

The Place of Psychical Research in the Study of Religion

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Introduction

On occasion in the past religious ideas and scientific ideas have come into conflict. In popular thought this is exemplified dramatically by two occasions. The first was in the sixteenth century when Copernicus established a system of astronomy in which the sun, rather than the earth, was the central point around which the planets moved. The most important corollary of this system was that it forced the idea of an enclosed sphere of heavenly bodies rotating around the earth to give way to the idea of potentially infinite space and a decentralized universe. The medieval concept of the universe, which was based on a simple hierarchical structure, was replaced by a concept which greatly changed humankind's idea of the limits of its world. The change of thought which accompanied the Darwinian theory of evolution in the nineteenth century was similar. A stable, fixed order in the animal world was abruptly challenged and an open-ended theory of continuous change substituted. Again, the limits of human thought were greatly expanded. In both revolutions of thought, however, the importance of the human being and his place in the universe seemed to be greatly diminished. The Copernican theory moved the earth, humankind's home, to an insignificant position within a system of planets, from her previous place as centerpoint, while Darwinian theory suggested that people were no more than the freak survival product of an accidental animal mutation. Also, these ideas seemed to be in serious conflict with the Biblical conception of the primacy of humans and their environment, and also with its method of creation.

In one fashion or another religious thinkers have become adjusted to these ideas even to the point where they were stimulated enough by them

to weave them into a new religious philosophy. Now, within the last century, researchers have been investigating matters again traditionally explained by religion. Under the generic of "psychical research", investigators are looking into ideas of life after death, and trying to gain a greater understanding of the true powers and nature of humankind. Some religious thinkers have begun to question the validity and the results of this work. An exchange of opinions in issues of the "Christian Century" in spring 1976 brings some of the problems into focus. The first writer, Robert M. Herhold, spoke out against an address by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. Kübler-Ross has done work with dying patients which has convinced her that life after death is a reality. Herhold is particularly concerned with three points: whether the data collected ~~is~~ ^{are} really fact rather than a wish or fleeting feeling; whether, if the data are established as fact, they can then be related to religious questions; and whether, once they are related to religious questions, one is really able to accept an answer based on reason rather than faith or tradition. Herhold argues in the negative on all three points.

James W. Woelfel responded vigorously against Herhold's position, particularly on the proposition that religious opinion cannot be supported by objective evidence, or believed on that basis. He has good company in his stand, including that of St. Thomas Aquinas, but he has to argue an abstract case. Kübler-Ross has not yet published the evidence which convinced her of the validity of the concept of life after death, so Woelfel can only argue that if the evidence is true, it ought to be taken into account and incorporated into religious thought. The problems raised in this discussion are not precisely the same as

those of the previous revolutions of thought. In this case, psychical, research finds itself supporting, rather than destroying, doctrines of religious thought and while expanding horizons of thought again, expanding the apparant position of man in the universe as well. The question which is the same, however, is whether religion exists as a self-contained system, or whether it can relate itself to the rest of the world and its modes of thought.

I would like to support and expand Woelfel's position that religion is amenable to dealing with rational and objective thought as well as faith and tradition, and that theories of religion can benefit from and be made more concrete through investigation. I will offer examples of evidence which has been published and thoroughly investigated and discussed. Once its verity has been established I will be able to discuss its relation to questions of religious import with more confidence. Specifically, I will consider the question of life after death, the doctrine of reincarnation, and the practice of healing through paranormal means. The result, at its best, is to mesh parapsychological investigation with religious theory and to uphold Woelfel's comment that "the notion that worship is positively related to ignorance rather than to knowledge seems...to be both untrue and a theologically embarrassing position to take."¹

The Place of Psychical Research in the Study of Religion

Part One: The Evidence

The material which psychical researchers investigate is that which most often makes up ghost stories, wierd tales, myths and legends. It has until recently been assumed within modern civilization that reports of events outside the normal range of human perception or ability were false or at least highly exaggerated. Some religiously oriented people allowed room in their world view for miracles, but were selective about what events could be so construed. There is a connection in this quarter with the idea that paranormal events were generally associated with spiritually advanced people. The most easily accepted stories about paranormal events were thus found in religious literature. These stories could be explained by the religious significance of the event, or explained away by freethinkers as legends accepted by a too credulous public. Stories about Jesus' healings fall in this category, as does the raising of Samuel described in I Samuel 28. These events were ones which helped shape the thinking within the Western religious tradition; the ideas that there are certain powers which can bend even the material world to their will, and that there is a life after death have always been part of Western religious thinking. Similarly, Eastern doctrine is bolstered and elaborated by stories. The Birth Tales of the Buddha, for example, illustrate the teaching of reincarnation.

But stories of seemingly miraculous healings, communications from the dead, and memories of past lives are not limited to religious literature. Reactions to such stories by the listeners is likely to be so skeptical or adverse that people who claim to have had unusual experiences on that order are often reluctant to say much about the event. A person

who had a vivid experience of himself leaving his body during a condition of clinical death said:

It was very interesting. It's just that I don't like telling people about it. ² People just kind of look at you like you're crazy.

When Morey Bernstein wrote a book describing the memories of a past life experienced by a woman whom he had hypnotized, both he and his subject, Mrs. Virginia Tighe, were attacked on scientific and religious grounds. Although much of what Mrs. Tighe remembered under hypnosis was verified in historical records, psychiatrists claimed they could find the root of the phenomenon in Mrs. Tighe's childhood, and the pastor of the Chicago Gospel Tabernacle traveled to Mrs. Tighe's home in Colorado in order to pray for her.

In the last quarter of the 19th century, however, a small group of English scholars found themselves intrigued by the possibility that there might be elements of truth in people's stories of unusual experiences. They hoped that if so, this might give them some more insight into the depth and range of man's personality. If the phenomena were found to be totally without validity then at least the futility of further investigation would be proved positively. So thinking, six men and one woman founded the Society for Psychical Research in 1882. Since then this Society has been in the forefront of psychical investigation, and in particular on what they call the Problem of Survival. This covers all manifestations which indicate communication from the dead (as in the story of Samuel's shade) or in any other way show that human personality survives bodily death. These are listed in C. J. Ducasse's The Belief in a Life After Death as apparitions and hauntings (the ghost story); remembered out-of-the-body experiences; communication from the dead through

automatists, including speech, written messages, and materialization of a human form purporting to be that of the dead person; possession; and memories of former lives.

Memories of former lives may be either spontaneous or brought to light through hypnosis. In either case, when the memories are such that it is impossible that the person could have them in living out his or her normal life and furthermore they can be verified by reference to historical documents or other sources of reliable information, then not only is the hypothesis of survival of bodily death under investigation, but so is a related issue, reincarnation. Dr. Ian Stevenson in the Department of Neurology and Psychiatry at the University of Virginia, is now the foremost investigator of such cases.

Research into the survival hypothesis seems to suggest that the human personality does survive in some sense, that consciousness is not dependant on the material body. By the same token, investigation into paranormal healing suggests that the material world, or at least the body may be affected by non-material means. Leslie Weatherhead completed a thorough study of some means of paranormal healing in conjunction with his own healing work as the minister of the City Temple in London. Weatherhead mentions as methods which have been at least somewhat effective in healing: the mechanism of suggestion, often through hypnosis; the laying on of hands; visits to a place considered holy, such as Lourdes; the Christian Science method of mental healing; diagnosis by psychics; the practice of intercession on behalf of a sick person through prayer; psychoanalysis and other methods of psychology. These methods of healing are psychic in that they seem to involve portions of the mind or personality beyond the normal range in effecting a cure. There is an even

more blatantly paranormal type of healing which Weatherhead omits, most probably because of its comparative lack of reknown at the time he was writing, in 1956. In 1950 a poor Brazilian villager had begun healing the sick through the means of operations performed with only minimal instruments (a kitchen knife, for example) and no anaesthetic. His patients were totally conscious and perfectly comfortable throughout the surgery and invariably improved as a result of it. The healer, known as Arigo, had very little education and no medical training whatsoever, and was at a loss to explain his strange gift, which had been bestowed on him suddenly in middle life. The account of his healing is very similar to that of psychic healers in the Phillipines, although the quality of the healing seems to be somewhat lower in the Phillipines. These cases add another dimension to the discussion of the matter of psychical healing, and fortunately, there has been some adequate documentation of them.

William James wrote about psychical research that in terms of logic, it is only necessary to show one example of an occurrence outside what is considered the normal range in order to break those limits. "If you wish to upset the law that all crows are black, you must not seek to show that no crows are; it is enough if you prove one single crow to be white."³ The most important point in this statement, however, is that the phenomenon of the white crow requires proof: it is not enough to catch a fleeting glimpse of what might be a white crow and then relate that experience to all of your friends and relatives. I would like, therefore, to discuss some of the research on representative or important cases in the areas of exploration on life after death, reincarnation, and paranormal healing.

The most substantial evidence for life after death is veridical communication from the dead person to his or her living friends and relatives. Ducasse uses as an analogy⁴ the example of discovering that a man whom one thought was killed in a plane crash is actually alive. One possible way is meeting the man on the street, recognizing him and talking with him of matters known both to you and to him. You would know before he told you that he had actually survived the crash, contrary to your beliefs. A second possibility is that he calls you on the phone to inform you that he has survived the crash. Nuances of voice and certain turns of phrase, plus the fact that he speaks of matters known to both of you, convince you that you are indeed talking with him and he has clearly survived the crash. Lastly, there is the possibility that someone else calls you to tell you that the man has survived. The person adds that your friend cannot come to the phone, but he needs an important favor done. In this case you want to make certain that it is really your friend who is communicating with you through another person. To do so, you relay questions about matters known only to you and your friend, and you also ask the person for a description of the man who purports to be your friend and who needs this favor. You are convinced finally or remain unconvinced according to how much information you can obtain, its quality, and the diversity of the information, including its faithfulness to certain associations of thought peculiar to your friend and to his emotional makeup. These are almost certain to seem like trivial matters to other listeners. You might also take into account your perception of the person who is calling on behalf of your friend and your assessment of his reliability.

The third possibility is a fairly accurate analogy of the majority

of communications through mediums. The medium is the instrument of communication, the telephone, her control is the person who speaks on behalf of your friend, and your friend is trying to convince you of the fact of his survival. In this situation, again, the quantity, quality, and diversity of the information will do most to convince you on a rational basis. Sir Oliver Lodge, a student of psychical phenomenon in the early twentieth century, became convinced that his son Raymond, who died in World War I, was communicating with him because of the information he obtained through mediums. Raymond, for instance, showed intimate knowledge of family matters and inside jokes. When his father, at one sitting, introduced the subject of "Mr. Jackson", the control understood him to mean a friend of the family, while Raymond was able to show, through the control's confusion, that he knew that Mr. Jackson was the name of the family peacock.⁵ The same was true when the subject of a certain boat was introduced. The control assumed that it was a boat that sailed on water, while Raymond made the responses appropriate to a discussion of a boat which had wheels and was to be sailed across the sand. The boys in his family had made the boat one year for summer play, and Raymond showed further his acquaintance with all the details when he said finally that it never ran anyway.⁶

The same kind of intimate understanding of the details of a particular family's life was shown in another case which suggested life after death. In this instance a 13 year old girl named Lurancy Vennum (later known as the "Watseka Wonder") exhibited for a period of three months and ten days all the personality traits and characteristics of an 18 year old ^{of the same name} girl who had died when Lurancy was a little over a year old. In this state, Lurancy identified totally with the personality of

the dead girl, Mary Roff. She was allowed to go and live with the Roff family, she was familiar with everything and everyone that the real Mary Roff had been, and she had no consciousness of any tie binding her in the least to the Vennum family. The Vennums and the Roffs were not socially close, and Lurancy had never known Mary. There was no way in which the quality, quantity, and diversity of the knowledge of the intimate affairs of the Roff family and Mary's place among them which Lurancy displayed could have been gained normally. She knew, for instance, to call Mary's sister, Mrs. Minerva Alter, by Mary's special name for her, Nervie. Lurancy in a normal state knew her only as Mrs. Alter, while her friends now called her Minnie.⁷ Lurancy, as Mary, knew that she would be Mary for only a limited time; when Lurancy returned to normalcy, the Mary personality had already announced her time of departure. Mary returned after that only on short occasions when Lurancy called on the Roffs after her extraordinary experience.

