the prophecy in dead silence.

My experience was more unusual than that of the majority. I was a foreigner on the staff of a foreign daily in New York. I had few friends, they were all new ones. None of them knew about my old country relations. Yet the statements about my family were correct.

The voice spoke in Hungarian. Plain as the words were, my native tongue offers a variety of expressions for the relationship between father and son.

The voice made no mistake. My father was in the habit of using the very words.

He had forgotten his German years before. It was no more spoken at home. The only word retained was "journalist." He was very proud of his boy, the journalist. The Hungarian equivalent of *ujsagiro*. He never used it. He preferred the German term.

The reference to the date of his death was not correct. He did not die on January 16. But he was buried on that day.

Uncle Vilmos, as predicted, went blind—and committed suicide! I know him as Uncle Villy. Vilmos (the proper name) left me uneasy. I had the matter out with my mother-in-law two years later when I revisited Budapest. She opened her eyes wide.

"Why, didn't you know? My boy alone in the family called him Uncle Vilmos. He was Uncle Villy to everybody else!"

Once again, we should note that the medium, Arthur Ford, neither spoke nor understood Hungarian. We can now turn to the last of our language cases, the Chinese case.

D. The Chinese Case

In *Psychic Adventures in New York* (Morley and Mitchell Kennerly, London: 1942), Doctor Nevill Whymant tells of the time he was invited by Judge W. M. Cannon to attend a sitting with the medium, George Valentine. Judge Cannon told Doctor Whymant that voices had spoken foreign tongues, European and Oriental, at previous sittings; and because Doctor Whymant (who, before coming to New York, had lectured many years in Chinese at Oxford) spoke thirty dialects and languages, his attendance was desired in order that he might comment on the voices that none of the others could understand.

Doctor Whymant later confessed that he found himself amused over the possibility of uncovering an ingenious hoax. Moreover, when Why-

mant met Valentine, he formed the opinion that this medium was basically stupid, unlettered and distinctly incapable of any form of acting. Incidentally, this was the same George Valentine that was the medium in the Welsh case discussed above.

As usual, the seance began with the Lord's Prayer, followed by some singing, and then the first voices came through the entranced Valentine speaking very personal matters to sitters other than Whymant. A voice spoke in Italian and Whymant was kind enough to translate it for one of the sitters. Suddenly, according to Whymant's narration, there came

> a weird, crackling, broken little sound which at once carried my mind straight back to China. It was the sound of a flute, rather poorly played, such as can be heard in the streets of the Celestial Land but nowhere else. The next sound seemed to be a hollow repetition of a Chinese name, K'ung-fu-T'zo, "The Philosopher-Master-K'ung," the name by which Confucious was canonized. I was not sure I had heard aright and I asked in Chinese for another opportunity of hearing what had been said before. This time without any hesitation at all came the name, K'ung-fu'T'zo. Now, I thought, this was my opportunity. Chinese I had long regarded as my own special research area, and he would be a wise man, medium or other, who would attempt to trick me on such soil . . . . It was difficult to discover what was said next, and I had to keep calling for a repetition. Then it burst upon me that I was listening to Chinese of a dialect not now spoken in any part of China. As the voice went on I realized that the style of Chinese used was identical with that of a Chinese classic edited by Confucius 2500 years ago. Only among scholars in archaic Chinese could one now hear that accent and style, and then only when they intoned some passage from the ancient books. In other words, the Chinese to which we were now listening was as dead colloquially as Sanskrit or Latin. I thought suddenly of a supreme test. There are several poems in the *Shih King* (Classics of Poetry) which have baffled the commentators ever since Confucius himself edited the work and left it to posterity as a model anthology of early Chinese verse. Western scholars have attempted in vain to wrest their meaning, and Chinese classical scholars versed in the lore and literature of the ancient empire have long ago given up trying to understand them. I have never read any of these poems myself, but I knew the first lines of some of them through seeing them so often while looking through the book for others. At this moment it occurred to me that if I could remember the first line of them I might now get a chance to astonish the communicator who called himself "Confucius." I asked if the "Master" would explain to me the meaning of one of those long, obscure odes. Without exerting conscious choice I said, *'Ts'ai Ts'ai chuan ehr,'* which is the first line of the third ode of the first book *(Chow nan)* of the Classics of Poetry. I certainly could not have repeated another line of this poem, for I did not know any of the remaining fifteen lines; but there was no need or even opportunity, for the voice took up the poem and recited to the end. I had a pad of paper and a pencil and I made notes of what the voice said and jotted down keys to the intonation used.

> In declaiming the ode the voice had put a construction on the verses and made the whole thing hang together as a normal poem. Altogether there were about sixteen sittings at which I assisted in exactly the same fashion as that detailed in the first sitting. The self styled Confucius was very regular in its incidence. Fourteen foreign languages were used in the course of the sittings I attended. They included Chinese, Hindu, Persian, Basque, Sanskrit, Arabic, Portugese, Italian, Yiddish (spoken with great fluency when a Yiddish and Hebrew speaking Jew was a member of the circle), German, and modern Greek.

Doctor Whymant went on to note that only the Chinese can pronounce correctly Confucius' name, and Whymant was absolutely convinced that the owner of the voice had to be Chinese, and a Chinese scholar at that. Whymant even asked the voice, "What was your popular name when you were fourteen years old?" Not only was the reply correct, but it was uttered with the proper intonation and, according to Whymant, this sort of information is known only to experts in the Chinese language. According to Whymant, after twenty-five years of research on the language spoken in Confucius' time (some 2500 years ago), scholars agree that there are only about a dozen sounds known to have been used in the time of Confucius. These archaic sounds were uttered by the voice that Whymant spoke with.

Finally, the day after the first sitting, Whymant went to the library to check on the poetic diction supplied by the communicating entity. As a result of this investigation, Whymant discovered an error and concluded that either he had misheard or misquoted the entity, or the entity made a mistake in reciting the poem. At the next sitting, before Whymant had opportunity to say anything, the voice came forth and said, "Speaking the other day, this clumsy, witless one stepped into error. Too frequently, alas, he has done this; and the explanation he gave was a faulty one. Listen now to the reading of the passage about which the illustrious scholar inquired." Whymant then noted that the true reading followed and corrected the faulty reading.

Before discussing the force of all the language cases as evidence for personal survival after death, let us recount a few other cases that have been the subject of painstaking investigation.

IV. THE MEDIUMSHIPS OF MRS. PIPER AND MRS. WILLETT

Among the trance mediums most examined and discussed in the early days of The Society for Psychical Research (founded in England in

1882) were Mrs. Leonora Piper and Mrs. Willett. Although the principal investigator of Mrs. Piper's mediumship had, as we shall see, serious reservations about the extent of her authenticity, I here include the discussion of Mrs. Piper because it helps to provide a good statement on what we should *not* count as evidence for personal survival even though the evidence may seem quite strong. Moreover, the examination of Mrs. Piper's mediumship underscores the force of the case made on the basis of Mrs. Willett's mediumship, a mediumship not vulnerable to strong skeptical replies.

A. Mrs. Leonora Piper

The American philosopher, William James, was quite active in, and served as President of, The Society for Psychical Research from 1894 to 1895. He also helped to found the American branch of that very same society, later to become The American Society for Psychical Research. James was introduced to Mrs. Leonora Piper, the Boston medium, in 1885 and his interest in her mediumship continued over a twenty-five-year period up to his death in 1910. In a report issued in 1909 and entitled "Report on Mrs Piper's Hodgeson Control" (later published in *The Proceedings of the American Society for Psychical Research,* Vol. III, 1909), James undertook to collate all the results of Mrs. Piper's sittings in America since Richard Hodgeson was her alleged control. Hodgeson had been a close friend of James and also one of the early founders of The American Society for Psychical Research.[3]

When William James and his wife first went to Mrs. Piper's seance back in 1885, and considerably before the period of the Hodgeson control, they gave her no information about themselves and said nothing while Mrs. Piper was in trance, and Phinuit (who was supposed to be a French physician) provided the Jameses with information that William James and his wife subsequently felt certain that nobody but they could have known. Indeed, in a letter that he later wrote to his friend F. W. H. Meyers about his early encounter with Mrs. Piper,[4] James said that after his first two visits with Mrs. Piper, he was initially convinced that she was either possessed of supernormal powers or knew the members of his wife's family by sight and had, by some lucky coincidence, become acquainted with the information she divulged. But he went on to note that later, as a result of numerous sittings with her, and because of his personal acquaintance with her, he came to believe that she had supernormal powers.[5] In a report he filed with the Society for Psychical Research in 1886, he said:

> This lady can at will pass into a trance condition, in which she is controlled by a power purporting to be the spirit of a French doctor, who served as intermediary between the sitter and deceased friends. This is the ordinary type of trance mediumship of the present day. I have myself witnessed a dozen of her trances, and have testimony at first hand of twenty-five sitters, all but one of whom were introduced to Mrs. P by myself . . .
>
> Fifteen of the sitters were surprised at the communications they received, names and fact being mentioned at the first interview which it seemed improbable should have been known to the medium in a normal way. The probability that she possessed no clew as to the sitter's identity was, I believe, in each and all of these fifteen cases, sufficient. But of only one of them is there a stenographic report, so that unfortunately for the medium, the evidence in her favor is, although more abundant, less exact in quality than some of that which will be counted against her.
>
> Of these fifteen sitters, five, all ladies, were blood relatives, and two (I myself being one) were men connected by marriage with the family to which they belonged . . . The medium showed a startling intimacy with the family's affairs, talking of many matters known to no one outside, and which gossip could not possibly have conveyed to her ears. The details would prove nothing to the reader, unless printed *in extenso* with full notes by the sitters. It reverts, after all, to personal conviction. My own conviction is not evidence, but it seems fitting to record it. I am persuaded of the medium's honesty, and of the genuineness of her trance; and although first disposed to think that the "hits" she made were either lucky coincidences, or the result of knowledge on her part of who the sitter was and of his or her family affairs, I now believe her to be in possession of a power as yet unexplained. *(William James on Psychical Research,* p. 97)

But James was quick to add that even though Mrs. Piper had knowledge not acquired in normal ways, he did not see enough evidence to establish that Mrs. Piper was in contact with deceased persons. He thought that Phinuit, Mrs. Piper's supposed control, was in fact a fictitious entity subconsciously created by Mrs. Piper. James' reasons for this latter conclusion were that: (a) Mrs. Piper's control, Phinuit, was supposed to be a French physician, but her French was limited to a few salutations and small phrases, and Phinuit did not understand or respond in French to James; and (b) Mrs. Piper failed three crucial tests.[6]

At any rate, after James' friend, Richard Hodgeson, died in December 1905, people were claiming that Hodgeson had taken over as Mrs. Piper's control. Intrigued, William James once again investigated Mrs. Piper's mediumship, and his investigation resulted in the earlier mentioned "Report on Mrs. Piper's Hodgeson Control" published in 1909. For this last report, James studied the transcripts of the various sittings in which Hodgeson was said to be in control. By January 1908 there had been seventy-five such sittings.

