

PERSONAL  
IDENTITY AND  
SURVIVAL

THE THIRTEENTH  
FREDERIC W. H. MYERS MEMORIAL LECTURE

1958

*by*  
C. D. BROAD

SOCIETY FOR PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

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C. D. BROAD

Charlie Dunbar Broad, the author of the Thirteenth Frederic W. H. Myers Memorial Lecture was born in 1887 and received his Master of Arts and Doctor of Letters degrees at Cambridge. He was elected to a Fellowship at Trinity College and, in the same year, appointed Assistant to the Professor of Logic at St Andrews University, Scotland. After holding the Professorship of Philosophy at Bristol University he returned to Trinity College and from 1935-53 he held the Knightbridge Professorship of Moral Philosophy at Cambridge. In 1926 he was elected to the Fellowship of the British Association. He has received an honorary doctorate in philosophy from the University of Upsala, Sweden and is a Fellow of the Royal Swedish Academy of Science. Author of many books on philosophical and related subjects, including *Perception, Physics and Reality* (1914), *Scientific Thought* (1923), *The Mind and Its Place in Nature, Five Types of Ethical Theory*, (1930), *Ethics and the History of Philosophy* (1952) and *Religion, Philosophy and Psychical Research* (1953).

Professor Broad has been a member of the Council of the S.P.R. since 1931 and held the office of President of the Society in 1935-6. He has again been appointed President for this year.

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Animula blandula vagula,  
hospes comesque corporis,  
quae nunc abibis in loca?  
Pallidula rigida nudula,  
nec, ut soles, dabis iocos.

*The Emperor Hadrian to his Soul*

*London*  
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**M**YERS's classical contribution to psychical research is entitled *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*, and I propose to make that topic the subject of my lecture. If we are to understand what would be meant by the *survival* of a human personality, we must first be clear as to what we mean by a *human person*. I shall therefore begin by considering that question.

Let us give the name 'human being' to creatures like ourselves, as we are in this life, i.e. beings with a characteristic kind of living organism, each of whom speaks of himself as 'I', and who are addressed or referred to by other such beings as 'You', 'Jack', 'Mr Jones', and so on.

Now, apart from and prior to all theory, it is a known fact that a human being is a psycho-physical unit, having two mutually irreducible but most intimately inter-related aspects, viz. the bodily and the mental. In respect of the former he is a *physical object*. In respect of the latter he is a *psychical subject*, i.e. something of which it is significant to say that it is capable of *having experiences*, and true to say that it does from time to time have such and such experiences. In respect of the former we speak of a human being as 'having a body'; he himself refers to this as '*my* body'; and others to it as '*your* body', or '*his* body', or '*Mr Jones's* body.' In respect of the latter we speak of a human being as 'having a mind'; he himself speaks of '*my* mind', and others speak of '*your* mind' or '*his* mind' or '*Mr Jones's* mind'. It is important to remember that this is a quite unique use of the possessive case. For there is always a temptation to treat these expressions as on all fours with 'Mr Jones's hat' and 'Mr Jones's umbrella.' If we do so, we may be led to make inferences which are certainly unjustified and may well be false or even nonsensical. We might be led, e.g. to take for granted that Mr Jones is something distinct from his body and from his mind and from both in combination, so that he might lose his body or his mind or both, as he might lose his hat or his umbrella or both, and still exist.

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There are fairly satisfactory criteria for the identity of a *human body* from its birth to its death, and for the diversity of two *human bodies*. I intend to use the phrase 'human being' in this lecture in such a way that the following statements are true *ex vi termini*. There is one and the same *human being* so long and only so long as there is one and the same *living human body*. When and only when there are two different *living human bodies*, simultaneous or successive, there are two different *human beings*. With this terminology it would be contradictory to suggest that a *human being* might have existed before the conception of his body or might continue to exist after the death of it. Again, it would be contradictory to speak of several *human beings* in a case of multiple personality, such as the famous Beauchamp case. Lastly, suppose there were cases in which the same personality expressed itself, either simultaneously or successively, through different human bodies. Suppose, e.g. that, whenever I go to sleep, a certain one human being in Australia were to wake up, exhibiting the same personal traits as mine, and remembering what I had experienced and witnessed while awake, and *vice versa*. Then it would be contradictory to speak of him and me as the same *human being*. In the former case we should speak of one human being with several personalities, and in the latter we should speak of several human beings with a single personality.

This terminology being presupposed, I will now summarize what seem to be the essential points about all the persons whom we have ordinary commonsense grounds for believing to exist. Each such person is something which combines in the most intimate way the following three features :

(1) It has an actual stream of experience of a certain special kind, though there may be numerous and longish gaps in this. Such a stream includes, beside first-order experiences, such as hearing a clock ticking, feeling toothache in a certain tooth, etc., a running accompaniment of second-order and sometimes even of third-order experiences, e.g. feeling afraid on seeing a runaway horse, and feeling ashamed of feeling afraid. It includes ostensible remembering some of which may be wholly delusive, but most of which may be presumed to be in the main veridical. It includes experiences of making, initiating, carrying



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out, modifying, laying aside and taking up again, various plans, which have their place in a wider scheme of life. It includes, therefore, long-range expectations, which may be either conditional or categorical ; and long-range emotions, prospective and retrospective, which may be either reflexive, like remorse for one's own ostensibly remembered misdeeds, or non-reflexive, like anxious anticipation of the outcome of an operation to be undergone by a friend. I shall describe such a stream of experience as ' personal '.