These are two cases in which personalities of people known to be dead manifested themselves strangely. In both, the people closest to the deceased were convinced that they were dealing with their continuing personalities by the wealth of detailed information, the sustained plausibility of the communication and acts, and by their emotional response to the manifestations of the deceased personalities. Less striking and more problematic evidence for life after death is obtained through reports of apparitions and out of body experiences; these two cases of communication and possession serve as potentially proven white crowns for the hypothesis of life after death.

In the life after death cases a major reason for concluding that it was indeed the deceased personality communicating was that the memories

were continuous and verifiable. Raymond, for instance, remembered incidents from his life as the youngest son of Sir Oliver Lodge which convinced his family that he was who he said he was. He also remembered his death and how he came to be in his present condition. And his memories continued to accrue: he remembered the sequence of communications with his family as they occurred and apparently continued to grow in knowledge and experience. Similarly with Mary Roff: she not only remembered her life with the Roffs, but was aware that she was only temporarily in another body and at some point would have to return to her discarnate existence. On the other hand, although it looked as though Lurancy was associating herself with Mary's personality, after that period of time, she never retained any consciousness of Mary's life, or any identification of herself with Mary. Memory, then, and identification of the self with the memory is one basic which implies continued existence.

Memory thus plays an essential role in the investigation of cases which suggest reincarnation. In the cases documented by Dr. Stevenson, typically a small child spontaneously recalls certain things which he or she claims are associated with a previous life. The children know the things they talk about because they consider themselves in their present lives to be the same person who lived previously, although they now find themselves in a different body and in different circumstances. A clear-cut case is that of Prakash, an Indian boy.⁸ When he was about 4½, he began to identify strongly with his memories of the life of a boy named Nirmal. Nirmal had lived in the village of Kosi Kalan, six miles from Prakash's village of Chhatta. He died of smallpox at the age of ten, in 1950. Prakash began running away from home in order to find

what he considered his real family in Kosi Kalan. When Prakash was about ten years old, in 1961, he finally met members of Nirmal's family. He recognized them immediately and greeted them in a manner appropriate to Nirmal. When he visited Kosi Kalan he was able to lead the way to Nirmal's family's house, and again spontaneously recognized members of the family. He identified strongly with his memories of the life of Nirmal and wanted to live with Nirmal's family rather than his own. This threat thoroughly alarmed his parents and was a source of friction between Prakash and his parents and Nirmal's family and Prakash's parents. In this case, the continuity of memory and the identification of the present self with the personality of a previous life, despite the unpleasant consequences, leads to the hypothesis of reincarnation.

A less typical but also strongly evidential case involves memory under hypnosis of a previous life. In 1952 an amateur hypnotist, Morey Bernstein, asked a responsive subject to describe her life before she was born as her present personality in 1923. The subject, Mrs. Virginia Tighe, answered with memories of a life lived in Ireland during the nineteenth century. She called herself Bridey Murphy and gave particulars of her life which later were found in documents of the time. Throughout six sessions over a period of about a year, Mrs. Tighe spoke consistently in the personality of Bridey Murphy and during hypnosis was perfectly comfortable with the idea that Bridey was a previous portion of her own personality. The belief that a hypothesis of reincarnation is the best solution in this case comes not so much from a sense of strong identification of Mrs. Tighe with Bridey, as was the case with Prakash, but more from the consistency of her replies and their subsequent verification. Mrs. Tighe, as was true with Prakash, was in no position to

have gained the information through normal channels.

For many people, the conviction that reincarnation is a fact of human existence was brought home less by a careful perusal of existing evidence than by the statements which Edgar Cayce made as to the validity of the idea. This seems peculiar without a closer look at Cayce's vast psychic talents. Primarily, Cayce was known as a clairvoyant who concentrated on using his powers to heal. The Association for Research and Enlightenment kept files on all of Cayce's work from 1923 to his death in 1945. During that time he diagnosed and prescribed over 8000 times for cases of illness or injury, apparently through clairvoyance while in a trance. The fact that his diagnoses and suggested treatments were invariably correct lent credence to his discussion of reincarnation, also while in trance. This last, however, is certainly no strong evidence for the theory of reincarnation; it is simply an interesting sidelight. Cayce's primary work, that of healing, is central to this paper. The discussion of life after death and reincarnation is talk about theories which may explain certain facts. The case for paranormal healing, on the other hand, is self-evident. When Cayce diagnosed a case, he diagnosed it correctly. When he prescribed a treatment, the patient found that that particular treatment cured him.

Cayce's powers of healing were limited to diagnosis and suggestion. Some healers have recourse to even greater resources. Arigo, mentioned earlier in this paper, was one such. He not only diagnosed and prescribed instantaneously, but was able to perform surgery in a manner unknown to medical science. One well-documented example suffices to serve as the white crow. In 1963 Dr. Henry K. Puharich, an American medical doctor, traveled to Brazil with Henry Belk, the owner of a chain of department

stores who devoted much time and money to psychical research, in order to investigate the stories about Arigo. Puharich decided that the most conclusive evidence would be for himself to undergo an operation by Arigo.⁹ At that time, Puharich had a benign but annoying fatty tumour (lipoma) on the inside of his right elbow. He had not had it removed because, while the surgery was not extraordinarily difficult or risky, in Puharich's case the tumour was close to the nerve controlling movement in the hand, and to a large artery. In order to avoid possible complications arising from surgery, Puharich had learned to live with the tumour. Arigo, however, was known to have removed even medically inoperable malignant tumours. Surely this would be an easy test of his ability.

Surgery was performed with a pocket knife donated from the audience. An operation that would have taken 15 to 20 minutes if done in the normal fashion, Arigo finished in less than ten seconds. There was no sterilization and no anaesthetic, yet Puharich felt no pain and had no infection throughout the healing of the incision. Motion pictures of the event showed Arigo seeming simply to scrape the knife blade across the arm, while the tumour almost popped right out. Arigo gave Puharich the tumour to take home with him. This episode forced Puharich and Belk to the conclusion that the phenomenon of Arigo was completely true, although difficult to explain. Brazilian spiritualists told Arigo that he was serving as a medium for the spirit of a Dr. Adolpho Fritz, who wanted to carry on healing work. Dr. Fritz was supposed to be a German doctor who had died during World War I. The spiritualists told Arigo that Dr. Fritz worked with a group of other discarnate doctors, and had chosen Arigo to be his medium because of Arigo's great desire to help his fellow man without concern for material benefit to himself. Observable

factors which lend some plausibility to this history are the facts that Arigo worked while in a trance, unaware of the work he was performing, and when he spoke during his trance, he had a German accent.

These few examples serve as an introduction to the kind of puzzling cases parapsychologists investigate. They are cases which are considered to be suggestive of the validity of the theories of life after death and reincarnation, and the healing cases are more evidence of the idea that the world works by more than material means. There are, of course, attempts at alternative explanations for the phenomena. One alternate hypothesis is that these phenomena can be explained in terms of what we consider normal today. This is to say that the mediums through whom Raymond ostensibly communicated tracked down bits of information known only to the family, through a number of years, without the family finding out. It is to say that Lurancy Vennum acquired knowledge of Mary Roff's life in such detail that the Roff family could distinguish, over three months, no difference between Mary's personality and that which Lurancy exhibited. It is to say that Prakash, a 4½ year old boy, was given enough information about a certain family living in another village to identify himself with their dead son, and later to be familiar with such details of their life appropriate only for the years that their son was alive. We must assume that a Colorado housewife familiarized herself with the life of a nineteenth century Irishwoman so well that she knew the names of the greengrocers in Belfast at the time in order to perpetrate a hoax which caused quarrels within her family and unpleasant notoriety in spite of efforts to hide her identity. In the case of healers, it is necessary to posit that Edgar Cayce concealed a vast knowledge of medicine during his waking hours,

and furthermore somehow obtained normally a diagnosis of people he never saw. Similarly, Arigo, who struggled through three years of grade school, must hide his medical knowledge, fake a German accent while working, and either surreptitiously administer anaesthetic and sterilize the area to be operated on or have faked an operation in which he removed and handed to Dr. Puharich the lipoma which had been in his arm. Besides finding no motive backing these suppositions, the investigators ruled them out as physically impossible.

Alternative explanations on a paranormal level are also advanced. Alleged communications by discarnate personalities through mediums, as in the case of Raymond, are ascribed to telepathic or clairvoyant powers of the medium. Ducasse explains that this could take place in three ways: ¹⁰ 1) the medium picks up information telepathically from the minds of people who knew the alleged communicator; or 2) she picks it up through retrocognitive clairvoyance of the communicator's life; or 3) she picks it up through clairvoyant perusal of documents and records presently existing. This view has certain merits. The medium is clearly in a trance when she receives and transmits information, and subjects in hypnotic trance have been shown to exhibit greater than normal telepathic powers. Furthermore, the main objection to these sweeping telepathic and clairvoyant powers was that there was no evidence for such a range of talents as to insure instantaneous accuracy, which generally occurred. (As W. H. Salter remarked, "It is possible to frame a theory which will explain certain occurrences, more or less, by telepathy, but is it not necessary in doing so to invent ad hoc a species of telepathy for which there is otherwise practically no evidence?"¹¹) However, study of Edgar Cayce's work has led to the conclusion that he obtained his information by exactly the kind of

sweeping telepathy and clairvoyance which Salter earlier found impossible to give credence to. The difference between Cayce's work and the mediums is that while Cayce gave simply the information in his own voice, the medium often communicates nuances which suggest another personality. For example, this short exchange between the control (known as Fedra) of Mrs. Gladys Osbourne Leonard and Raymond seems to give evidence of Raymond's personality being present.

Sir Oliver Lodge asks the control through the medium: "What about that yacht with sails; did it run on the water?"

Fedra replies: "No." (Fedra, sotto voce.--Oh, Raymond, don't be silly!) He says, no. (Fedra.--It must have done!) He's showing Fedra like a thing on land, yes, a land thing. It's standing up, like edge-ways. A narrow thing. No, it isn't water, but it has got nice white sails."

Lodge: "Did it go along?"