In this final report James once again concluded that from a purely logical point of view, the Hodgeson control could well be a fictitious entity created and dramatized by the subconscious mind of Mrs. Piper. James admitted that the Hodgeson control manifested paranormal knowledge, and everybody admitted that the Hodgeson control showed all the personal characteristics and traits of Hodgeson.[7] However, James still felt that the evidence was not strong enough. Mrs. Piper had had numerous personal contacts with Hodgeson before he died. As a result of these personal contacts, she could, James felt, be subsconsciously dramatizing his personality and furnishing it with information acquired by ESP. Later, we will return to examine the force of James' conclusions about the mediumship of Mrs. Piper.

B. Mrs. Willett[8]

Unlike Mrs. Piper and other mediums, when Mrs. Willett went into deep trance, she did not lose control of her body as if she were asleep or in a swoon. She would sit up and talk in a natural way and in the first-persons singular. There was no appearance of her body's being used by the deceased personality that spoke through her. So, while she was a trance medium, she was not the usual kind of possession medium.

What is important about Mrs. Willett's mediumship is that the deceased spirits of F. W. H. Meyers and Edmund Gurney, both founders of The Society for Psychical Research, spoke through Mrs. Willett and requested that one of the sitters be their friend Lord Balfour, a keen psychic researcher and President of The Society for Psychical Research from 1905 to 1906. When alive, Meyers and Gurney were avid philosophers widely read in philosophy, psychology and theology. Lord Balfour had had numerous philosophical discussions with both Meyers and Gurney before they died.

With Lord Balfour and others present on June 4, 1911, Mrs. Willett went into a deep trance. Then ensued the first of a series of sittings characterizable as lively philosophical discussions between Lord Balfour, the sitter, and both Meyers and Gurney, the communicators.[9] Commenting on the content of these communications, C. D. Broad noted that all these ostensible communications were "plainly the product of a highly intelligent and cultivated mind or minds, with a keen interest in psychology, psychical research and philosophy, and with a capacity for

drawing subtle and significant distinctions" (p. 297). Moreover, whatever the source of the utterances, the communicators showed a thorough acquaintance with the views and terminology of Meyers' book, *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death.*

It is worth emphasizing that the seances produced a high level of sophisticated philosophizing between the sitter and communicators (*Lectures,* p. 297). Typically, for example, Balfour would examine leisurely the record of a sitting, and then at the next sitting make criticisms or suggestions and ask for explanations. The Gurney communicator would then speak to the issues raised and try to clear up the obscurities. Sometimes, the Gurney communicator would accept, and sometimes vigorously reject, Balfour's suggestions and interpretations. Some of the sittings (those held on Oct. 8, 1911, Jan. 21, 1912, and March 5, 1912) were purely philosophical and sound like the transcript of an Ivy League graduate seminar on classical philosophy.[10]

Before determining the strength of these communications as evidence for personal survival, we must keep in mind two crucial facts. First, Mrs. Willett knew little philosophy and had even less patience for all that kind of talk. When not in trance state, and when subsequently shown a transcript of these sittings, Mrs. Willett could not understand the content. For example, a typical sentence uttered by the communicator during the sitting on May 24, 1911 was "The Absolute labors to attain self-consciousness through the myriad of self-created sentient beings." When shown this script some time later, Mrs. Willett did not know either the origin or the point of the script. Second, even though Balfour and others were convinced that the Meyers and Gurney communicators acted and spoke in ways uniquely characteristic of both Meyers and Gurney when they were alive, Mrs. Willett had met neither Meyers nor Gurney. As we shall see, these two considerations, when combined with the content of the communications, make it impossible to explain the sittings as an instance of the medium subconsciously impersonating people she had previously met and communicating information obtained through ESP.

At any rate, Lord Balfour came to believe that he was indeed in communication with the departed spirits of both Gurney and Meyers, and that no other hypothesis could explain the data as well.

We can now turn to our last case, a famous cross-correspondence case, frequently discussed in the literature and generally thought to be a good source of evidence for belief in personal survival.

V. THE EDGAR VANDY CASE

The Edgar Vandy case is similar to many other cases examined at length by various investigators.[11] Discussed by C. D. Broad (*Lectures,* p. 359ff.), the case was originally sent to The Society for Psychical Research by Mr. George Vandy. It concerns sittings held by George Vandy and his brother Harold with various mediums in 1933 shortly after the death of their brother, Edgar, on August 6 of that year.[12]

Edgar Vandy, a thirty-eight-year-old engineer, visited an estate in Sussex with a friend whose sister was a secretary to the owner of the estate. Upon arriving at the estate, Edgar and his friend decided to swim in the private pool and thus changed into swimming apparel in the bushes 200 feet distant from the pool. Edgar, who finished dressing first, entered the pool considerably earlier than his friend, whose view of Edgar entering the pool was blocked by bushes.

When Edgar's friend reached the pool some two or three minutes later, Edgar was drowning. Although Edgar's friend caught hold of Edgar, he could not hold his grip on him and Edgar sank to the bottom , whereupon Edgar's friend went to seek help.

Edgar's death was clearly due to drowning, and medical evidence indicated that Edgar had fallen while entering the pool, struck his jaw, and lost consciousness before drowning. But various conflicting hypotheses about the way Edgar died were offered and all of them were consistent with the available facts of the case. Dissatisfied with the results of the inquest, one of Edgar's surviving brothers, George Vandy, thought it likely that trance mediums might be able to illuminate some of the details attending Edgar's death.

Accordingly, George Vandy wrote to Mr. Drayton Thomas, a distinguished psychic researcher, for a "proxy sitting" with the medium, Mrs. Leonard.[13] He also requested the names of other mediums with whom the writer (George Vandy) might himself have sittings.

The only relevant fact George Vandy offered was that he wanted to obtain information about a brother who had died recently, and that some doubt remained in the mind of relatives about the cause of death. No names or other details were given. He did not mention that the death was not due to natural causes. Thomas agreed to the proxy sitting and recommended three reputable mediums. George Vandy arranged for either himself or his brother to have sittings with the three mediums recommended.[14]

We need not repeat the fascinating analysis and content of the six sittings conducted under very careful conditions. Both are readily available in the literature. However, evidence is overwhelming that many facts about Edgar Vandy's death (as well as the machine he had invented and was secretly perfecting) were revealed in a way that defies explanation in terms of the normal ways of knowing.

For example, common to all six sittings were the themes (information conveyed by the medium about the deceased): (a) that Edgar *fell* and in particular that his head was hit and damaged; and (b) that *one or more* persons were present at the scene of the tragedy, that likely they could and should have saved Edgar's life, and that they failed to do so through cowardice and incompetence, and that Edgar wished to shield them (C. D. Broad, *Lectures,* p. 360ff). Common to exactly five sittings (all the five non-proxy sittings) was a reference to (a) water and drowning and (b) Edgar's death being a strangely unlucky event which might easily have been avoided. Finally, common to two sittings were the two themes that (a) death was not because of suicide or culpable carelessness on Edgar's part, and that (b) Edgar experienced a feeling of dizziness just before or in close conjunction with the accident. On Broad's analysis, then, there are, in all, eight themes, some of them highly specific and characteristic of the deceased and the circumstances of his death. These themes occurred in sittings in which both the medium and the sitter were different. For the sake of brevity, I shall overlook the frequency and precise nature of the information conveyed about the machine Edgar Vandy had invented and was secretly perfecting.

VI. THE SKEPTIC'S REPLY

How shall we regard the language cases, the cases involving the mediumships of Mrs. Piper and Mrs. Willett, and the Edgar Vandy case? In terms of providing evidence for some form of personal survival after death how strong are these cases? Which cases, if any, offer us compelling evidence for personal survival? Can the skeptic refute any or all of these cases as strong evidence for personal survival?

In these next few pages I want to show that the skeptic can justifiably disregard the evidence offered in both the Edgar Vandy case and in the examination of Mrs. Piper's mediumship. However, the skeptic has no forceful reply to the evidence offered in either the examination of Mrs. Willett's mediumship or the language cases. In other words, the

language cases and the examination of Mrs. Willett's mediumship establish the case for life after death. Let me explain why all this is so, and in so explaining I will discuss these cases in an order different than the way they were introduced. The discussion will go a bit more smoothly if we examine the cases in this way rather than in the sequence in which they were introduced. So, beginning with the Edgar Vandy case and proceeding through the mediumship of Mrs. Piper and Mrs. Willett to the language cases, let us now examine the force of the skeptic's best response to each case.

A. The Edgar Vandy Case

In evaluating the force of the Edgar Vandy case, the philosopher C. D. Broad denied that the results of the proxy sittings could be a matter of coincidence. He thought it incredible that the amount and kind of agreement found among the statements made by the various mediums at the various sittings could be purely a matter of coincidence. So, for Broad, given that we must reject chance (or coincidence) as an explanation of the results in the Vandy case, we must either suppose (without direct evidence) an elaborate fraud, in which the experimenter and the subjects must have collaborated, or we must admit the evidence as a case of paranormal knowledge. Broad then goes on to conclude that the most natural and simplest way to explain the Vandy case is to suppose that some people survive their deaths (*Lectures,* p. 356ff). And many people would agree with Broad's assessment.