Fedra: "He says it DIDN'T! He's laughing! When he said 'didn't' he shouted it. Fedra should have said, 'He laid peculiar emphasis on it.' This is for the boys."¹²

In this episode, a certain teasing, lighthearted picture of Raymond comes through in Fedra's words; an aspect of Raymond which the family certainly understood. Moreover, the "peculiar emphasis" on the word "didn't" is in character for Raymond in speaking of an odd boat which he and his brothers had fun making, but which never quite worked, as the wheels were too small. The ability of a medium to demonstrate and convey the essence of a certain personality was too striking to dismiss, and difficult to attribute to telepathy or clairvoyance, as it did not occur in cases other than communication from discarnate spirits. In the case of the Watseka Wonder, a paramount piece of evidence was that the family was convinced not only by accurate information, but the feeling they had of recognizing Mary Roff's personality. Mary's sister "said that the mannerisms and behaviour of Lurancy when under the control resembled those of her sister Mary."¹³

The cases suggestive of reincarnation also evade relegation to the category of unusual telepathy cases in their relation to the information they have. Prakash, for example, not only had intimate knowledge of Nirmal's family, but identified himself totally with the life of Nirmal. In the Bridey Murphy case as well the subject assumes a continuity of identity between herself and her previous manifestation. It is of course possible that Mrs. Tighe did possess such extraordinary extrasensory perception under hypnosis that she could pick up details of nineteenth century Irish life, retrocognitively or clairvoyantly through existing records, and then weave them into the pattern which she called a previous life in order to obey the suggestion of the hypnotist. It is also remotely possible that Prakash obtained facts about the life of Nirmal through extrasensory perception and then believed them to be associated with himself. The existence of other cases in which a precisely similar phenomenon occurs, however, suggests that these are to be grouped separately from simple telepathy cases. This inclines the investigator to evaluate Prakash's statements and behaviour as most probably adhering to Prakash's own explanation: that these are memories which he retained of a life lived on earth before his present one.

Finally, the fact that Cayce and Arigo helped cure through paranormal means stands unchallenged. There is to date no explanation for the means through which they effected cures other than those which they themselves offer: a wide-ranging clairvoyance on Cayce's part, and possession by a discarnate spirit in the case of Arigo.

Coming to the conclusion that the phenomena themselves are genuine, and that they are evidence of a level of activity beyond the normal range,

one begins to perceive a certain unity among the manifestations. The theory of disincarnate spirits is upheld by the possession of Lurancy Vennum's body by Mary Roff and by the possession of Arigo by Dr. Fritz. That the powers displayed by Dr. Fritz are not unknown to incarnate humans is shown by the phenomenon of Edgar Cayce. F. W. H. Myers posits a subliminal level of human consciousness which is not limited as is normal waking human consciousness, and which survives bodily death, thus making a continuum between the paranormal powers displayed on earth and the theory of survival after death. It is on this level that Prakash obtains the memories of his previous life, an abnormal ability which Mrs. Tighe can tap only through hypnosis. Finally, what is the theory of reincarnation but the idea of possession by spirits of vacant bodies in an immature stage of development?

Through psychical research, the white crow of paranormal phenomena seems to be proven. It is necessary in this paper next to discuss whether it is appropriate to classify psychic phenomena in the same category as religious experience.

Footnotes

- ¹ James W. Woelfel, letter in "Readers' Response", Christian Century (93(July 7-14, 1976): 632-633), p.633.
- ² Raymond A. Moody, Life After Life (N.Y.: Bantam Books, 1975), p.85.
- ³ Gardner Murphy and Robert O. Ballou, eds. William James on Psychical Research (London: Chatto & Windus, 1961), p.41.
- ⁴ C. J. Ducasse, A Critical Examination of the Belief in a Life After Death (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1961), pp.200-203.
- ⁵ Sir Oliver J. Lodge, Raymond Revised (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1922), pp.150-153.
- ⁶ Ibid., pp.148-149.
- ⁷ F.W.H. Myers, Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death, vol. 1 (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1903), p.366.
- ⁸ Ian Stevenson, Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation (N.Y.: American Society for Psychical Research, 1966), pp.20-33.
- ⁹ John G. Fuller, Arigo: Surgeon of the Rusty Knife (N.Y.: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1974), pp.37-49.
- ¹⁰ Ducasse, p.191.
- ¹¹ Ibid., p.196.
- ¹² Lodge, p.44.
- ¹³ Myers, p.366.

Part 2: Psychic phenomena and religious experience

Spiritualists have incorporated psychic phenomena into a religion. The basis of Spiritualist belief is that each person is a spirit temporarily encased in a human body. At death, the spirit is released from its imprisonment. It takes on a more ideal form, which corresponds closely to the form and characteristics of the particular human body it occupied, but without most of its imperfections. The person, as a spirit, is supposed to continue to grow in knowledge and experience, progressing through different spheres of reality, of which the earth was the lowest one. The progression is said to be never ending, but there is a goal of perfection.¹⁴ Most important to the Spiritualist religion is the belief that spirits communicate with people still on earth and that they desire to be of help in times of need.

"Help" may often simply take the form of consolation to the relatives and friends by the person who is now "in spirit". The focal point of the Spiritualist church service is the relaying of messages from the deceased to the members of the congregation. A medium spends his or her allotted portion of the service identifying spirits who wish to communicate and delivering short but reassuring messages. A brief example of Arthur Ford's mediumistic work during a Spiritualist service, described by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, is typical:¹⁵

He inclined his head, like one listening, and then:

"Peter Armstrong! Is Peter Armstrong in the hall?" A rather astonished gentleman raised his hand.

"There is a whole group here for you--your mother Mary, your sister Kate, two brothers, Robert and John, your son Ned. Do you recognize them?"

"Yes."

"Well, they send greeting and love."

Then: "I get another name--Sarah Edwards. Is she present? Please put up your hand. Your daughter is here. She says her name is Lucy. You are in trouble, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Well, she says to hold on and all will be well. I give you that."

"John Walker." Another hand went up. "Your brother Willie is here. Passed out in the war. Is that right?"

"Yes."

"He says this is your first visit to a Spiritualist church. Is that so?"

"Yes."

"Well, he hopes you will go on. I give you that."

"Any one here called Melton--Jane Melton?" A hand went up. "Your brother Albert is here."

"No, I never had a brother Albert."

"Oh, yes you had."

"No."

"Think again!"

"Oh, I am sorry. Of course, little Bertie, who died young."

"Yes, he is growing up nicely. He wanted to tell you so. And do not worry about your mother. She will be all right. I give you that."

Brazilian Spiritualists have taken this concept to great lengths and medical doctors who are Spiritualists consult mediums for advice from spirits who have continued to progress in medical knowledge after passing over from the earth.¹⁶ Furthermore, the conception of the spiritual body as the true body has led to the practice in Brazil of operations in which trained mediums mimic precisely the actions of a regular surgeon's normal operating procedure, not, however, on the body itself, but a few inches from the body. They claim that they are operating on the spiritual body, and "an enormous number of successful cases have been verified by responsible doctors."¹⁷

Spiritualist teaching is based largely on the experiences and writings of people with major psychic talents, for example, Emmanuel Swedenborg and Andrew Jackson Davis. Neither could properly be said to be the founder of Spiritualism: the first Spiritualist Circle grew up in Rochester, New York, in 1848 for studying apparant communication from a murdered man through the mediumship of two young sisters, Margaretta Fox, 15, and Kate Fox, age 12. The philosophy and perspective from

which the members of the circle discussed the phenomena was based on Swedenborg's perception of the spirit life, supposedly clairvoyantly obtained, and Andrew Jackson Davis' trance dictation of a book called Nature's Divine Revelations. They provided the concept of the spirit world as being arranged in levels of development and provided specifics for the basic concepts. The continuing power of the church derives from the constant reaffirmation through experience of the most basic belief of Spiritualism: that the spirit survives bodily death and can communicate with people still on earth.

This continuing personal reaffirmation seems to provide the basis for institutional religion altogether. William James writes:

Churches, when once established, live at second-hand upon tradition, but the founders of every church owed their power originally to the fact of their direct personal communion with the divine.¹⁸

Having accepted that psychic experiences are genuine, a pattern comparable to personal experience in longer established religions seems to be forming. As James wrote, the founders of religions had powerful religious experiences which formed the basis of the religion. This is especially clear in the case of Buddhism, where the Buddha's experience of enlightenment, a pure knowledge of the truth and the way to attain it came upon the Buddha in one powerful, sudden realization. Institutionally, a philosophy has grown up around the Buddhist religion, to say nothing of ritual and daily practice. But his followers are encouraged personally to follow in the steps of the Buddha solely in order to have the same realization of the truth which he achieved. Similarly, one prevalent view of Jesus' work is that he said that no one could reach eternal life except through him. Ritual, his deification, immense structure grew around that idea, yet a fundamental Christianity

still wants its members to understand and internalize the experience of living with or in Christ. In Spiritualism, members know that Swedenborg and Davis described the spiritual world minutely. They know the theory behind Spiritualism, they understand themselves and others to be in reality spirits, and know that on earth they are at the beginning stage of an infinite path to perfection. But Spiritualists are also asked to know this through experience. Thus, each member himself receives messages from discarnate spirits, and feels the truth and power of direct experience which lies behind its philosophy.

Each religion is therefore able to claim confirmatory experience for its precepts and to feel a measure of justification through that. The Spiritualist, however, takes one step back from his experience, and instead of calling it a religious experience, says that it is a piece of evidence for his view. The functions of religious experience and the psychic phenomena appear to be the same, why then does the Spiritualist disavow a religious aspect to his confirmatory experience?

Personal religious experience was scrutinized by William James in The Varieties of Religious Experience. He discussed personal religious experience in terms of the experiences, acts and feelings of people as they understand themselves to be in relation to the divine.¹⁹ His effort was less to work from a definition of what is religious experience than to include all of what is recognized as religious experience into a broad and comprehensive definition. Thus, Buddhist realization of truth is a recognized religious phenomenon and must be included, although the place of "the divine" in the Buddhist world view is not theistic. Emersonian transcendentalist experience is included, though the theistic conception is impersonal. Salvation

Army type conversion experiences take their place alongside medieval mysticism, in an effort to sort out the elements common to them all.

James was able to find certain characteristics common to whatever was termed religious experience. At its most basic, personal religious experience was an emotional understanding of the world which produces certain attitudes and beliefs. James concludes thus:

Summing up in the broadest possible way the characteristics of the religious life, as we have found them, it includes the following beliefs:

1. That the visible world is part of a more spiritual universe from which it draws its chief significance;
2. That union or harmonious relation with that higher universe is our true end;
3. That prayer, or inner communion with the spirit thereof--be that spirit "G-d" or "law"--is a process wherein work is really done, and spiritual energy flows in and produces effects, psychological or material, within the phenomenal world.

Religion includes also the following psychological characteristics:

4. A new zest which adds itself like a gift to life, and takes the form either of lyrical enchantment or of appeal to earnestness and heroism.
5. An assurance of safety and a temper of peace, and, in relation to others, a preponderance of loving affections.²⁰

These characteristics are best illustrated by reference to certain dramatic and obvious types of religious experience. Conversion and mystical experience are discussed by James at length, and afford ample material conducive to understanding the points involved.

Conversion experience is a complete alteration in attitude, perception, and basis of understanding the world which remains, after the change, stable enough so that it is clear to see a transformation in the person who has undergone the conversion experience. A conversion may be religious or non-religious. James proffers as an example that of a President of the United States who generally exhibits a particular way of perceiving events and dealing with problems, that

is, from a political point of view. While on vacation, however, he leaves his political orientation for different preoccupations, for instance, the mode of thought of a wilderness camper. If the President were never to return to the affairs of his elected office and instead remain in the wilderness camper frame of mind, it would be said that he underwent a transformation, a conversion experience in that his change of view was total and complete and resulted in different attitudes and behavior.

Similarly, James presents a conversion from a belief in a religious way of life to an atheistic conception of the world. Here, the French philosopher, Jouffroy, discovers his disbelief and how his perception of the world has been transformed:

I seemed to feel my earlier life, so smiling and so full, go out like a fire, and before me another life opened, sombre and unpeopled, where in future I must live alone...²¹

The religious conversion, of course, is in line with James' generalizations about religious experience. It leads to a new understanding of life which adds vigor, peace and happiness to that person's life, and an ability to act in ways heretofore impossible, as a result of new convictions and understanding. The change may be instantaneous or more gradual; it is the fruits of the change and its stability which is important. Also important is that the experience is direct; although it is interpreted in the light of previous philosophical understanding, the understanding received is only to be acted on, not discussed for its implications. For example, Billy Bray, "an excellent little illiterate English evangelist",²² once he had the experience of conversion, gave up not only his habitual drunkenness, but also quit smoking²³ as a result of his new understanding

of his relationship to the divine. In Buddhist literature, there is a tale of a leper, Suppabuddha, who, after hearing Buddhism expounded from the lips of the Buddha, understood the world in a new way and wished to become a follower of the Buddha. Suppabuddha exclaimed:

Excellent, sir! Excellent, sir! Just as if, sir, one should lift up the fallen, discover the hidden, point out the way to one bewildered, show a light in the gloom, saying, "Now they that have eyes to see can see shapes."--even so in divers ways has the Exalted One expounded dhamma. I, even I, sir, do go for refuge to the Exalted One, to dhamma and the order of monks. May the Exalted One accept me as a follower, as one who from this time forth even to life's end takes refuge in him.²⁴

This selection shows the enthusiasm and vigor which a convert finds his life infused with, his new understanding of the world, the emotion, and the assurance which is a part of religious experience.

While conversion experience illustrates vividly the willingness of the person who undergoes it to act on his direct understanding, mystical experience shows the depth and clarity of the impression of religious knowledge. The mystical experience, as researched by W. T. Stace through widely differing cultures and belief systems in different times and areas of the world, is always one of pure unity. As soon as the mystic tries to explain his experience, he sees the paradox of pure unity, but cannot withdraw from that description. The cultural reference varies. For example, Buddhists generally call the experience of such unity Nirvana, while Hindu mystics might call it Self and Christian mystics understand it to be G-d.²⁵ Meister Eckhart had a problem in this area in that Christian teaching was that there was an ineradicable difference between G-d and man. In certain of his writings therefore, he tried to avow that there was one small point of difference between the soul and G-d in its apparant union.

In other passages he does not make such a claim. Stace writes, "it is impossible not to note...that the Catholic mystics frequently make what seem to be unguarded statements which imply complete pantheistic identity and then hastily add a qualifying clause, as if they had suddenly remembered their ecclesiastical superiors."²⁶ It seems clear in this case that the remembered experience is the real point of reference, with the philosophical interpretation following behind.

This discussion of conversion and mystical experience forms a representative body of personal religious experience from which it is possible to understand the generalizations about religious experience. The psychological qualities which James understood religious experience to entail (an undaunted interest in life and a feeling of compassionate love for humankind) seem to me to be a result of the direct religious experience, as Billy Bray's ability to quit smoking and drinking were indications of the strength of his conversion experience. The internal experience itself seems to me to have a quality which James mentioned only partially in his definition of personal religious experience. He wrote exactly that religion for the purpose of this discussion ought to be taken as:

"the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine."²⁷

The religious experience seems to provide for people a direct knowledge of what they apprehend as divine. The knowledge, once there, may be acted on. For the person who has undergone a conversion experience, this may take the form of redirecting his or her personal life and goals. For the mystic, it may take the form of trying to explain the experience coherently, or to reconcile it with the philosophy of his or her particular

religion. But in either case, that religious experience provides the basis for a world view, it gives an internal, immediate understanding of the divine and the place of the person who experiences it within the order. This internal understanding may be seen in the founders of religions, and also, as was shown above, in continuing reaffirmation of the same experiences by the followers of the particular religion.

Can any of the qualities of religious experience be said to apply to the psychic phenomena discussed earlier in this paper?

First, it seems clear that there are some resemblances between religious experience and psychic experience. The most important of these is that they are both internal events for the participant. Also, they are particular to the individual. Although there are methods of preparation, there is no guarantee of a result, and the person who has a religious or psychic experience is somewhat outside the average. In religious literature there are systems of disciplines and exercises to be performed in order to attain mystical levels of consciousness; in conversion experience the potential convert is often exhorted to have faith, to prepare him- or herself by faith in order to have the experience. It is also possible for the conversion experience or mystical experience to be entirely spontaneous.

In the cases described in the first section of this paper, the occurrence of psychic manifestations were in the main spontaneous. This can be seen clearly in the case of Prakash and Lurancy; Prakash was simply aware, from his earliest childhood of the fact of his previous life, while Lurancy found herself caught up in an event completely outside her previous experience. There was no attempt to continue or develop the manifestation. Lurancy, after her experience, lived a normal life,

while Prakash's memories remained stable. Psychic manifestation began similarly for Cayce and Arigo. Cayce discovered his talents in a trance induced by a hypnotist in order to relieve Cayce's laryngitis. In the trance, he discovered that he had the ability to diagnose his own medical condition and to prescribe treatment for it. The hypnotist, a practicing doctor, experimented by asking Cayce to diagnose for other patients of his. Cayce was entirely successful. After that, Cayce continued for most of his life to give readings for people. His ability manifested itself without any previous training on his part, however, and was developed only in that the scope and direction of the information requested of him in trance was sometimes altered. Arigo's experience in developing his healing mediumship was without volition on his part and frightening to him and his family. Without warning, Arigo began to have vivid dreams in which he saw a group of doctors performing an operation. One of them would address Arigo and tell him tell he could help in the work. Arigo suffered blackouts and severe headaches. He underwent psychiatric and physical examinations, and though he was given a clean bill of health, feared he was going mad. Worse still was the conflict between the experiences he was having and the teaching of the Catholic church. The Church in Brazil came out strongly against Spiritualism and Spiritualist practices, and had to be rigid because such a great percentage of the population, though nominally Catholic, was also involved in some form of Spiritualism. (One knowledgeable woman explained to John Fuller, "although Brazil is mostly Catholic, you'll find that eighty percent of them, when they are really in a pinch, off they go to consult a medium of some sort."²⁸) What Arigo was describing sounded too suspiciously like a manifestation

which could be explained by reference to Spiritualist theory. The conflict and fear which Arigo was undergoing himself ended only when he performed his first operations and cured the people involved. Arigo was unaware he had performed surgery at all, having done so in a trance, in response to emergencies, but was reassured by the people involved, and soon went on voluntarily to heal the people who asked him to. (Which did lead to a complete break with the Catholic church for Arigo.) Clearly, this spontaneous manifestation was unsought by Arigo, and his technique and talent remained stable throughout the period of his healing work. Psychic experiences thus do not partake of the qualities ascribed to religious experience by James, that it leads to zest for life and inner assurance and peace. If those feelings come at all, it is much later, when the person becomes more used to the manifestation and more comfortable with its implications.

In healing in particular, a spontaneous manifestation is not necessary, and preparation on a religious level may take place. In a case not discussed in the first section, the active striving of the healer after his psychic gift becomes apparent. This is in the history of Tony Agpaoa, a healer in the Phillipines. His technique is much the same as Arigo's, involving surgery which causes no pain, heals without infection and is performed under the most primitive of conditions. Often Agpaoa uses only his own hands to perform an operation, forsaking instruments entirely. His work is not as good as Arigo's, involving some cases of complete fraud, but more often he does treat his patients correctly and cause cures. He, too, is said to be possessed by a spirit who works through him. Agpaoa worked in order to become a healer, however. He went to a sacred Filipino mountain and fasted and

prayed in order to receive a spirit who would heal through him. He then learned more about healing techniques from previously established Filipino psychic healers. He was not afraid or mistrustful of his gift, and welcomed its manifestation. In this way he is very much like a mystic who follows the rules of a certain discipline in order to attain a level of mystical consciousness.

The cases of Bridey Murphy and Raymond retain a resemblance to religious experience only in their internal character and particularity. In illustration, Mrs. Tighe is one of the few who can be so deeply hypnotized as to reach a level on which she can recall incidents from a past life. (Morey Bernstein, her hypnotist, devotes a major part of his book to a description of his own attempts and failure to be hypnotized.) Raymond manifests through a medium, whose possession by a control spirit is akin to the position of Lurancy Vennum and Arigo. But these last two cases illustrate clearly the major difference between psychic experience and religious experience. This is that while religious experience is a process of understanding, of receiving a new world view and seeing your own position in it, psychic experience is a matter of receiving information. From the information received, a new philosophy might be built up, but it is a matter of rational inquiry and deduction, not immediate apprehension. Thus, where a mystic knows with utter certainty that the universe is One, and the convert is convinced, for example, that Christ is in him, Cayce only knows that if you give a certain 48-year-old woman from Raleigh, North Carolina one ounce of dried wild ginseng root, one-half dram of Indian turnip and one dram of wild ginger together in a solution of two ounces of pure grain alcohol and one ounce syrup of wild cherry in the amount of one-half teaspoonful

twice a day until it is gone, in conjunction with other treatment, the woman will recover from a long-standing illness. Furthermore, since the waking personality of Edgar Cayce is not aware of what he does in trance, someone will have to tell him exactly what he said. This unawareness of trance personality was also true in the case of Bridey Murphy and naturally Arigo and Lurancy Vennum.

Direct knowledge, therefore, internally perceived without recourse to material means as we understand them today, is the main characteristic of psychic experience. Stace had to investigate and explain mystical experience mainly from the basis that the explanation of it by each mystic has markedly similar characteristics. Psychic experience, on the other hand, is investigated by its verifiability. The only way an investigator can decide that an experience is genuinely psychic is if the information is of an order which could not have been gained through normal channels, and if the information corresponds to something which can be proved through material means. Prakash's memories might well be taken as a young child's game if they did not correspond perfectly with the life of a boy from years before. Mrs. Tighe could be assumed to be merely responding to the suggestion of her hypnotist and making up a fictional tale, if the details weren't exactly correct for the life of a nineteenth century Irishwoman from Belfast. Lurancy might just have been thought mad, except her Mary Roff personality knew the intimate affairs of the life of Mary Roff. Similarly with the Raymond case: his mediums did not have access to the information they gave through themselves as Raymond. And Arigo and Cayce vowed to quit their practice as healers if they ever harmed someone through their diagnosis, prescription, and surgery. But the information proved veridical through their cures.