But no serious skeptic would ever accept Broad's conclusion. After all, even if the Vandy case provides evidence for belief in paranormal knowledge, still it would not follow that the most natural, or simplest, hypothesis to explain the data is the hypothesis of personal survival after death. Broad's conclusion does not follow, because the Vandy brothers failed to get so much as one grain of new and verifiable information about the question that was troubling them and for which they instituted the series of sittings. In itself, this failure is quite significant. It shows that we can explain the cross-correspondences and the ability of the various mediums to ascertain the relevant facts pertinent to Vandy's death by appeal to clairvoyance (or telepathy) plus the subconscious dramatizing power of the medium's mind. The mediums could be picking up the information through ESP and a little telepathy, and then subconsciously personating and dramatizing in the predictable way. Or so the skeptic would argue, and, I must confess, the skeptic seems quite

persuasive here. Cases like the Vandy case, however impressive they may be, still do not seem to be strong enough to carry the hypothesis of survival if we grant the fact of clairvoyance, telepathy, and subconscious personation.

Moreover, the skeptic can further urge that even if the mediums in the Vandy case *had* turned up some verifiable fact not already known by somebody connected with the case, even then it would by no means follow that we must accept the hypothesis of personal survival in order to explain the facts. We could still hold on to the explanation that appeals to clairvoyance (or super psi) plus the dramatizing power of the medium's mind.

B. Mrs. Leonora Piper's Mediumship

What is interesting about the mediumship of Mrs. Leonora Piper is that William James' skeptical conclusions are quite strong. Indeed, James' assessment of Mrs. Piper's mediumship offers the best possible argument favoring the skeptic's position. James, of course, granted that Mrs. Piper could (and did) communicate verifiable facts that she had no normal way of knowing. He even granted that the alleged Hodgeson control manifested predictably the flamboyant manners and unique characteristics of his friend, Hodgeson. However, James still felt that, from a logical point of view, paranormal knowledge plus the dramatizing powers of the medium's subconscious mind would be sufficient to explain the data.

If Mrs. Piper had never met Hodgeson, James might have had difficulty explaining how the medium could successfully impersonate Hodgeson sufficiently well to convince Hodgeson's intimate friends that it was indeed Hodgeson talking through Mrs. Piper. But inasmuch as Mrs. Piper had known Hodgeson for a long time before his death, James did not feel that the evidence warranted belief in some form of personal survival after death.

What William James showed us is that Mrs. Piper's ability not only to provide, while in trance, verifiable information unknown to anybody connected with the case but also to do it in a way that led people to believe that it was the deceased Hodgeson conveying the information does not provide strong enough evidence for belief in some form of personal life after death.

This last point is important because some people continue to think that if only we can show that the medium reveals some relevant and

verifiable fact unknown to anyone connected with the case, then we have good evidence for believing that the medium was in fact in touch with a disembodied spirit. Hodgeson apparently made this same mistake when he went on record as believing that Mrs. Piper was in communication with the dead.[15] The uncovering of such a fact would certainly rule against telepathy as a way of explaining how the medium knows it, but it would not rule against simple clairvoyance as an alternative explanation.

It is worth noting, of course, that while James argued in favor of the skeptical position with regard to Mrs. Piper's mediumship, nevertheless, he also argued that when *all* the evidence for belief in personal survival is considered, then it would be reasonable to hold to the belief in personal survival (*William James on Psychical Research,* p. 209).

C. Mrs. Willett's Mediumship

When we turn to consider the cases relating to Mrs. Willett's mediumship, however, the sort of skeptical reply offered by William James against Mr. Piper's mediumship holds no water against Mrs. Willett's. There is a crucial difference between the two sets of cases. Like Mrs. Piper, Mrs. Willett could provide information not known by anybody connected with the case, and, like Mrs. Piper, Mrs. Willett's communicators spoke directly to relatives and friends in a way convincingly characteristic of the traits of the communicator before death. However, unlike the Piper case, we cannot explain the Willett case by appeal to ESP plus personation, because in the Willett case the high-level philosophical discussions that took place between Gurney and Meyers and Balfour reflected an acquired skill, the skill of philosophizing. Once again, knowing *how to* philosophize (like knowing *how to* speak a foreign language or *how to* play a musical instrument) is not something we can know by clairvoyance or telepathy. We can clairvoyantly or telepathically know *that* something or other is so, but we cannot, for all the reasons mentioned in Chapter One, clairvoyantly or telepathically know *how to* speak a language, play an instrument, or philosophize. This basic point, when combined with the fact that Mrs. Willett never met either Gurney or Meyers, seems to tip the scale in favor of the belief in personal survival if we are to offer any plausible explanation of the relevant data in the Willett case. Underscoring these considerations, C. D. Broad offered the following reflections on the Willett case:

> The mere utterance, by the lips and the pencil of a woman of Mrs. Willett's normal range of interest and knowledge, of a long coherent series of

> statements of this kind, in the form of conversations by the deceased Gurney and Meyers with the living Lord Balfour, about topics that had been the main interests in life of the ostensible communicators, is a fairly startling fact.
>
> Suppose we altogether rule out the suggestion that Meyers and Gurney in some sense survived bodily death and were the deliberate initiators of these utterances. We shall then have to postualte in some stratum of Mrs. Willett's mind rather remarkable powers of acquiring information from unread books or the minds of living persons or both; of clothing it in phrasiology characteristic of Meyers and Gurney, whom she had never met; and of working it up and putting it forth in a dramatic form which seemed to their friend Balfour to be natural and convincing. (C. D. Broad, *Lectures,* p. 313)

Presumably, ascribing all that to the mind of Mrs. Willett is just a bit too much to accept.[16]

In the end, Broad concludes cautiously that many quite well-attested paranormal phenomena strongly suggest persistence of the psychical aspect of a human being after death. A few also strongly suggest the full-blown survival of a human personality.

William James came to much the same conclusion after his examination of Mrs. Piper, even though his verdict on her was negative:

> If we suppose Mrs. Piper's dream-life once and for all to have had the notion suggested to it that it must personate spirits to sitters, the fair degree of virtuosity need not, I think, surprise us. Nor need the exceptional memory shown surprise us, for memory seems extraordinarily strong in the subconscious life. *But I find that when I ascend from the details* of the Piper case *to the whole meaning of the phenomenon, and especially when I connect the Piper case with all the other cases I know of automatic writing and mediumship, and with the whole record of spirit-possession in human history, the notion that such an immense current of human experience, complex in so many ways, should spell out absolutely nothing but the word "humbug" acquires a character of unlikeliness.* The notion that so many men and women, in all other respects honest enough, should have this preposterous monkeying self-annexed to their personality seems to me so weird that the spirit theory immediately takes on a more probably appearance. The spirits, if spirits there be, must indeed work under incredible complications and falsifications, but at least if they are present, some honesty is left in the whole department of the universe which otherwise is run by pure deception . . . . (as cited in *William James on Psychic Research,* p. 147)

D. The Language Cases

Finally, for the very same reason that we cannot succeed in explaining the data in the Willett case by appeal to ESP and the subconscious dramatizing power of the medium, we cannot explain the data in the

language cases introduced back at the beginning of this chapter. In each of the language cases noted above, the ability of the medium to convey to the sitters information unknown to anybody connected with the case, and to convey the information in a foreign language demonstrably not learned (or understood) by the medium, is surely the strongest possible evidence we have, or could have, for the belief in some form of personal survival after death. If we combine the language cases with the Willett case, it becomes difficult to see any possible strength in the skeptic's position.

The only objection the skeptic could possibly make to these language cases is that they are neither well-attested nor the subject of the sort of study offered by The Society for Psychical Research. Indeed, when confronted with such cases the skeptic typically assumes fraud or denies outright that such cases ever occurred. So, as long as we are not able to produce such language cases at will, the skeptic will consider these cases interesting but anecdotal rather than as evidential grounds for belief in life after death.

Well, of course, it is certainly possible that each of the language cases is an instance of fraud, or a clever hoax cooked up by various people just for fun. But the skeptic has not so much as one shred of evidence that these cases are instances of fraud. Should we not accept the testimony to these cases if we have no good reason to think people are lying to us or trying to deceive us?[17]

VII. CONCLUSION

Although the language cases presented in this chapter offer unusually strong evidence for personal survival, we cannot overlook the fact that the occurrence of such cases seems to be very rare. Indeed, over the past thirty years careful research attempting to find such cases has produced meager results. I know of no compelling language case successfully examined and professionally documented during the last thirty years. The skeptic of course is only too willing to tell us that our inability to document so much as one clean language case over the past thirty years is less a tribute to the rarity of such cases than it is a source of serious doubt about the authenticity of the cases cited in this chapter. For these reasons, the language cases cited above should be viewed as having limited force until we can find and document new instances of such cases.

In the meantime we still have the evidence provided by the study of Mrs. Willett's mediumship. But even here we must admit that however

strong the evidence from Mrs. Willett's mediumship, it is probably not strong enough by itself to carry full-blooded conviction. On the principle that extraordinary beliefs require extraordinary evidence, the skeptic will want more evidence for the belief in some form of personal survival after death.

RECOMMENDED READING

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

LIKE PLATO, I have been trying in these past few pages to convince myself of the reasonableness of believing in some form of personal survival after death. Whether I personally believe in life after death is less interesting than whether it is a reasonable belief, and I conclude that on the best available evidence it is. If one *were* to believe in life after death, it *would* be a reasonable belief and, indeed, more reasonable than the belief that we do not survive biological death. This way of putting it underscores the important point that however much it is desirable to believe in only reasonable beliefs, it is not always within our power to believe what we ought to believe. Just as fear can make one see evidence that is not there, it can also blind one to the evidence that is there. In science, of course, we seek to minimize those sorts of personal factors by insisting that the evidence for scientific belief be repeatable under ideal experimental conditions. Once again, however, the important question is whether it *would* be reasonable to accept such a belief if one in fact *could* accept it.