Spiritualists thus use information to convince themselves of religious truths. Their feeling about psychical experience is that it proves the first three conclusions of James about religious thinking: that there is a spiritual universe which is of more significance than this world, that an orderly relationship with that universe is humankind's purpose, and that communication with that world is possible and desirable. Spiritualists, however, are limited by their own religious belief. Although they claim verifiable psychic experience which supports their ideas, they consider, as a religion, only reports which tend to confirm their ideas of spiritual levels and continual progress in a spirit world after death. For example, the teaching of reincarnation is not universally accepted by Spiritualists. Yet a perusal of the evidence quite likely would lead to the conclusion that it is a valid concept. The Spiritualist view has been set in a pattern which is no longer really amenable to change by evidence, although it is conducive to confirmatory experience. So also, I think, have other institutional religions set themselves in molds.

Psychic research, on the other hand, is an attempt by investigators to come to terms with any event which is verifiably psychic. The basic idea behind science, that the world is a unified kind of phenomenon and that what is learned in one field can be transferred to another (for instance, as mathematical knowledge is applicable to physics) is also present in psychical research. There is the prevailing idea that all psychic phenomena are somehow unified as well, that there is some continuum connecting the material world and the events of psychical research, and that laws govern psychical events as much as they can be said to control material ones.

There is one more point of convergence between religious and psychic experience which can be discussed here. In religious literature, the

most spiritually advanced people, the founders of religions, are gifted with psychic talents. Jesus, for example, was a healer, while the Buddha had the power to read minds. Similarly, after a long career of healing and offering clairvoyantly obtained advice on a large number of psychological and religious problems, Cayce came to be seen as somewhat of a religious figure, a seer. Tony Agpaoa, the Filipino healer, went through religious practice in order to become a healer. It is clear that psychic experience is not the same as religious experience. It is also clear that psychic experience is not limited to people of great spiritual advancement. The case of Lurancy Vennum is testimony to this point; she was never described as anything but an average young girl and yet underwent a major psychic experience. The non-religious character of the event may be compared to the experience of another young girl, Bernadette of Lourdes, whose visions, which she understood to be of Mary, were psychic in that they were purely informational, yet partook of religious aura in the significance which could be placed on them in a Catholic setting.

It is obvious from the preceding pages of this paper that religious experience and psychic experience cannot be equated. And yet there seems to be some link between the two which the careful investigator cannot fail to take into account, from the association of religiously advanced people and psychic abilities, and from the possible explanation of religious theory, which psychic phenomena seem to be in a position to give. A fuller discussion of the relationship is in order.

Footnotes

- ¹⁴George Lawton, The Drama of Life After Death: a study of the Spiritualist religion (N.Y.: Henry Holt and Co., 1932) p.86.
- ¹⁵Ibid., pp.238-239.
- ¹⁶Fuller, p.39.
- ¹⁷Ibid., p.58.
- ¹⁸William James, The Varieties of Religious Experience (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1904) p.30.
- ¹⁹Ibid., p. 31.
- ²⁰Ibid., pp.485-486.
- ²¹Ibid., p.177.
- ²²Ibid., p.249.
- ²³Ibid., p.290.
- ²⁴F. L. Woodward, trans. The Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon, part 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1948) Udana 5:iii. p.59.
- ²⁵W. T. Stace, Mysticism and Philosophy (London: MacMillan and Co, Ltd., 1961), p.34.
- ²⁶Ibid., p.114.
- ²⁷James, p.31.
- ²⁸Fuller, p.251.

Part 3: Science, Religion, and Psychical Research

The question discussed in the introduction to this paper and the one which caused the most difficulty for Herhold, was whether or not scientific thought could prove or disprove religious concepts. That question presupposes an absolute difference between Religion and Science as ways of perceiving the world. It was also noted that at two points in human history it seemed clear that science and religion had come into irreconcilable conflict, a conflict which was resolved ultimately in favor of the scientific hypothesis, which it seemed the church was forced into accepting, although grudgingly and resentfully. Herhold accepts this view of a dichotomy between religion and science, or faith and certain knowledge, writing:

Dr. Kübler-Ross indicated that...experiences of dying or "dead" patients have made her certain that there is a life after we die....At first I felt reassured...but when I got home, my leg began to hurt where Dr. Kübler-Ross had pulled it. It was nice to hear that someone from another discipline had arrived, without benefit of clergy, at a belief in life after death. I was troubled, however, that Kübler-Ross had made not a statement of faith, but what she regarded as a statement of fact,"beyond a shadow of a doubt."²⁹

From this point of view, as Herhold writes later, certain religious opinions are beyond the realm of human investigation: "Life after death is, by definition, beyond the range of scientific research..."³⁰ We have seen already that this opinion is untrue; investigators from societies of psychical research apply scientific techniques in their studies of cases which seem to imply a life after death. Herhold's question goes further than that. It is almost a matter of whether you are allowed to know about religious ideas through reason: "If life after death could be empirically verified 'beyond a shadow of a doubt', then there would seem to be little need for faith."³¹

As Arthur Koestler explains admirably in The Sleepwalkers, this

chasm between religious faith and scientific knowledge was at one time not only seen as bridgeable, but in point of fact a distinction between the two as different fields without a meeting place was inconceivable. As noted earlier, the development of a system of astronomy in which the sun was the focal point rather than the earth was a reason for a major breakdown in the relations between astronomy, as Science, and the Catholic church, as the institution of Religion. Koestler describes the conflict, however, as evitable and unnecessary; more due to the unpleasant and overly dogmatic, egotistic personality of Galileo Galelei than to a reactionary position of the church.

In the beginning, the Copernican system was no problem. The book in which Nicolas Copernicus put forth his system (On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres) contained a preface written by a theologian and preacher, Andreas Osiander, to whom the printing of Revolutions was entrusted by Copernicus' disciple. The preface was inserted anonymously and most likely infuriated Copernicus,³² who died before he could do anything about it. However, it was extremely placatory to religious theory that the earth was the center of the universe and held that Copernicus' theories, though they might seem to indicate that the sun really was the center of the universe, were merely working hypotheses. Osiander wrote:

...if any causes are devised by the imagination as indeed very many are, they are not put forward to convince anyone that they are true, but merely to provide a correct basis for calculation. Now when from time to time there are offered for one and the same motion different hypotheses (as eccentricity and an epicycle for the sun's motion), the astronomer will accept above all others the one which is the easiest to grasp. The philosopher will perhaps rather seek the semblance of the truth. But neither of them will understand or state anything certain, unless it has been divinely revealed to him....So far as hypotheses are concerned, let no

one expect anything certain from astronomy, which cannot furnish it, lest he accept as truth ideas conceived for another purpose...³³

While this stance may have incurred Copernicus' wrath, it allayed any problems his book might have had with religion. Furthermore, the preface was true in that, although Copernicus believed that at least parts of his system were correct (he was sure, for example, that the earth moved), the system was faulty in many ways and without sufficient proof,³⁴ could be taken by theologians and astronomers alike with any reasoning ability, only as a working hypothesis.

It was not until seventy years later that Galileo tried to parlay this imperfect system into a position of absolute truth, with disastrous consequences for the relationship of institutional religion and science. The church had come to terms with Copernican astronomy; Jesuit astronomers knew that the heavens and heavenly bodies were not immutable, as Aristotle had taught, and they were not totally averse to the Copernican system--as a working hypothesis. It still, however, seemed contrary to scripture in its entirety and until absolute proof could be had for it, scripture took first place.³⁵ The church announced itself amenable to change in its position on scripture if there were indeed absolute proof. In other words, scripture was held on a high level of belief, but the Catholic church was willing to admit a misinterpretation when faced with evidence from a scientific field. Koestler describes a response from Cardinal Conti to a question from Galileo on this matter:

The cardinal answered that, concerning the "immutability" of the skies, Holy Scripture seemed to favour Galileo's view rather than Aristotle's. As for Copernicus, the "progressive" (i.e. annual) motion was admissible, but the daily rotation did not seem to agree with Scripture, unless it was assumed

that certain passages must not be taken literally, but such an interpretation was permissible "only in the case of the greatest necessity."

"Necessity" in this context meant once again: if and when convincing proof was shown of the reality of the earth's motion.³⁶

Galileo set out, in 1613, to force this nicely balanced stalemate into a decision in favor of the Copernican system. Unfortunately, he had no convincing proof, in view of the fact that the orthodox Copernican system was impossible. He had, however, always held in his own mind that Copernicus was basically right. Koestler understands Galileo's motivation at this point to be pure ego:

For almost fifty years of his life, he had held his tongue about Copernicus, not out of fear to be burnt at the stake, but to avoid academic unpopularity. When carried away by sudden fame, he had at last committed himself, it became at once a matter of prestige to him. He had said that Copernicus was right, and whosoever said otherwise was belittling his authority as the foremost scholar of his time.³⁷ [U]his was the central motivation of Galileo's fight...

Galileo refused to back down or soften any part of his position towards Copernicus. The church also stood firm in its decision to believe the scriptures over a scientific hypothesis unless it were demonstrated by absolute proof. Thus, in 1615, Cardinal Bellarmine, the Consultor of the Holy Office and Master of Controversial Questions, wrote in a letter:

...I say that, if there were a real proof that the sun is in the centre of the universe, that the Earth is in the third sphere, and that the Sun does not go around the Earth but the Earth round the Sun, then we should have to proceed with great circumspection in explaining passages of Scripture which appear to teach the contrary, and we should rather have to say that we did not understand them than declare an opinion to be false which is proved to be true. But I do not think there is any such proof, since none has been shown to me. To demonstrate that the appearances are saved by assuming the sun at the centre and the earth in the heavens is not the same thing as to demonstrate that in fact the sun is in the centre

and the earth in the heavens. I believe that the first demonstration may exist, but I have very grave doubts about the second; and in case of doubt one may not abandon the Holy Scriptures as expounded by the Holy Fathers...

With this as its firm position, the Church felt bound to discredit any work which tried to show that the Copernican theory was in fact true or that it was in accord with scripture, when the Church was assured that it was not. Copernicus' work was forbidden reading for four years, until 1620, when some minor corrections were made to show it definitively as only a working hypothesis, as its preface puts forth. Galileo was finally put on trial before the Inquisition in 1633 after gentle treatment for decades from the church, because he still maintained that the Copernican system was right and continued to teach it. The church still dealt leniently with him, asking him only to recant his conviction. He did so readily, even offering to write something in refutation, an offer which was discreetly not taken advantage of. But the clash, once it was discovered that a heliocentric system was correct, put the church in a very bad light. It seemed like a clear case of authoritarian ignorance coming down against the forces of reason, which of course ultimately conquer. The very cautious but reasonable position of the church has been lost sight of in this case. Galileo's position as a martyr was exaggerated, as was the case which he had against the church. What is important to remember for this paper is that institutional religion has not always and need not now necessarily close its eyes to arguments of logic on points which it has tried to explain by reference to tradition or religious writing; and that Galileo's case, which is a landmark in the split between religion and science, was not an open and shut affair. Koestler concludes:

The Galileo affair was an isolated, and in fact quite untypical

episode in the history of the relations between science and theology, almost as untypical as the Dayton monkey-trial was. But its dramatic circumstances, magnified out of all proportion, created a popular belief that science stood for freedom, the Church for oppression of thought.³⁹

The public conception of the conflict between religion and science which raged when Charles Darwin put forth a theory of evolution, suggesting that man was not descended quite directly from Adam who had been made by G-d, is similar. By the nineteenth century, Biblical criticism was not unknown, and few scholars allowed themselves to take the Bible literally as it stood.