What is striking about the preceding discussion is that if we had *only* the best available evidence from reincarnation studies, or *only* the best evidence on apparitions of the dead and cases of possession, or *only* the best evidence from testimony bearing on OBEs, then we might well be justified in ignoring the belief in life after death. After all, extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.

But the force of the case for life after death rests *on the whole body of evidence viewed as a set of arguments*. Each argument is like a thread which, of itself, would be incapable of carrying the full weight of the belief in life after death. Bound together, however, they make a strong cord that can lift that belief from the realm of superstition and thoughtless commitment in the absence of sound evidence. By itself, then, each argument would fail to provide for full-blooded conviction even though each argument may

well be sound. We need a lot of evidence for belief in life after death. And I am urging that we have reached the point where a critical examination of *all* the evidence available makes such a commitment a good deal easier than it has ever been before in our history. Certainly, we are a great deal better off than was Plato for the reasons he gave for favoring the belief in life after death and reincarnation.

Finally, the proponents of orthodox religious belief, such as Christianity, may well find the arguments herein congenial to their commitments. If so, that is a plus for them and something not intended by the author. But some will probably object on the grounds that such arguments may well seek to undermine the necessity of the virtue of faith. I should not think that this latter objection would be taken very seriously. We do not always have the power to accept what we know to be true. Faith may well be that power in some way given.

We must also remember that the evidence considered here for belief in life after death is also supportive of belief in reincarnation. It seems reasonably clear that the discussion of whether reincarnation is consistent with Christianity (or any other orthodox religion such as Judaism or Hinduism) and whether such orthodox attitudes could accept the evidence offered here is clearly beyond the scope of this book.

In the light of the discussion offered above, theologians may well have a good deal to think about in examining the nature of religious activity. But this book makes no claims about God. Belief in life after death does not, as I see it, either require or preclude any particular beliefs about God. However, for those whose religious beliefs just happen to extend to belief in some form of life after death, this book can be taken to show that the belief in question is capable of serious rational support totally independent of any particular religious belief.

APPENDIX

OTHER SKEPTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I. INTRODUCTION

WE HAVE NOT yet examined two very common skeptical objections to the belief in some form of personal survival after death. The first objection asserts that personal survival after death is impossible, because we cannot even imagine what a disembodied person would be like. The second objection is that even if some form of personal survival were possible, we still have no scientific evidence (and hence no scientific knowledge) of anyone surviving death. Typically, philosophers raise the first objection and scientists the second. But both objections are based upon crucial misconceptions. Let me explain.

II. ON THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF LIFE AFTER DEATH

Skeptics who assert the impossibility of personal survival usually do so on the grounds that the very idea of a human being's personality existing independently of his body is inconceivable. On this view, it makes no sense even to talk about personal survival after death, because we cannot imagine what a human personality is if it is not partially identifiable with a human body. For the skeptic, then, our very concept of a person is so tied to our understanding of bodily existence and activities that we cannot even imagine what a person is like if it does not possess such characteristics. After all, just think of it. A disembodied person would need to perceive events clairvoyantly in some way, without any sense organs, such as eyes and ears. A disembodied person would need to act upon other things and other persons in some kind of telekinetic way without using limbs and without the usual feelings of stress and strain that come from the skin, the joints and the muscles. And a disembodied person

would need to communicate with others telepathically without using vocal organs and emitting audible sounds. All this, as C. D. Broad has noted, is *conceivable* as long as we keep it in the abstract; but when we try to think of "what it would be like" in concrete detail, we do not seem to have any clear or definite ideas at all.[1]

In urging this last objection, however, the skeptic makes a crucial mistake. His mistake consists in thinking that just because we cannot *imagine* what a disembodied person must be like, there cannot be any. Indeed, an adequate reply to the skeptic is that our inability to imagine fully any particular state of affairs should not be taken as evidence for its nonexistence. We may not be able to imagine an infinite series of numbers or what it would be like to walk upon the moon; still, there are infinite series of numbers, and people do walk upon the moon. In short, the basic mistake the skeptic makes here is one of inferring the nonexistence of something simply because we cannot imagine it as some sort of a physical object. The skeptic might just as well object to belief in the existence of God on the grounds that we cannot imagine what God looks like. If one believes in disembodied persons, by definition one believes in beings not understandable in *purely* physical terms. Obviously, whether such beings exist is a function of whether we have sufficient evidence for thinking some such being must exist, and not whether we can imagine them as we would a physical object.

Besides, even if we cannot fully imagine what a disembodied person must be like, we can still say a good deal about what human personality *must* be like if it is to survive bodily death. On this last point, C. D. Broad once turned his attention to the question "Is survival possible, and, if so, in what possible sense or senses?" In answering the question he said:

> It seems to me that a *necessary*, though by no means sufficient condition for survival is that the whole or some considerable part of the *dispositional basis* of a human being's personality should persist, and should retain at least the main outlines of its characteristic type of organization for some time after the disintegration of his brain and nervous system. The crux of the question is whether this is not merely conceivable, in the sense of involving no purely logical absurdity (whether explicit or implicit), but is also factually possible not irreconcilable with any empirical facts or laws for which the evidence seems to be overwhelming . . . .
>
> There seems to be only one view of human nature compatible with the possibility of the *post mortem* persistence of the whole, or any part, of the dispositional basis of a human being's personality. We must assume some variant of the Platonic-Cartesian view of human beings. This is the doctrine that

> every human being is some kind of intimate compound of two constituents, one being his ordinary everyday body, and the other something of a very different kind, not open to ordinary observation. Let us call the other constituent in this supposed compound an x-component. It would be necessary to suppose that the x-component of a human being carries some part at least of the organized dispositional basis of his personality, and that during his life it is modified specifically and more or less permanently by the experiences which he has, the training which he receives, his habitual practical and emotional reactions towards himself and others, and so on. (*Lectures,* pp. 414-415)

Most importantly, Broad hastens to add that there are two traditional features of the classical Platonic-Cartesian doctrine that we need not, and ought not, accept. The first is that the x-component is *by itself* the person. It might well be that personality, and even the lowest form of actual experience, requires the association of an x-component with an appropriate living organism. The known facts about the intimate dependence of a human being's personality on his body and its states would seem strongly to support that version of the doctrine. The second is that the x-component is unextended and unlocated and has none of the properties of the physically existent. On this last point, Broad notes that if we gratuitiously assume that the x-component has none of the characteristics of the physically existent, then (a) it, the x-component, could not be supposed to have a minute structure or to be the seat of recurrent internal processes, which is what is needed if it is to carry traces and dispositions, and (b) it, the x-component, could not be conceived to be united with a particular living body to constitute an ordinary human being:

> If we are to postulate a "ghost-in-the-machine," and that seems to me to be a *conditio sine qua non* for the barest possibility of the survival of human personality, then we must ascribe to it some of the quasi-physical properties of the traditional ghost. A mere unextended and unlocated Cartesian thinking substance would be useless and embarrassing for our purpose; something more like a primitive animism than refined Cartesianism is what we need. (*Lectures,* p. 416)

Certainly we could differ with Broad on some of the details of his proposal. But it seems clear that under the conditions he specifies we can conceive of a form of dualism (and personal disembodied existence) not inconsistent with the known facts of physics, physiology and psychology. Such a dualism would make it possible for the dispositional basis of a human personality to persist after the death of a human being who had possessed that personality. Thus it is neither logically inconceivable nor factually impossible that the dispositional basis of one's personality (or at

any rate some part of it) might continue to exist and to be organized in its former characteristic pattern, for a time at least, after the death of his body, without being associated with any other physical organism (*Lectures,* p. 417).[2] Even at that, however, the surviving personality would need to share some features in common with physical objects.

Further, the claim that it is inconceivable that one could survive one's death is vaguely reminiscent of the traditional attack on the possibility of mind-body causal interaction. This familiar attack is parasitic on the claim that we cannot imagine how minds and bodies could possibly interact.[3] In facing this attack, however, Broad elsewhere encourages us to see first whether there is any evidence for causal interaction rather than deny the possibility of it on the grounds that we cannot understand how two so different principles could be causally related. In short, rather than say something or other cannot occur because we cannot imagine how it could, we should look for independent evidence of its occurrence and, should we find it, either admit that we do not know how it occurs or seek new ways of trying to understand how it occurs. This same procedure seems advisable with regard to disembodied persons: first, see if there is evidence for the existence of some principle not reducible to mere physicalistic terms; and second, if there is such evidence, admit that such a being exists but that we do not fully understand its nature and cannot imagine its properties in purely physicalistic terms.

At any rate, if we are to avoid being dogmatic, we must avoid the claim that nothing could possibly count as evidence for personal survival.

III. THE SCIENTIFIC STATUS OF BELIEF IN LIFE AFTER DEATH

As we noted above, the second most common objection is that we have no scientific knowledge of anyone ever surviving death, because we have no evidence that will sustain serious scientific scrutiny. This sort of objection feeds on the belief that all the evidence offered for belief in personal survival (whether it be from reincarnation studies, ghost stories, OBEs or mediumship) is not publicly repeatable under controlled conditions. We cannot generate at will compelling case studies. We cannot, for example, scientifically control disembodied spirits so that we can make them appear under desirable conditions. Because the evidence for personal survival lacks this characteristic, the evidence is not, the skeptic

would have us believe, repeatable under the scientific method. For this reason, some scientists tend to consider the case studies offered in the preceding chapters as "anecdotal" rather than as solid scientific evidence. And some skeptics are downright insistent that unless a belief is established by the method of science and under the canons of evidence endorsed by science, the belief cannot be an item of human knowledge.