When Darwin's Origin of Species was published...those clergy and laymen who had kept abreast of Biblical and historical scholarship, well developed by that date, were neither surprised nor alarmed by what was already an idea familiar to them. They recognized that Darwin had skilfully provided empirical evidence to corroborate the idea of real development in world process which had been articulated with increasing clarity and conviction by the new-style historians who had been at work for just about one hundred years before Darwin published the results of his biological researches in 1859.⁴⁰

The difficulty in accepting the truth of Darwin's theory of evolution was felt by those who were still taught and still clung to the notion that the Bible was the repository of all knowledge, scientific as well as historical, religious, and moral. Since people in the vanguard of learning and thought had been able to disabuse themselves of the latter idea, it was to be expected that the others could later follow in their footsteps, in a hesitant but definite progression.

In both cases of a perceived conflict between new discoveries of science and institutional doctrines of religion, those in the forefront of the religion found themselves already in a position to be able to accept the new findings, in a cautious way, but in accordance with their studies of religion. The new developments, which finally were

supported with absolute proof, were admitted to have shown, as Cardinal Conti said in the seventeenth century, a certain misinterpretation of the scriptures and tenets of the religion. This of course did not spell the end of religion, only a certain modification of ideas on the basis of reason. It is unfortunate (Koestler suggests "disastrous"⁴¹) that this has been interpreted as a victory for science over religion, or as a definitive split between institutional religion and science. These histories also suggest that Herhold is mistaken in believing that faith is the only basis for religious knowledge; clearly in times past, religious scholars were willing to let their religious ideas be changed in the light of research.

As science has often in the past been the means of changing our conceptions of the world and developing our knowledge, the burden of accepting and working the changed into its world view has so far been the problem of institutional religion. As Whitehead wrote:

Consider this contrast: when Darwin or Einstein proclaim theories which modify our ideas, it is a triumph for science. We do not go about saying that there is another defeat for science, because its old ideas have been abandoned. We know that another step of scientific insight has been gained.

Religion will not regain its old power until it can face change in the same spirit as does science. Its principles may be eternal, but the expression of those principles requires continual development...⁴²

It is now to be seen that the discoveries of psychical research which Herhold understands to have such great problems for questions of religious knowledge and eventual acceptance, pose equal difficulties for orthodox science. It is ironic that the specific issues which this paper deals with, survival, reincarnation, and the possibility of paranormal healing, are all doctrines held without any but personal proof by institutional religions, and though churches hold the theory without investigative proof, scientists tend to reject it, though proof is available. Koestler says this at

the end of his work on the gradual erosion of the relations between religion and science:

The materialist philosophy in which the average modern scientist was reared has retained its dogmatic power over his mind though matter itself has evaporated, and he reacts to phenomena which do not fit into it much in the same manner as his scholastic forebears reacted to the suggestion that new stars might appear in the immutable eighth sphere. Thus for the last thirty years, an impressive body of evidence has been assembled under strict laboratory conditions which suggests that the mind might perceive stimuli emanating from persons or objects without the intermediary of the sensory organs; and that in controlled experiments, these phenomena occur with a statistical frequency which invites scientific investigation. Yet academic science reacts to the phenomena of "extra-sensory perception" much as the Pigeon League reacted to the Medicean Stars; and, it seems to me, for no better reason. ⁴³

Tom Valentine in his book on psychic healers in the Phillipines ran into precisely this attitude with a staff investigator for the American Medical Association. Valentine was researching claims by Filipino healers, in particular Tony Agpaoa. The A.M.A. investigator, William J. Monaghan, said he had evidence that Agpaoa was a fraud. Valentine was eager to see it, because from his own investigation, it was becoming more likely to him each day that Agpaoa was a genuine healer. Monaghan could only present him with a number of clippings from newspapers which claimed fraud, and a letter from Dr. Ian Stevenson which said that he had not been able to find conclusive proof one way or the other. Valentine was disappointed, to say the least, and more convinced of Monaghan's close-mindedness than of Agpaoa's fraud. Monaghan confirmed this view with a later statement:

The burden of proof doesn't rest with us, Mr. Valentine. The burden of proof is on those who make the claims. If you believe this quackery is genuine, then it's up to you to bring in positive proof. ⁴⁴

Although this stance sounds much like the careful position of the church in respect to the Copernican theory, the point is that proof in

healing cases was available, in film and in documented cures.

More serious objections by scientists to psychic phenomena were explained by C.J. Ducasse. Ducasse reviewed the case regarding the possibility of life after death, and found specific problems based on scientific observation and theory regarding it. Foremost is the assertion that consciousness depends on the body. The power of this objection is seen clearly in the observations leading to the conclusion. First, consciousness is only found in living organisms, and the more complicated the organism is, the more developed the consciousness is. Consciousness is not present in the body after a severe injury to the head, as it is not present after death. Also, changes in the physical or chemical composition of the brain cause radical changes in consciousness. A lesion, for example, a lobotomy, or certain medications alter abilities, reactions or traits which the person has always considered part of himself. Personality, as well, is dependent on sex, hereditary factors, and environment.⁴⁵ Experiments on animals, observations on people can only confirm the position that consciousness is indeed altered when the brain is altered, and sometimes when there is a change in the body. A final objection, given these considerations, is plausible; that is that there is no conceivable life after death in which people could continue as themselves. The idea is that a drastic change of environment has drastic consequences on the consciousness as well. Ducasse illustrates:

To take a crude but telling analogy, it is past belief that if the body of any one of us were suddenly changed into that of a shark or an octopus and placed in the ocean, his personality could, for more than a very short time if at all, recognizably survive so radical a change of environment, of bodily form, of

bodily needs, and of bodily capacities.⁴⁶

It must be remembered that the conclusion that consciousness depends on the body, though based on empirical evidence, is still theoretical. It was the task of F.W.H. Myers, one of the founding members of and leading investigators for the Society for Psychical Research, to explore levels of human consciousness and their different manifestations and from his research, put forth a theory by which the survival of the human personality after bodily death could be explained.

Myers began with a theory that normal waking consciousness is only a minor part of the total consciousness which makes up a person. To support this view, he worked with cases which indicated that the waking consciousness was in some way interfered with, aided, expanded, or limited by something within the person which he or she cannot control through the brain, or consciously. One clear manifestation of mental or physical effects which were outside the control of the conscious mind was seen in cases of hysteria. Freud, for example, treated one woman who was plagued by a persistent, hallucinatory smell of burnt pudding. She could find no explanation for the problem. Freud was able to uncover, through strong suggestion that she remember the origin of her problem, that the smell of burnt pudding was associated with the children of whom she was the governess. She also found a strongly repressed thought, that she was in love with her employer. And finally, when the smell of burnt pudding was unaccountably replaced with that of cigar smoke, she remembered that she had witnessed a scene in which she realized that her employer was too aloof and haughty ever to treat his subordinates on a truly human level. Cigar smoke was linked with this scene because

it occurred at the end of a dinner, when the gentlemen were smoking. Her conscious understanding of this caused both the cessation of the obnoxious odors and the cessation of her hopeless love for her employers.⁴⁷ The intervention of an unconscious level of her mind, causing the peculiar smells, is indicated.

Genius is another area which is not under conscious control.

Myers particularly cites examples of people who were able to perform mathematical calculations instantaneously which were far beyond ordinary limits of ability. Often that ability left as unexplainedly as it had been present, showing that the talent had not been in the realm of conscious attainment. Myers indicates the problem in a particular case:

Still more remarkable, perhaps, was Professor Safford's loss of power. Professor Safford's whole bent was mathematical; his boyish gift of calculation raised him into notice; and he is now a Professor of Astronomy. He had therefore every motive and every opportunity to retain the gift, if thought and practice could have retained it. But whereas at ten years old he worked correctly in his head, in one minute, a multiplication sum whose answer consisted of 36 figures, he is now, I believe, neither more nor less capable of such calculation than his neighbors.⁴⁸

Myers' suggestion is that this ability is on a level only potentially or sporadically available to most people at this point.

Experiments in hypnosis seem to carry this theory of levels of consciousness out. Mrs. Sidgwick, also one of the founders of the S.P.R., carried out one such experiment. After a colleague hypnotized a subject lightly, she gave him a certain piece of information. The hypnotist then suggested he go deeper into hypnosis, and at that stage Mrs. Sidgwick gave him a different piece of information. They continued this process until the subject seemed too deeply hypnotized to be able to respond, about nine levels. Mrs. Sidgwick then put questions to

him at each level. She found that he could answer appropriately only to the information she had given on that particular level. For example, when the subject had been hypnotized to the fourth level, he had already been given three separate items of information, one for each of the first three levels. Before he was given a piece of information for the fourth level, he was asked if he remembered anything. He remembered only that Mrs. Sidgwick was supposed to talk to him.⁴⁹ This suggests strongly that Myers' theory of levels of consciousness, with the waking consciousness one of many, is correct.

Myers understood manifestations of psychical phenomena to be traceable to this theory as well. He studied phenomena which generally come under the heading of extra-sensory perception, including clairvoyance, clairaudience, and telepathy, and extended his studies to apparitions, automatic writing, mediumistic trance, and possession. In the same way that subliminal levels of consciousness appear to cause hysterical manifestations, have some association with genius, and present themselves clearly in stages of hypnosis, so are psychic phenomena, inexplicable to the waking consciousness, manifestations of the subliminal levels. In the case of extra-sensory perception the subliminal levels of the minds of the percipient (and the agent, if there is one) are involved directly, with the information received on the subliminal making itself somehow known to the waking consciousness, as in special knowledge received which is called genius. Myers was thus able to unify all mental phenomena which eluded the boundaries of normal waking consciousness into a comprehensive theory of a subliminal consciousness which does not seem to be as dependant on the body.

G.N.M. Tyrell was able to somewhat support this conclusion with his study of apparitions. Apparitions are clear visions of a person, or animal who seems to be occupying the space nearby. Apparitions may be of living or dead persons, they may signify a death or an emergency or they may signify nothing, they may be seen by many people or by one especially sensitive individual. They are uncannily real, to the point of appearing three-dimensional, casting shadows, avoiding furniture in the room, sometimes responding to or acknowledging the people present. Tyrell came to understand apparitions as not located in time or space nor sent from agent to percipient, but rather as a joint creation on some subliminal level, "and he came to think that at those mid-levels human beings are in a sense non-separate."⁵⁰

Myers was willing only to propose that the existence of the subliminal levels of consciousness, apparently separate in their needs from the sensory data which the brain accepted, meant that people existed more basically in terms of this consciousness than in terms of their bodies. To Myers this meant a very personal survival, rather than a survival of a sort of group consciousness. This allows the manifestations of personalities such as Raymond to be attributed to the survival of his spirit or soul. The same is true of the reincarnation information: reincarnational memories are as strongly individual as ordinary memories and appear to have the same base. Other possessions, as in healing, are also accounted for.

Carl Jung in his work, however, also found he had to support the theory of a less individualized kind of subliminal consciousness, at least on a certain level. This was prompted by his discovery that the same symbols are used subliminally by different cultures all over the world. This suggests a common source of information.

What function does the brain have, then? In terms of total consciousness, Henri Bergson suggested that its function, rather than, to create consciousness, is more to limit it. Rosalind Heywood explains this view concisely:

The brain, he said, limits man's conscious awareness of the exterior world to what is practically useful to him, to what he can act upon to his own advantage. It keeps his attention fixed on those limited aspects of the world. It is the organ of attention à la vie and of action.... It is when his brain barrier is working inefficiently and his attention à la vie wavers that some of those other perceptions slip through, to be labelled, perhaps, telepathy, clairvoyance of mundane events, or subjective hallucination.⁵¹

One last possible connection makes a cautious bid for attention. The theory of a subliminal unity among humans sounds very similar to reports of what is actually experienced in mystical states of consciousness. Often in mysticism there is a limiting factor to be overcome, for example, ego, in favor of experiencing a more total Self. In the theories discussed above, reliance on the limiting factor, the brain, in some way must be overcome in order to gain experiences which seem to show some subliminal unity.

The question as to individual survival as opposed to a rather general belonging to a human subliminal consciousness has not been resolved. It seems clear that although the collective unconscious idea has some support and merit, the evidence for personal survival is too strong to allow the former theory to overcome the latter. Lurancy Vennum manifested the personality of Mary Roff to those who knew her best; it was not a matter of a general resemblance to Mary which was discovered through symbols found in dream analysis. On the other hand, it is difficult to denounce Tynell's study of apparitions. Psychical research depends on careful research in order to compile valid evidence

from which to form a theory; as it has strong cases for both ideas, it will take more study in order to overcome the discrepancies. This is true of course only of the general scientific idea of a fundamental unity in the world is really valid, as the materialist notion, a basis of science, seems now to be in flux.

That fundamental unity was at one time specifically a religious conception which prompted scientists to explore the universe. Johannes Kepler, for instance, believed in a harmony of mathematics, human experience, and physical objects which ought to be able to be described. This led him to investigate the relationships among planetary orbits and from religious conviction to discover information important to science. It seems now that science and religion find difficulty at times in finding a unity in which both can fit. A few thinkers, such as Teilhard de Chardin, have been able to reconcile scientific findings with religious ideas and even develop them further. As at one time,

Apart from reassuring the conscious mind by investing the universe with meaning and value, religion acted in a more direct manner on the unconscious, pre-rational layers of the self, providing it with intuitive techniques to transcend its limitations in time and space by a mystical short cut, as it were. The same duality of approach--the rational and the intuitive--characterizes...the scientific quest. It is therefore a perverse mistake to identify the religious need solely with intuition and emotion, science solely with the logical and the rational.... The priests were the first astronomers; the medicine-men were both prophets and physicians; the techniques of hunting, fishing, sowing, and reaping were imbued with religious magic and ritual. There was a division of labor and diversity of method in the symbols and techniques, but unity of motive and purpose.⁵²

Psychical research now stands in a peculiar position between science and religion. Initially both institutional religion and orthodox science are repelled by its ideas, on the one side, that religious ideas are being subjected to scientific scrutiny, and on

the other, that clearly impossible phenomena are being accorded the dignity of real investigation. But there is also the possibility of a reconciliation between the two seemingly antagonistic fields of thought, as when Woelfel upholds the practice of using research to better understand religious ideas, and philosophers such as C.J. Ducasse can dispassionately conclude that there is strong evidence for the view that there is life after death. The implications for both science and religion is that neither can be a self-contained system. Also, the scientific investigation of psychical phenomena give a new strength to some religious ideas, as I would like to discuss in the next section.

Footnotes

²⁹Robert M. Herhold, "Kubler-Ross and Life After Death" (Christian Century, vol. 93, April 14, 1976), p.363.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid.

³²Arthur Koestler, The Sleepwalkers (N.Y.: The MacMillan Co., 1959)p.167.

³³Ibid., pp.565-566.

³⁴Ibid.,p.171.

³⁵Ibid.,p.427.

³⁶Ibid.,p.431.

³⁷Ibid.,p.438.

³⁸Ibid.,p.448.

³⁹Ibid.,pp.522-523.

⁴⁰Very Reverend Dr. Alan Richardson KBE, "Religious Thought and the Idea of Evolution", The Crisis of Evolution (Great Britain: The Open University Press, 1974)p.109.

⁴¹Koestler,p.425.

⁴²Ibid.,p.527.

⁴³Ibid.,p.535.

⁴⁴Tom Valentine, Psychic Surgery (N.Y.: Pocket Books, 1975)p.42.

⁴⁵Ducasse, pp.29-30.

⁴⁶Ibid.,p.34.

⁴⁷Myers, vol. 1, pp.51-52.

⁴⁸Ibid.,p.82.

⁴⁹Ibid.,pp.453-455.

⁵⁰Rosalind Heywood, The Sixth Sense (London: Chatto and Windus, 1959)p.186.

⁵¹Ibid.,p.211.

⁵²Koestler,p.521.

Part 4: Speculation

In psychical research, investigation into the areas of life after death, reincarnation, and paranormal healing is rather heady stuff. The laboratory research is almost deliberately tedious in favor of gaining absolute statistical evidence. Experiments were designed, for instance, to test telepathy, in which the subject guessed which of five cards the agent was trying to make him perceive through telepathy. Every extraneous element was eliminated from the experiment in order to be certain that there could be no other route of information than through some extra-sensory means of perception. The results were often statistically significant. They were also important for the weight of completely controlled and documented evidence which was obtained. But the toll on sustained interest was severe. Rosalind Heywood reported, "I once heard Mr. Shackleton, a 'star' card-guesser, announce with passion, 'I was bored! bored! BORED!'"⁵³

The evidence for life after death, reincarnation, and paranormal healing provokes interest spontaneously. The phenomena themselves are often spontaneous and impossible to confine to a laboratory. Stevenson, for example, travelled thousands of miles, to India, Ceylon, Brazil, Alaska, in order to record cases of seemingly reincarnational memories. The phenomena are less easily quantifiable than the results of the card-guessing experiments; the quality of the phenomena must be taken into account. In the Raymond case, Raymond's family spent great amounts of time and ingenuity devising tests which would definitively prove that Raymond and only Raymond could be responding to their inquiries. While a number of successes would be good evidence, one absolutely positive test would prove the case better than ten ambiguous responses. It is measurable not in terms of statistical frequency, but in terms of veridi-

cality and relevance to the entirety of the phenomena. The evidence for life after death, reincarnation, and paranormal healing is not isolated and sterile as the telepathy experiment information is; rather, it forms part of a pattern with other psychic manifestations and with the life of the central individual. So whereas laboratory evidence for and documentation of psychic talent is essential for statistical purposes and confirmation of more spontaneous, more bizarre manifestations, the "field" evidence for survival, reincarnation, and paranormal healing is a far richer source for speculation on the meaning of these phenomena.

At this point I assume that we are all convinced that the evidence for survival, reincarnation, and paranormal healing is veridical and genuine. Furthermore, we accept that the three aforementioned theories are the best conclusions for the evidence as it stands. We have seen that psychic experience can not be called religious experience, but now I would like to make a link between the information gained from psychic experience and religious ideas. How can that be done? Stace faced a similar problem in writing about mystic experience. He first had to decide on the reality of the phenomenon without having experienced it himself. He was able to do that because of the striking similarity of and agreement among documents of mystics through centuries and from widely separate cultures. Next he wanted to discuss the question of whether the phenomenon was only a psychological aberration or whether there was some "objective reference" to the "universal core" of the experience. He came to the conclusion that there was such an objective reference which could best be referred to as the "Universal Self" because of the experience of the complete disappearance of the ego into total unity which mystics report.⁵⁴ Stace used logic to reason

from observation to a conclusion about a religious question. In the case of psychical research I will do the same. Although the psychic experience is not essentially religious, an understanding of particular psychical experience is often gained through reference to ideas found in religion, and because the information gained through psychic channels, veridical on other questions, sometimes deals with religious subjects.

First and foremost is the probability that human beings are not primarily physical. Most religions teach in one form or another the idea that material things and material existence are not the most essential elements in explaining human beings. Most religions teach the existence of a soul or a real self behind the facade of the present body and personality. Even Buddhism, which will not admit to an underlying self, does not accept the physical entity of a person to be his or her totality; in Buddhism, though there is nothing behind the facade, neither does the physical facade have its own reality--all is illusion.

Psychical research supports the religious view that human beings are not primarily physical, through experiences of telepathy and clairvoyance, through mediumship, and the evidence for life after bodily death. Spiritualists claim to know the truth about life after death through the psychic visions of their leaders; that is, that after death the person still develops individually as a spirit. His or her soul is still the essence of the person, the spiritual form is an outward body, as the material body was on the earth plane. So far nothing other than assertions of sensitives can support the view that humans have a soul. Even Theravada Buddhism can accept the idea of a spiritual body--people

are often incarnated later as devas, on a higher plane than that of material existence. But this conclusion of psychical research seems to be a first step in the reestablishment of religious doctrine about the nature of humankind on some basis of reason and observation.

A corollary to the idea that human beings are not primarily material is the discovery of psychical research that people survive bodily death. At this point the agreement between conclusions from psychical research and doctrines of religion becomes a little strained. Western religions generally reach along the lines of the idea that people live on the earth once and after each person dies, he or she is judged on the value and religious merit of his or her particular life and then is awarded some kind of punishment or some kind of reward. Eastern traditions incorporate the teaching of reincarnation, whereby an individual incurs reward or punishment in his or her own life, according to the merits of the previous lives. Actually, the fortunes of the individual are seen less as a matter of reward and punishment than as material for further development, and as the simple result of the neutral law of karma. Again, all Spiritualists do not accept the teaching of reincarnation as the idea of a series of rebirths on the earth plane, although their idea of individual development is strong. But psychical research concludes there is strong evidence for the theory of reincarnation. Thus, on a level of reason and observation, it appears that there are some areas in which teachings of Western religions need expansion or reinterpretation.

Finally, psychical research gives some insight into the relationship between the human spirit and the human body, giving the spirit the ascendancy, as religion would have it. This is seen most clearly in

the work of the healers. Although they perform real work on the bodies of their patients and prescribe real medicine to cure illness, there is a stress on reforming the inner attitude of the person. In the reports of Arigo's work this was not so evident, but Agpaoa and Cayce made it a central theme of their efforts. Joaquin Cunanan, the vice-president of the Espiritistas Union, a religious organization to which many of the Filipino healers belong, and Tony Agpaoa talked briefly about healing work to Tom Valentine:

"If the vital body is opened by a spirit guide working through the healer, the physical body will follow the pattern and open also. But this does not have to be so dramatic; many times vital surgery can take place without bleeding or incision. Our healers open the body primarily to dramatize the healing for the patient's benefit," Cunanan explained.