In replying to this objection we must keep in mind two basic points. The first is that although *most* of the evidence for personal survival is not repeatable and accessible in the usual way that, for example, the evidence for the law of gravity is public and repeatable, it is a mistake to think that all knowledge requires evidence that is public and repeatable. There is a good deal of knowledge that does not require that kind of evidence. For example, I know what my father said to me just before he died. The evidence for my knowledge claim, his spoken words, is not repeatable or publicly accessible. And even if there had been five thousand people in the room with me when my father spoke his dying words, the evidence still would not be repeatable. Surely, I (and whoever might have been with me) know what my father said on that day. In other words, even if all the evidence for personal survival were not repeatable, it would by no means follow that nobody knows (or nobody could know) that some persons survive bodily death. The most that would follow is that we do not have a *universal* knowledge of the fact.

The second point is that we do in fact have a scientific knowledge of personal survival. This knowledge is provided by the earlier examined evidence in favor of reincarnation. As we suggested back in the first chapter, in order to verify the belief in reincarnation we need only regress an indefinitely large number of suitable subjects until we secure an interesting number of them with the appropriate memory claims and the appropriate skills not learned in their present life. This we have already done and there is no other explanation for the results than to suppose that some persons reincarnate. Admittedly, this does not give us knowledge of what human personality is, but only that the whole of human personality cannot be identified with the human body, that human personality survives some time after death, and that it reincarnates.

It is the same with measles as it is with our belief in reincarnation. We have a scientific knowledge *that* a certain percentage of people who have never contracted measles will contract it upon being exposed to it, provided they have not been previously innoculated against measles. But this knowledge is not a knowledge of what measles is. It is rather a knowledge that, whatever measles may be, a certain number of people

can be expected to get it under certain circumstances. Similarly, we know *that* a certain small number of people regressed under certain circumstances will manifest the traits that only belief in reincarnation can explain, and we can further verify this belief by examining other people in the future. But this does not tell us what human personality is. It tells us that some human personalities, whatever a human personality may come to be understood as, survive death. So, not only is belief in personal survival *verifiable* by appeal to public evidence, it *has* been verified by evidence that is public and repeatable. The verifying evidence is the same in each different case.

It is, of course, true that the repeatability of the evidence for personal survival comes only with the body of evidence favoring reincarnation and voluntary OBEs. The same sort of repeatability does not occur in *all* the evidence for personal survival. We cannot, for example, willfully generate more evidence from ghost stories and mediumship cases. Just as we must wait for ghosts to appear, we must wait for the proper kind of medium to appear. Even at that, however, we can readily grant that the evidence presently available from the cases examined in Chapters Two and Four provide us with a sound knowledge of personal survival. But nobody should think that the evidence in these cases is repeatable in the same way that the evidence for the law of gravity of repeatable.

NOTES

Chapter One

1. Ian Stevenson, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation,* University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville; 1974 (reprinted 1978).
2. A recent estimate of the number of similar cases as well as other pertinent information is contained in J. G. Pratt's *The Psychic Realm: What Can You Believe?* In the chapter "Memories of Another Life" which touches on Stevenson's research, Pratt reports that "As of July 1974 the Files on reincarnation cases in the University of Virginia, Division of Parapsychology, contained a total of 1,339 distinct instances of persons claiming such memories that had been reported directly to the investigator or to his associates in the field. And although it is commonly supposed that most of these cases come from the East where belief in reincarnation is strong, most of the cases come from the United States. In the West there is a strong tendency to ignore and suppress statements from children about the time previous to birth." (Random House, 1975)
3. Ian Stevenson, *Xenoglossy,* University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville: 1974. The case study here quoted also appears in *Reincarnation: The Phoenix Fire Mystery,* ed. by John Head and S. L. Cranston, Julian Press/Crown Publishers Inc., N.Y.: 1978, N.Y.: 1977, p. 438ff. For another similar case, see "A Preliminary Report of a New Case of Responsive Xenoglossy: The Case of Gretchen." *The Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research,* (1976), pp. 66-77.
4. See Stevenson's and Pashrica's "A Preliminary Report on an Unusual Case of the Reincarnation Type with Xenoglossy," *The Journal of the American Society of Psychic Research,* vol. 74, 1980, pp. 33-348. Hereafter, references to this journal will refer to the journal as *J.A.S.P.R.*
5. For a fuller description of this case, see Ian Stevenson's "Some New Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation II: The Case of Bishen Chand," *J.A.S.P.R.*, vol. 16, Oct. 1972, pp. 375-400.
6. The Shanti Devi case is originally described in L. D. Gupta, N. R. Sharma, and T. C. Mathur, *An Inquiry Into the Case of Shanti Devi* (Delhi: International Aryan League, 1936). See also S. C. Bose, *A Case of Reincarnation* (Ligate, Satsang, S. P., 1952). For other references on this case, see Stevenson, I., p. 17, note #6. The case is also described by Jane Singer in *Reincarnation in the Twentieth Century* (ed. by Martin Ebom, New York, Signet: 1970), p. 42-48.
7. Notice the force of this first alternative explanation. By appealing to (a) the skeptic appeals to a phenomenon (clairvoyance or ESP) generally established, and

that would account for the subject's paranormal knowledge of past events (see, for example, *ESP and Psychokinesis* by Stephen Braude, Philadelphia, Temple University Press: 1979; *The Psychic Realm: What Can You Believe?* by Hintze and Pratt, New York, Random House: 1975; and *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain* by Sheila Ostrander and Lynn Schroeder, New York, Bantam Books: 1970); by appealing to (b) the skeptic appeals to a psychological phenomenon also well-known, the phenomenon of "multiple personality," or "alternating personality." (See S. I. Franz, *Persons One and Three: A Study in Multiple Personalities,* New York, McGraw-Hill: 1933; Cogdon, Hain and Stevenson, "A Case of Multiple Personality," *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* (1956, pp. 272-276); Thigpan and Clecky, *The Three Faces of Eve,* New York, McGraw-Hill: 1957). Thus appealing to (b) accounts for the subject's claim *to be* a reincarnation of a previously known person. It also accounts for the fact that the subject views his knowledge of the past as "memories" of the past. And it also accounts for the fact that subjects like Swarnlata (although Swarnlata was an exception in this regard) tend to "forget" their earlier lives as they get older. Finally, by appealing to (c) the skeptic accounts for the success the subjects usually have in convincing others (especially the deceased person's living family members) that they are indeed the reincarnation of a certain well-known person. This first skeptical explanation is offered by C. T. K. Chari, who says: "I am of the considered opinion that all these studies remain quite inconclusive; with the available data of psi research we cannot rule out some combination of the counterhypotheses of hidden and disguised memories acquired in normal fashion. Extrasensorially selective tapping of the memories of others, and a psychometric or psychoscopic ESP achieving strong emphatic identification with deceased persons and an apparent 'resuscitation of memories' not belonging to the subjects in their normal lives. I have examined the counterhypotheses singly and jointly and conclude that a combination of them is not only feasible but actually illustrated in the empirical data of survival research." *(Signet Handbook of Parapsychology,* edited by Martin Ebom, New York, Signet: 1978, p. 315. See also C. T. K. Chari "Regression 'Beyond Birth' " (*Tomorrow,* vol. 10, 1962) and "Buried Memories in Survival Research" (*International Journal of Parapsychology,* vol. 4, 1962). The same objection is offered by Martin Ebom in *Reincarnation in the Twentieth Century,* New York, Signet: 1969, p. 7, and by Louisa Rhine in *The Journal of Parapsychology* (Dec. 1966).

8. *The Psychic Realm: What Can You Believe?* eds. Hintze and Pratt, p. 243.
9. For a detailed statement of the way in which Stevenson gathered data and conducted the examination and verification of these memories, see the introductory section of *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation.*
10. In *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain,* however, the authors point to evidence that seemingly suggests extending the concept of clairvoyance to the phenomenon of acquired skills. They describe pertinent cases in which the subjects were hypnotized and then told that they were distinguished artists (such as Renoir or Gaugin) or mathematicians (such as Boole or DeMorgan). Then these subjects were sent off to paint or to do mathematics. In each case, we are told, the subjects had little or no previous skill in either painting or mathematics. The results of these experiments are reported as remarkable, in that the first subjects began to paint just like the distinguished artist they were told to be. And the second subjects were reported to have advanced remarkably in mathematics (p. 146ff).

The Soviets, who conducted these experiments, refer to these cases as cases of instant or artificial reincarnation.

However, these reported cases are not independently documented or verified in any convincing way. Moreover, in such cases it is extremely important to note that the skills reported did not extend to *responsive xenoglossy.* Nor did the skills in question include being able to play a musical instrument without previous instruction. Remember that in the case of Bishen Chand, however, in addition to a rich set of memory claims independently verified in various ways, Bishen (like Laxmi Narain before him) could also play the drums skillfully. But he had not been taught *how* to play the drums; nor had he ever been exposed to them. And Bishen's skill at playing the drums cannot be explained by appeal to ESP for the very same reason that we could not explain *responsive xenoglossy* by appeal to ESP. Similarly, we cannot explain Lydia Johnson's ability to speak Swedish, or Shanti Devi's ability to speak in a dialect she had not been taught, by appeal to ESP. The Soviets have not presented cases at all similar to these cases.

Importantly enough, however, these last considerations suggest what *would* count as splendid evidence for falsifying the reincarnation hypothesis. It is this. If a person could be hypnotized and succeed, under hypnotic suggestion, to play an instrument he has not been taught to play, or to speak in a dialect not learned, or to respond in a foreign language which he has never heard before, then there would be good evidence for the skeptic to discount *responsive xenoglossy* and unlearned musical ability as distinctive evidence for the belief in reincarnation. Presently, of course, we do not have this sort of evidence. If we did, we would have good reason to extend clairvoyance (or ESP) to acquired skills, skills such as playing an instrument and speaking a foreign language. But, until that time, should it ever come, *responsive xenoglossy,* as well as the ability to play an instrument without having been taught it, cannot be explained without our assuming reincarnation as a fact. And the need to appeal to reincarnation is especially strong when the language or musical skill involved is known to be the language or the musical skill of the person the subject claims to be the reincarnation of.

11. What also undermines the skeptic's appeal to genetic memory is the fact that while purely genetic traits (such as genetic diseases like Huntington's chorea, Down's syndrome, PKU) are non-dispositional, other genetic traits are *dispositional*: we inherit the disposition, more or less, to certain traits, and the emergence of the actual trait or ability requires some input from the environment. So, the acquisition of a skill, such as speaking a language, cannot be explained in terms of an inherited trait because contemporary genetics requires us to view the ability to speak a langauge as a function of an inherited ability *plus* an additional component supplied by the envirnoment. As far as we can presently see, then, the ability to speak a language is not an inherited trait (like eye-color) and so cannot be supposed to be inherited through an inherited memory. And this holds equally well for the ability to play an instrument.
12. Some people have tried to account for the "memory" claims in cases like the Swarnlata case by claiming that the subject had learned the information earlier but forgot it and then later in recalling the information learned earlier simply forgot that it had been learned earlier. Thus, the phenomenon of forgetting what one has learned and then recalling it without being aware that one has learned it earlier is cryptomnesia. The general problem with this objection is that the sub-

ject usually has information that could not have been conveyed to the subject by anyone in this life. See Stevenson, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation,* (p. 12 and pp. 333-342).

13. For examples of this see Stevenson, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnaiton,* (pp. 91-105 and pp. 149-171).
14. The justification for this idealizing condition lay in the fact that its satisfaction would diminish the force of the objection that the subject subconsciously identifies and impersonates the deceased person's traits clairvoyantly grapsed. For further discussion on the rationale behind this condition, see Stevenson, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation,* (p. 169ff and pp. 359-360.
15. Here again, this idealizing condition has for its purpose to distinguish between the psychiatric phenomenon identified with "multiple personality" or "alternating personality" and cases of reincarnation in which the subject claims to be an *extension* of the previous personality.
16. See Stevenson, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation,* (pp. 366-372).
17. See Stevenson, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation,* (p. 145ff).
18. Indeed, one of the most notable consequences of these cases is that, if we accept them as compelling evidence for the belief in reincarnation, all heretofore disputes on the nature of the mind-body question (that question being whether there are minds as traditionally understood or whether an adequate explanation of human nature can be had simply by appeal to physical matter and the laws of physics) become obsolete. This suggests that the future of philosophical discussion should be oriented more to questions of ethics or to what the larger implications of personal survival after death may be. This is not to say, of course, that in the interest of predicting and controlling human behavior there may not continue to be long-standing disputes on what shape the future of the science of psychology should take. As a matter of fact, we may still argue over the nature of just *what* it is that survives death and is so essential to human personality. But it is to say that where to doctrine of reincarnation is established, the nature, tone, and direction of philosophical speculation on the nature of man will need to take a dramatic turn into different paths.
19. One way to test for the universality of reincarnation would consist in taking a random number of people who are capable of being regressed in trance, people who would not claim to have had an earlier life, and then see whether they could, under a trance, come up with memory claims of past lives, claims independently verified and not the product of telepathy or clairvoyance. Presumably, those living their first life will not have such memories under regression. So, we would expect some (how many cannot be said) to have no memories of a past life—unless these reincarnations go on forever, and it is hard to say what will count scientifically for showing that they do.

Chapter Two

1. Springfield, Ill., Charles C Thomas: 1961, pp. 21-22.
2. The pamphlet is in the New York Public Library, and the case is examined in *The Journal of the Society for Psychic Research.*

3. Ducasse, p. 22.
4. See John Fuller, *The Ghost of Flight 401.* New York, Berkeley Publishing Corporation: 1978.
5. A notice of this case appears in Andrew McKenzie's book, *The Unexplained: Some Strange Cases in Psychical Research,* New York, Abelard: 1968, p. 45ff.
6. The case of the Cheltenham ghost is also reviewed by Andrew McKenzie in *The Unexplained: Some Strange Cases in Psychical Research,* New York, Abelard Press: 1968, pp. 51-63.
7. Andrew McKenzie, p. 54.
8. Dommeyer says:

> What can one make of such a case? I believe it is possible to bring it under the ESP hypothesis. There are some features of the specter story that provide hints as to what may have actually occurred. First the specter delivered discourses "sometimes over an hour long."[19] By what means were these discourses delivered? Were there physical sound waves in the air that caused the persons present to hear the specter's words? It is not likely there were, when one considers that Captain Butler's hand passed through the specter's body as though it were light. It is not reasonable to suppose that such a spectral body had a voice box capable of producing physical sounds. If the "auditory sensations" experienced by the witnesses were not caused by the sound waves, there is left only one plausible hypothesis to account for the discourses they heard. That hypothesis is that they heard these discourses clairaudiently. There are many recorded cases of clairaudience.
>
> In this Butler case, then, why cannot one explain what happened by positing the parapsychological events needed to explain it? The work of Tyrrell has already clearly established the occurrence of "collective apparitions," i.e. an apparition that is seen by a number of people together. Why should it be supposed any less possible that there are collective clairaudient experiences? Why can it not be supposed that some person present, when the Butler specter appeared and spoke, was the "sender" of both visual and auditory "hallucinations" and that some others there had the capacity to "receive" them? Let it be further assumed that the "sender" had the retrocognitive or clairvoyant powers needed to duplicate some knowledge the living Mrs. Butler had had; let it be further assumed that he had the precognitive powers needed for the predictions the specter made. Or, several persons may have jointly functioned as "sender-receivers."
>
> No one has ever established that apparitions "seen" singly or collectively are causally tied to discarnate minds; there is no more reason for positing that collective "hearings" are. Doctor J. B. Rhine has pointed out that the occurrence of telephathy, clairvoyance, precognition, etc., are associated with the states of mind of senders and receivers; the attitudes, the motivations and enthusiasm of the subject are important, as are those of the sender. It is not impossible therefore that these groups of persons in the Butler case were, by nature or by conditions of the time,

in states of mind that led to these very unusual ESP manifestations. Whatever the explanation of the Butler case, it would have to refer to unusual conditions because the circumstances to be explained are themselves most unusual.

If the above explanation, in its main outline, is not accepted, what alternatives remain? Certainly, the "specter" was not the physical Mrs. Butler. Neither do we know of any causal chain that would lead from her physical body as cause to the specter as effect. Even if we did, this would have nothing to do with survival. But could the discarnate mind of Mrs. Butler (assuming there is such a thing possible) be the phantasm? This is not a reasonable suggestion: the phantasm was in space and time; it walked about among the witnesses, and minds do not do that kind of thing. Could the discarnate mind of Mrs. Butler have caused the phantasm to be seen and heard collectively? Though this is conceivable, it is hardly more than that. It seems like a simple and desirable explanation only until one looks more closely at the mechanism of such a causal feat. How could Mrs. Butler as discarnate mind communicate by physical voice to those who heard her discourse? As discarnate mind she would have no physical voice box. Her only means of communication would have been by telepathic or other ESP means. She would have had to "send" the visual and auditory "hallucinations" that were experienced. Also, since she made accurate predictions about deaths and births, Mrs. Butler's discarnate mind must have precognitive powers posited of it. Then, there is the matter of "reception;" the witnesses had to have the capacity to hear "clairaudiently," to "see" clairvoyantly, etc., what they reported seeing, hearing, etc. The survival interpretation, therefore, does not exclude the positing of ESP powers to the same magnitude as those involved in the nonsurvival ESP explanation; the former view includes those powers and, in addition, posits the existence of a discarnate mind. The nonsurvival ESP interpretation is therefore logically simpler and more probably true than the other hypothesis as an explanation of the Butler case. (See "Body, Mind and Death," *The Pacific Forum* (1963) pp. 31-33. The footnote reference #19 in the body of this text refers to Ducasse, p. 155).

9. See pages 78-80 below.
10. For two other case studies very similar to the Butler case see "The Case of the Green Lady" and "The Case of the Ghostly Pilot" in Edwin Bennett's *Apparitions and Haunted Houses: A Survey of Evidence.* (Ann Arbor, Gryphon Books: 1971), pp. 29ff. and pp. 139ff. Although both cases report on apparitions frequently seen by many individuals collectively over a long period of time and involving apparitions providing precognitive knowledge, they are reported as legends and have no sworn eyewitness accounts to document the basic facts of the case.
11. Ducasse, pp. 171-174.
12. Dommeyer says:

> But why need the "possession" hypothesis be accepted here? Ordinary dreams and the hypnotic trance, not to mention the mediumistic situation, testify to the "dramatizing powers" of the unconscious. Under hyp-

nosis the subject can be caused by suggestion to play the role of another person. On several occasions, the writer has seen hypnotized subjects take on the roles of others in realistic fashion. The hypnotist, for example, might suggest that the subject is a Civil War veteran. Without delay, the subject would start telling a tale of his suffering as a soldier, his experiences in battle, etc. Granting such well-known powers of the unconscious to dramatize under hypnosis, and recalling also the remarkable though commonplace dramatizations of man's dream-life, and adding to this the power of retrocognition, we have a nonpossession hypothesis for explaining the Watseka Wonder case. There is no need for believing that "something" that had earlier been "in" Mary was later "in" Lurancy, i.e., that a mind had somehow gone from one to the other. With that need no longer present, the Watseka Wonder case has no bearing upon the survival issue. (Dommeyer, pp. 36-37).