"Yes, I merely plant the seed. The mind of the patient really provides the cure," agreed Agpaoa.⁵⁵

Carroll English, a woman who underwent major surgery at Agpaoa's hands, reported that Agpaoa told her afterwards that she was healed, that her physical problems had been real, but that they were caused by her mental attitude. His parting advice to her was that she "think better thoughts."⁵⁶

Cayce explained repeatedly in reading after reading that "mind is the builder,"⁵⁷ that a proper attitude leads to health and well-being, whereas negative thoughts destroy what has been built up. There is a rather dramatic reading for a man suffering of multiple sclerosis. In his first reading Cayce diagnosed his illness and prescribed treatment for it. He also indicated that the illness was in part caused by the man's attitudes of hatred and malice. The man followed the mechanical, physical suggestions for treatment, improved for a while, and then suffered a relapse. The next reading emphasized how important a part the spiritual suggestion that he change his attitude was to play in his

recovery:

...when the entity becomes so self-satisfied, so self-centered, as to refuse spiritual things and does not change its attitude; so long as there is hate, malice, injustice, jealousy; so long as there is anything within at variance with patience, long-suffering, brotherly love, kindness, gentleness, there cannot be a healing of the condition of the body.

This factor in the healing of the body seems to suggest that, as religions hold, spiritual qualities as those listed above, are not merely fine sentiments, but have an actual power in the world, and a physical effect on people and events.

Thus, so far it appears that psychical phenomena can shed some light on questions of religious import. We can perhaps, from investigation in psychical fields, garner more evidence to support on an even stronger foundation the conclusions which are found in major religions: that the spiritual is more basic than the physical; that human beings reincarnate and live more than one life on earth, as opposed to being judged and either condemned or rewarded on the basis of their one existence; and the spiritual qualities are essential elements of life, not frills. The power is felt in Moses' speech in Deuteronomy 30:15-20:

Today I offer you the choice of life and good, or death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the L-rd your G-d which I give you this day...then you will live and increase....I offer you the choice of life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life and then you and your descendents will live; love the L-rd your G-d, obey him and hold fast to him: that is life for you...

The qualities which are now being discussed are spiritual questions more than physical facts, although we see that the former may have as much power as the latter. Psychical research seemed to answer some physical questions which had heretofore been relegated to the domain of religion;

what can research and observation suggest about spiritual problems, which, again, before this have generally been answered by religion?

Material from this fields of reincarnation and healing is most evidential in answering these questions. The basic idea behind reincarnation, from teachings of Eastern religions, is that each individual progresses through a series of lives to the point where he or she is sufficiently spiritually developed not to need another incarnation. During this series of lives, the individual meets and deals with situations which are caused by his or her positive and negative actions in the past. This is karma. The word karma is applicable not only to the fortunes of the individual but to the interests he or she has, and to his or her skills and abilities. Stevenson, in his research on reincarnation, has come across a connection between the present personality with its skills and the remembered personality's abilities frequently. This is also true ^{as} interests and aptitudes. One interesting case was that of Paulo Lorenz,⁵⁹ born in Brazil in 1923. He remembered a previous life as his older sister, Emilia, who committed suicide at the age of 19, in 1921. Several characteristics stand out in his life. First, whereas Emilia used to speak of her desire to be male, Paulo appeared to think of himself as female. He wore only girl's clothing until he was four or five, and played with dolls. He did think of himself then as the incarnation of Emilia, making remarks in which he identified himself with her. He finally began to come to terms with his body and wore boy's clothes, but always retained some effeminency. His further identification with Emilia was shown by a strong interest in and a great talent for sewing. This ability was present in no member of the family (of 13 children) than Emilia and Paulo. Emilia and Paulo were the only members of the family

who never married (Emilia refused several offers of marriage before she suicided). This case, which Stevenson considers suggestive of reincarnation, shows a clear carry-over of interest and aptitude.

A case which Stevenson investigated in Ceylon seems to show elements of retributive karma; a misfortune directly related to action in a previous life. H. A. Wijeratne Hami⁶⁰ was born in 1947. He had a marked deformity at birth, a weak and deformed right arm. At about 2½ years old his mother overheard him say that his arm was crippled because in his previous life he had murdered his wife. He talked in detail about the crime he had committed. These tallied with the circumstances of the life of his present father's younger brother, Ratran Hami, who had been executed in 1928 for killing his wife. These cases suggest the same conclusion as the case of the man who needed to change his mental attitude in order to cure himself; that conclusion is that the spiritual decisions and physical actions of human beings relate in a very direct way back to themselves, and must be solved or faced by the individual him or herself. This is to say that the doctrine of karma seems from these cases to be a valid spiritual law.

A further demonstration of the power of spiritual laws in action is seen in the work of the healers. A religious element has already been noted in the case of Agpaoa, who fasted and prayed in order to be worthy of being the medium for a healing spirit. Cayce and Arigo were also religious men. Cayce's boyhood ambition was to be a preacher, an ambition which he had to abandon because of the impossibility of obtaining the necessary education. He read through the entire Bible once for every year of his life. Similarly Arigo was a devout Catholic before his relentless mediumship forced him into a position which the Church, opposed to spiritist manifestations, could not condone. There are some indications

in the histories of these three men which suggest that religious qualities were essential for the work they were doing. Cayce, for example, who spent most of his life giving readings to people who needed help, at one point used his gift of clairvoyance to win himself and some friends a large amount of money at the racetrack. He lost the power even to go into a trance for an entire year after that. It was also clear that his information was at its best in terms of accuracy and efficacy when it was solely for the purpose of helping someone who needed it. Even when Cayce wanted to use readings to locate oil enough for money to build a hospital where his prescriptions and treatments could be best given and studied, the readings or their applications went awry for Cayce. He found that he could best function when he had no concern over financial affairs at all, and simply trusted that if he did his part, all would be well. He didn't accept money for readings until the demand became so heavy that he was unable to support his family at his normal trade as a photographer and still give enough readings. Then he received a minimal salary through a foundation which associates of his set up. The association between his extraordinary gift and his own spiritual condition seems clear; when he manifested selfishness and concern over material things, his gift was abated. Because his life was in essence selfless and non-materialistic, he was able to help people in the best way he could.

Arigo never accepted money for his healing. He supported himself with outside work, sending back to donors any contributions to his cause, and refusing even offers of meals or coffee from his patients. Arigo's gift never once faltered nor misled him, its purity in some way a reflection of his own. On the other hand, Tony Agpaqa has made himself

wealthy man through the fees he charges his patients. It is Valentine's belief that money has no bearing on the quality of the phenomenon⁶¹ but, some of Agpaoa's fellow healers are aghast at his foolhardiness. Agpaoa continues in his ability to heal, but he sometimes performs fraudulent operations, and on one occasion, was unable to finish a genuine operation which he had begun. He called on another healer present to close the wound. It does not seem unreasonable to suppose the same connection between non-materialism and quality of work which was present in Cayce's work, but this is speculation, and Cayce's story is the stronger evidence.

In this section I have shown that psychical research has some bearing on religious questions. From observation, the importance of the spiritual element in humans becomes clearly not a matter held only on belief or faith, but also through reason. Furthermore, there seems to be some reason to accept the theory of reincarnation and therefore to revise some ideas in Western thought. (Cayce's discovery, once he woke from the first trance in which he discussed reincarnation, that he had espoused a theory which seemed contrary to all he had ever been taught, was devastating to him at first. He took time to search the Bible for any statement which might deny the possibility, and he studied the effects of the readings which discussed previous lives on the people who had had them--at first only the members of his own family. He couldn't find any passage which directly opposed the concept of reincarnation, and he found that the readings led only to greater self-awareness and understanding, and then he found himself able to come to terms with the teaching.) There also is reason to believe that attitudes of the mind and qualities which are generally deemed of a high order are genuinely powerful, and their acceptance or rejection have consequences felt by

each person involved in the particular situation.

The last point to be discussed, then, is what place psychical research occupies in the study of religion. It seems clear from the above discussion that psychical research occupies a position which makes it in a certain way a "science of religion." Questions of religious import concerning the real nature of human beings, of their fate, of the importance of a religiously oriented way of life yield in investigations carried out by psychical researchers. Paranormal manifestations are valuable because they magnify and clarify phenomena which may be only peripherally glimpsed or even totally obscured in normal physical reality. Although psychical researchers are not all preoccupied with religious concerns, and as psychical research also yields rich material in the field of psychology the place of psychical research will not be limited to answering only questions of religion. Although, to paraphrase Mark Vonnegut, what is psychology but religion with statistics and rats? But as religion comes to understand itself as again amenable to reason, the findings of psychical research can be incorporated into religious thought and perhaps the gap which a science-influenced civilization sees between itself and the dictates of religion can be somewhat bridged.

Footnotes

⁵³Heywood, p.143.

⁵⁴Stace, p.203.

⁵⁵Valentine, p.186.

⁵⁶Ibid., p.27.

⁵⁷reading 1662-1, among others

⁵⁸Gina Cerminara, Many Mansions (N.Y.: New American Library, 1950) p.76.

⁵⁹Stevenson, pp.179-190.

⁶⁰Ibid., pp.134-150.

⁶¹Valentine, p.131.

Conclusion

Religion and science are not mutually exclusive, but each has its own sphere of influence. Institutional religion is founded on personal religious experience, which seems to be a direct understanding of the universe and its order, with reason and purpose. From this experience philosophy and theology build up systems of belief. It is these systems of belief which are liable to new interpretation and to change, not the religious experience itself. William James set forth the problem for himself when he was writing the lectures which comprised The Varieties of Religious Experience:

...first, to defend "experience" against "philosophy" as being the real backbone of the world's religious life--I mean prayer, guidance, and all that sort of thing immediately and privately felt, as against high and noble general views of our destiny and the world's meaning and second, to make the hearer or reader believe what I myself invincibly do believe, that although all the special manifestations of religion may have been absurd (I mean its creeds and theories), yet the life of it as a whole is mankind's most important function. 62

Science is supposed to deal logically and dispassionately with facts. In the past few centuries its efforts have led away from the creeds and theories of institutional religion, forcing religions to change their ideas on issues such as astronomy and the development of humankind, developing a materialistic picture of the universe in which religion's ideas of spiritual reality seem ridiculous, and obtaining for itself a position where conclusions of science are generally believed over theories of religion. In most cases this is a fair position, for scientific research can prove one way or another what philosophers can only theorize about. But this has led to a situation where all religious thought and theory is often seen as worthless and most likely false, because scientific thought has gone such a different route than religious

thought.

Enter psychical research. Psychical phenomena are midway between religious experience and scientific materialism. They are as seemingly miraculous as accounts in religious literature, yet do not always have religious import and are not limited to religious people. They provide veridical pieces of information and rival scientific techniques in accuracy and efficiency, yet defy laws of materialism. And when scientific research is undertaken to investigate the phenomena, the answers for them seem to be provided by doctrines of religious thought. Religion and science thus find themselves in a mutually helpful relationship, and religion begins to have a more respectable standing in the world of fact and logical thought, through the auspices of psychical research. It is important to remember that religious experience is not investigated by psychical researcher, although it can be discussed in logical terms, as Stace did with mysticism. But psychical experience, investigated with scientific methods, shows a connection with religious doctrine and provides a way to better understand the philosophy which has accrued around religious experience. Psychical research thus confirms the importance of religious thought which has always been felt by those who have undergone religious experience and provides for those not so susceptible to religious experience a similar assurance. William James writes of himself:

Now, although I am so devoid of Gottesbewusstsein in the directer and stronger sense, yet there is something in me which makes response when I hear utterances from that quarter made by others. I recognize the deeper voice. Something tells me:--"thither lies truth"...

and psychical research provides confirmation for people who must learn the truth at second hand.

Footnotes

⁶² Murphy and Ballou, pp.263-264.

⁶³ Ibid., p.271.

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