Chapter Three

1. See Raymond Moody's *Life After Life,* Covington, Georgia, Mockingbird Books: 1975, and *Reflections on Life After Life,* New York, Bantam Books: 1978; Helen Wambach, *Reliving Past Lives: The Evidence Under Hypnosis,* New York, Harper & Row: 1978. Ronald Siegler "Accounting for 'Afterlife' Experiences," *Psychology Today* (Jan. 1981), p. 65ff; Robert Monroe, *Journeys Out of the Body,* New York, Doubleday: 1971; Michael Sabom, *Recollections of Death: A Medical Examination,* New York, Harper and Row: 1981; John Hartwell, Jane Janis and Blue Harary, "A Study of the Physiological Variables Associated with Out-of-Body Experiences," *Parapsychological Association Convention,* New York: 1974; Janet Mitchell, "Out-of-Body Vision," *Psychic Magazine,* (April, 1973) pp. 44-47; Jeffrey Mishlove, *Roots of Consciousness,* New York, Random House: 1975, Section II; Muldoon and Carrington, *Projections of the Astral Body,* New York, Samuel Wiesner: 1970; Robert Crookall, *The Study and Practice of Astral Projection,* New York, University Books: 1966; Robert Crookall, *Out-of-Body Experiences,* New York, University Books: 1970; Kenneth Ring, *Life at Death: A Scientific Investigation of Near-Death Experience,* New York, Coward, McCann and Geoghan: 1981; Mark Woodhouse, "Near-Death Experiences and the Mind-Body Problem," *Anabiosis,* (Spring, 1982), and "Five Arguments Regarding the Objectivity of Near-Death Experiences," *Anabiosis,* (Spring, 1984).
2. Covington, Georgia, Mockingbird Books: 1975.
3. See, for example Robert Crookall, *Out-of-Body Experiences,* New York, University Books: 1970.
4. *Revue Metapsychique* (May-June) 1930 and cited by C. J. Ducasse in *The Belief in Life After Death,* Evanston, Ill., Thomas Publishing Company: 1956, p. 91ff.
5. Jeffrey Mishlove, *The Roots of Consciousness,* Random House, New York: 1975, p. 134. Mishlove cites Hartwell, Janis and Harary "A Study of the Physiological Variables Associated with Out-of-Body Experiences," Parapsychological Association Convention, New York: 1974 and Robert Morris, "PRF Research on Out-of-Body Experiences, 1973," *Theta,* No. 41, Summer 1974. See also Muldoon and Carrington, *Projections of the Astral Body,* New York, Samuel Wiesner: 1970.

6. Raymond Moody, *Life After Life,* New York, Bantam Books: 1975, pp. 21-25 and reprinted in Humber and Almeder, *Biomedical Ethics and the Law,* New York, Plenum Publishing Corp.: 1979, pp. 627-628.
7. *Vital Signs,* vol. 1, no. 3, Dec. 1981.
8. *Atlanta Constitution,* January 18, 1982. This case is also related by Michael Sabom in *Recollections of Death: A Medical Investigation.* New York, Harper and Row: 1982.
9. Ronald Siegler, "Accounting for 'Afterlife' Experiences," *Psychology Today* (January, 1981), p. 65ff.
10. See note 5 above.
11. Michael Sabom, *Recollections of Death: A Medical Examination,* p. 25; and Kenneth Ring, *Life At Death: A Scientific Investigation of Near-Death Experience,* p. 66.
12. It is probably because most OBEs and NDEs are like these cases that the explanation in terms of autoscopic hallucinations suggests itself. For example, in *Life After Life* there is not even one case cited in which the subject testifies to the *independently verified* occurrence of some event which took place during the NDE outside the immediate area of his body—say, in another room beyond earshot or beyond the sight of others in the room during the NDE. The important cases, the ones that do not lend themselves to the explanation in terms of "autoscopic hallucinations" are just those in which the subject's testimony extends to true claims about independently verifiable events that took place while the subject is independently observed to be sensorily incapacitated in the extreme and at a place beyond the customary sensory reach of the event to which the subject testifies.
13. See Hartwell, Janis and Harary, "A Study of the Physiological Variables Associated with Out-of-Body Experiences," Parapsychological Association Convention, New York, 1974. See also note 5 above.
14. See William K. Stuckey, "Psychic Power: The Next Super Weapon," *Harpers,* New York: January 5, 1977, pp. 47-55 and Ostrander and Schroeder, *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain.* New York, Bantam Books: 1976, pp. 68-87.
15. See Sabom, p. 73ff and Ring, p. 46ff.
16. Indeed, it has been claimed that some clairvoyants are able to describe certain phenomena from whatever viewpoint they are asked. This ability has been attributed to Ingo Swann. See Stuckey, "Psychic Power: The Next Superweapon," p. 48.
17. I am assuming, of course, that the strongest cases are amply documented and that the data is not just fraudulently fabricated to fit a logically ideal case of what it would take to sustain the dualist's interpretation of the OBE or the NDE. I am also assuming that in the stronger cases the knowledge which the subject acquires while ostensibly under the OBE cannot be explained by appeal to telepathy. Frequently, what is reported and independently verified is nothing anyone near the subject could know.
18. Naturally, too, were this requirement to be satisfied, there might still be objections that the EEG was measuring only a certain kind of brain activity, and that the flat EEG would not provide the crucial evidence of the dualist's view. How one could know that there is another kind of energy, natural energy, in addition to that measured by the EEG would be questionable, of course; and appeal to its existence to undermine the force of the flat EEG would be quite arbitrary.

For most of us, then, an ideal OBE supportive of dualism could be either a voluntary OBE in which:

(a) the subject is antecedently directed to visit a distant location, describe the location, and move a designated object in that location while an independent observer (not knowing the experiment is being conducted) is placed in the assigned location during the time in which the subject is directed to visit.

(b) the subject's brain waves are monitored under EEG during the OBE and are determined to be flat (or very, very low) during the OBE experience.

(c) after the OBE, the subject accurately reports on the details of the environment visited and offers autoscopic descriptions fitting the details of the environment and manifestive of an elevated viewpoint;

(d) the independent observer at the place of visit confirms the subject's report about the environment as well as the time the designated object moved;

or an involuntary OBE in which:

(a) the subject's vital functions cease and brain activity is monitored with the EEG reading flat (or very, very low) during the OBE;

(b) after the OBE, the subject reports on events that took place during the OBE at some distance from his body and these reports are independently verified by appeal to third-party witnesses of those events transpiring during the time of the flat (or very, very low) EEG reading;

(c) the events reported and described by the subject having the OBE are not predictable by appeal to general probabilities.

Notice that in the involuntary idealized case no objects need be moved by the subject; nor even is it required that the subject describe the area around his body in ways that indicate a viewpoint about the body. It will be enough to show that the subject is not hallucinating the content of his reports that the content cannot be the product of ESP, clairvoyance or lucky guesses.

Indeed, even in the idealized *voluntary* OBE, it seems that the dualist's position is secured without the requirement that the subject move an object in the targeted area. Here again, it would be enough that the EEG be flat and the subject's report on the details of the target area be accurate and not generally predictable; for then the epistemic content of the subject's report could not be explained either by appeal to chance or by appeal to forms of clairvoyance. It is crucial that in both idealized cases the EEG be flat or very low.

Incidently, it might be suggested that there is one imaginable case where the flat EEG would not appear to be necessary and that would be in case of a blind person having an OBE. In other words, if a certifiably blind person (although not blind from birth) was able, in virtue of having an OBE, to describe (including colors) independently verifiable states of affairs at some distance from his body, states of affairs not known to anybody near the subject's body during the OBE, then there would be no way of explaining that without granting the dualist's claim. Even if the blind person's EEG were not flat, the argument might go, we could not account for the blind person's knowledge by appeal to clairvoyance. Unfortunately, there is ample documentation of blind persons having the gift of clairvoyance extending to the ability to describe colors and "see" numbers. See, for example, Ostrander and Schroeder, *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtin,* pp. 265-289.

19. In "Visions of an Afterlife" by Dina Ingber, *Science Digest* (December 1980), p. 95ff it is claimed by the author that in 1979 Doctor Schoonmaker released the results of long-term research in which there were fifty-five cases of NDE wherein flat EEG's were established.
20. It has also been suggested that we may well want to add to our list of idealizing conditions for the voluntary OBE the further condition that that subject *appear* to the independent observer (or observers) stationed at the designated place to visit. And surely if this were to occur we could not explain it by appeal to *action at the distance* if the subject's EEG were determined to be flat during the OBE. But if the subject's EEG was not flat, I do not see how we rule against this phenomenon being an instance of *actio in distans*. We have evidence that some people are capable of making others (at a distance) "see" what the subject wants them to see (see Ostrander and Schroeder, *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain*. p. 120ff).

    Further, it is difficult to see how this last condition would be necessary if all the others were satisfied. After all, the satisfaction of this condition would not provide any different or stronger evidence than what is provided by the failure to be able to explain the subject moving an object during an OBE while the EEG is flat.

    Moreover, for those who think that the existing evidence tips the scale in favor of the dualist's position, the flat (or very, very low) EEG requirement would be unnecessary. It also seems too strong a requirement because we do not generally find it in voluntary OBE's when all the other idealizing conditions are satisfied. But, for those who like myself, feel that the earlier-cited evidence for the dualist's interpretation of the OBE should be stronger, the further requirement that the subject's EEG be flat during the OBE would present compelling evidence.

    Accordingly, while there may be something to be gained by pursuing the requirement that the subject in the OBE appear to those present at the place of visit, failure to satisfy this requirement should not be taken to show that the dualist's interpretation is false.

    The virtue of seeking evidence in terms of the idealized voluntary OBE is that it is experimentally feasible, but in no case yet reported are we demonstrably able to satisfy the flat EEG requirement. On the other hand, seeking evidence in terms of the idealized involuntary OBE is difficult because it is so difficult to get EEG readings on patients (or others) in critical arrest while trying to save them from dying. It may turn out that failure to secure flat (or very, very low) EEG's will not be viewed as failure to confirm the dualist's view. Even at that, however, it is reasonably clear that should we be able to secure as much, the dualist's view of OBE's would be strongly supported.

    It is quite conceivable, of course, that even if we satisfied the idealized conditions for both voluntary and involuntary OBE's, the skeptic might then argue that the knowledge the subject acquired was not acquired when his EEG was reading flat. Rather, upon awakening the subject clairvoyantly apprehended what had happened while his EEG was flat and then mistakenly believed that he acquired the knowledge while out of his body when his EEG had been flat. At this juncture, however, the skeptic must say just what he would accept as evidence for the dualist's interpretation of the OBE. Failing that, the skeptic cannot avoid the charge of dogmatism.

Chapter Four

1. In another type of mediumship, the medium, without entering a trance state, claims to have direct conscious contact with deceased disembodied spirits. But I am not here concerned with this type of mediumship. For a fuller discussion of various kinds of mediumship, see C. D. Broad, *Lectures on Psychic Research,* London, Routledge and Kegan Paul: 1932, p. 253ff.

   These different kinds of mediumships have long been the subject of careful and formal investigation beginning with the founding of *The Society for Psychical Research* (S. P. R.) in 1896. Indeed, extensive case studies of mediumship, and of specific mediums, have been the subject of numerous studies appearing, and continuing to appear, in *The Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research.* See, for example, Mrs. Sidgewicks' "The Psychology of Mrs. Piper's Trance," vol. 28; Murphy's "Three Papers on the Survival Problem," *The Journal of American Society for Psychical Research* (January, July and October, 1945); and see Hart's *The Enigma of Survival,* New York, Rider Press: 1959, and W. H. Salter's *Zoar,* Sidgewick and Jackson: 1961.
2. After the sitting, Evans gave Bradley the conversation in Welsh and the translation in English. Bradley, of course, never spoke Welsh.
3. Incidentally, prior to his sudden death in 1905, Richard Hodgeson had examined the mediumship of Mrs. Piper and had concluded, for reasons we shall see later, that Mrs. Piper's activities could be explained only by appeal to some form of personal survival after death. He often claimed that if he died while Mrs. Piper was still alive and functioning as a trance medium, he would come back as her control and speak to his friends through her. After his death in 1905, he began to appear as her control, replacing the former control, Phinuit. James examined her mediumship both when Phinuit was the control and then later when Hodgeson was the control. A copy of James' 1909 report is available in *William James on Psychical Research,* by Gardner Murphy and Robert Ballou, New York, Viking Press: 1960, p. 144ff.
4. Reprinted in *The Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research,* Vol. 2, part XVII, December 1890.
5. See *William James on Psychical Research,* p 104.
6. The most interesting test was the following. Mrs. B on her deathbed wrote a letter and sealed it and gave it to her sister, who did not know the contents; nor did anybody else know the contents. After Mrs. B died, the letter was carried to William James by Mrs. B's sister. James in turn took the sealed letter to Mrs. Piper, who identified the author of the letter but failed three times to get the written message correct, even though the deceased Mrs. B was supposedly telling the entranced Mrs. Piper what the message was.
7. Doctor Bayley, an intimate friend of Richard Hodgeson, noted after one of the sittings: "Such expressions and phrases were quaintly characteristic of R. H. in the body, and as they appear, often rapidly and spontaneously, they give the almost irresistible impression that it is really the Hodgeson personality, presiding with its own characteristics. To appreciate this fully, of course, one would have to have known him as intimately as I did." (as cited in *William James on Psychic Research,* p. 149)

8. The English medium, Mrs. Willett, died in 1956. Back in 1885 she had married a landed proprietor from Neath. Her husband's sister was the wife of F. W. H. Meyers, one of the founders of The Society for Psychical Research and the author of *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death,* London, Arno Press: 1954. Mrs. Willett, a person of notable achievement, was well-educated and took a prominent part in public affairs, particularly in South Wales. For example, she served as chairman of the Arts and Crafts Section of the national Eisteddfod in 1918, and later in 1920 was made a Justice of the Peace for Glamorganshire, being the first woman to occupy that office there. In 1922 she was appointed by the British Government as a delegate to the assembly of the League of Nations.

   In terms of the history of her mediumship, Mrs. Willett became a member of The Society for Psychical Research soon after F. W. H. Meyers died in 1901 and then, for lack of interest, resigned in 1905. However, in 1908 she suffered a death in the family and decided to take up automatic writing, an activity she had dabbled in as a young girl.

   In 1909, Mrs. Willett's mediumship bloomed and continued for a number of years. The early phase of her mediumship, including transcripts of all her sittings from 1890 to 1912, was the subject of a long and important paper authored by Lord Balfour in Vol. LXIII of *The Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research.*
9. As the philosopher C. D. Broad has noted about the Willett sittings with Lord Balfour, the sittings covered three topics: (1) the conditions under which the communicators work in communicating through Mrs. Willett; (2) the processes involved in such communication in general, and the special procedures involved in conducting a cross-correspondence experiment; (3) their views on certain philosophical questions about the nature of human personality, its survival of bodily death and the relation of the human individual to the Absolute. (*Lectures on Psychical Research,* p. 296)
10. Much of the transcripts can be found in C. D. Broad's *Lectures on Psychical Research,* p. 290ff.
11. See no. 691, Vol. XXXIX, of *The Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research.*
12. The records of the case, along with other correspondence and papers had been locked away for a number of years as a result of conditions arising from the Second World War. These papers came into the possession of George Vandy in 1953, and he submitted them to The Society for Psychical Research shortly thereafter.
13. A "proxy sitting" occurs when the experimenter receives in writing from some person, usually a complete stranger, a few distinctive facts about a certain recently deceased individual, and also completely unknown to the experimenter. The specified facts are usually sufficiently clear to allow the experimenter to determine that the medium was referring to the individual in question, if she should happen to do so during his next sitting with her. Normally, thereafter the experimenter writes down (or tapes) the information which the stranger had sent him, memorizes it, and then sends a copy of it to an officer of the *S. P. R.* to be filed without being opened. The experimenter meditates and tries to contact the deceased and asks for cooperation. Thereafter, the experimenter visits the medium and has a sitting with her. She is told nothing of the contents of the filed paper, or of the reason for that particular sitting, though she is aware of the general

idea of "proxy sittings." Sometimes under these circumstances the medium supposedly contacts the person answering the description submitted to the sitter of the deceased individual and proceeds to supply further specific details which are highly characteristic of that person and not applicable to anyone else (see C. D. Broad, *Lectures,* p. 353).

14. To protect the results of these sittings the following safeguards were taken to prevent the mediums from gaining relevant information before the sittings by normal means, and to prevent unwitting conveyance of information by leading questions during the sittings. (a) In making an appointment with the medium, the intending sitter always gave a fictitious name and address. (b) All correspondence making appointments was preserved for future reference. (c) To each sitting the sitter took with him an experienced shorthand typist, chosen by himself and unknown to the medium. The name of the deceased Edgar Vandy was never mentioned to the medium, and the person employed as typist was not always the same. The shorthand writer wrote an exact report of everything said at the sitting. The notes were typewritten and then sent to the sitter, who annotated them immediately after receiving them. (C. D. Broad, *Lectures,* p. 354)
15. Because he could not explain by appeal to telepathy her ability to provide facts unknown to anybody at the time of the sitting, Hodgeson mistakenly concluded that Mrs. Piper must be in communication with the dead. See J. Mishlove, *Roots of Consciousness,* N.Y., Random House: 1975, p. 87. Mrs. Henry Sidgwick, however, did not make this mistake. See *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research,* vol. XIII, 1897.
16. With such considerations in mind, Broad concludes his treatment on mediumship with the following:

> Many mediumistic communications, which take the dramatic form of messages from the surviving spirit of a deceased human being, imparted to and reported by the medium's "control," plainly do not warrant us in taking that aspect of them literally. Often they require no more radical assumption than telepathic cognition, on the medium's part, of facts known (consciously or unconsciously) to the sitter or to other human beings known to him . . . .
>
> Notwithstanding such cases as these, I think it unplausible to claim that all well-attested cases of ostensible possession of a medium by the spirit of a certain deceased human being can be explained by telepathy from persons still alive in the flesh and dramatization on the part of the entranced medium. I am thinking now of cases where the medium speaks with a voice and behaves with mannerisms which are recognizably reminiscent of the alleged communicator, although she never met him on his lifetime and has never heard or seen any reproduction of his voice or his gestures . . . .
>
> Now it seems to me that any attempt to explain these phenomena by reference to telepathy among the living stretches the word "telepathy" till it becomes almost meaningless, and uses that name to cover something for which there is no *independent* evidence and which bears hardly any analogy to the phenomena which the word was introduced to denote.

> *Prima facie,* the cases in question are strong evidence for the persistence, after a man's death, of something which carries traces of his experiences, habits and skills, and which becomes temporarily united during the seance with the entranced medium's organism.
>
> But they are also *prima facie* evidence for something more specific and surely very surprising indeed. For they seem to suggest that dispositions to certain highly specific kinds of *overt bodily* behavior, e.g., speaking in a certain characteristic tone of voice, writing in a certain characteristic hand, making certain characteristic gestures, etc., are carried by the x-component when it ceases to be incarnate, and are ready to manifest themselves whenever it is again temporarily united with a suitable living human body. And so strong do these dispositions remain that, when thus temporarily activated, they overcome the corresponding dispositions of the entranced medium to speak, write and gesticulate in her own habitual ways.
>
> Nevertheless, it seems to me that *most* of the well-attested mediumistic phenomena which are commonly cited as evidence for the survival of a deceased human being's personality, do not suffice to support so strong a conclusion . . . . (*Lectures,* p. 425ff)

17. The skeptic can offer two other reasons for thinking that all such cases must be fraudulent. However, given the complex nature of the reasons and the suitable response, I shall reserve consideration of these reasons for the Appendix of this book.

Appendix

1. C. D. Broad, *Lectures,* p. 409. For a similar argument, see Anthony Flew's "Can A Man Witness His Own Funeral," *Hibbert Journal (1956);* William James, "Human Immortality: Two Supposed Objections to the Doctrine," in *William James on Psychical Research,* edited by Gardner Murphy and Robert Ballou, Viking Press; New York: 1960, p. 279ff.
2. A view quite similar to C. D. Broad's appears in Anthony Quinton's "The Soul," *The Journal of Philosophy,* LIX 15, (July 19, 1962), pp. 393-404 and more recently in James M. O. Wheatley's "Reincarnation, 'Astral Bodies,' and 'Components'," *The Journal of The American Society for Psychical Research,* vol. 73 (April 1979), pp. 109-122.
3. C. D. Broad discusses this objection in *Mind and Its Place in Nature,* London, Routledge and Kegan Paul: 1962, p. 97ff.

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