(2) A person is also something which has an elaborately organized system of dispositions, cognitive, conative, and emotional, some common to human nature and some peculiar to himself. They are organized in a special way, which is characteristic of himself and depends jointly on his innate constitution and on the particular course of his experience, but which is a determinate form of the generic type of organization characteristic of human nature. During no period, even of the fullest waking consciousness, are most of these dispositions fully in action. And those which are in action during any given period are then manifested only in that one of innumerable alternative possible ways which the special circumstances of the moment call forth. During the numerous gaps in his personal stream of experience the *only* sense in which a person exists, so far as we know for certain, is as the bearer of the potentialities summed up in such an organized set of dispositions.

(3) Finally, every person, whom we have ordinary everyday grounds for believing to exist, is an *embodied* person. There is one and only one body which he is aware of by means of organic sensation ; which he can directly influence by means of his volitions and emotions ; which can directly influence him by generating and modifying sensations in his stream of experience ; and from which as centre he ostensibly perceives all the external things and events which he does ostensibly perceive. That body has the characteristic human form and structure and properties. Every such body, whilst alive, embodies *at least one* human personality, and in the vast majority of cases (though not in all) *only one*.

Now, in order profitably to discuss the possibility of a human person surviving bodily death, it is important first to consider

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the continuity, and the breaches in continuity, which may occur within the stream of experience associated with a single human body during its lifetime. For the death and dissolution of a human body is a more profound change than any that happens during its life, and it seems *prima facie* reasonable to suppose that it would involve either a complete cessation of the associated stream of consciousness, or, if not, a radical breach in its continuity.

I will begin by considering the normal alternation of sleep and waking, and then pass to the abnormal (but not paranormal) phenomena of multiple personality uncomplicated by claims to mediumship. In considering the alternation of sleep and waking I shall at first exclude the experience of dreaming, and confine my attention to the case of a person who, on awaking, does not ostensibly remember any particular dream or even that he has been dreaming. We will consider first the evidence available to such a person *himself* of the occurrence of a gap within his stream of experience, and of his identity with the person to whom the earlier segment belonged.

What is the evidence which a person *A* has, on awaking from an apparently dreamless sleep, that there has been a *gap* in his personal stream of experience, stretching back from the moment of waking to a certain moment in the past? Plainly an essential factor in it is a certain kind of combination of the presence and the absence of ostensible remembering. On the one hand, ostensible remembering either arise spontaneously or can be evoked voluntarily, which purport to be of experiences had or things and events perceived up to and including a certain moment in the past. On the other hand, *no* ostensible remembering either arise spontaneously or can be evoked voluntarily, which purport to be of experiences had or of things or events perceived between then and the moment of waking.

Other important indicia available to a person in regard to himself are the following. (i) The surroundings which he perceives on awakening may seem to him familiar in all their main outlines, but certain details of them may have changed in exactly the way in which he knows from experience that they would be likely to have changed in a certain period of time,

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e.g. a candle may have burnt down to a certain extent, the hands of his watch may have shifted by so much and so on.,

(ii) A very important indicium, available *only* to a person in regard to himself, is the familiarity of the massive background of organic sensation, by which his body manifests itself to him in his personal stream of consciousness. Against this there may be a characteristic change in detail, e.g. the change from feeling replete to feeling hungry. Imagine a human being going to sleep in familiar surroundings, and his body then being gently moved into wholly strange ones. Imagine, further, that some drug has been administered, which will operate while he is asleep so as profoundly to alter the whole background of organic sensation. Even if, on waking, there were plenty of ostensible rememberings, purporting to be of experiences had and of things and events perceived before the beginning of the period, it seems likely that the person who has just awoken would be extremely puzzled and confused as to his identity with or diversity from the person who fell asleep.

Let us now consider the evidence which a human being *B* can have as to the continuity or discontinuity of the personal stream of experience associated with *another* human being *A* during a certain period. If we ignore for the present the possibility of telepathy and of clairvoyance, such evidence must consist entirely of external physical signs, circumstantial or narrative, noted and interpreted (consciously or unconsciously) by *B*. And these must ultimately go back to causal ancestors in the overt behaviour, positive or negative, of *A*'s body.

It is a *circumstantial* indicium for *B* that there has been a gap in *A*'s mental history during a certain period, if he observes that *A*'s body did not make the normal responses to sensory stimuli, that its eyes were shut, that it was prone and breathing heavily, and so on. It is a *narrative* indicium for *B*, pointing in the same direction, if *A* afterwards tells him that, so far as he can remember, he was having no experiences during that period. These two kinds of indicia often point in the same direction. But sometimes they may conflict. *A* may tell *B* afterwards that he was continuously having experiences during the period, but that he was stricken with temporary paralysis and aphasia,

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and so was unable to give any of the wonted external signs of consciousness.

So far I have deliberately excluded the experience of dreaming. It is now time to consider it. For many of us the periods when our bodies are not showing the ordinary signs of waking consciousness, and when there are gaps in the ordinary personal stream of experience as tested by ostensible memory, are not complete blanks. Often directly after waking, and sometimes at intervals for long afterwards, one has ostensible rememberings as of quite elaborate dream-experiences. As ostensibly remembered, these resemble in their general character ordinary waking experiences of perceiving with the senses and acting through the body. They are just as forcible and lively and complex and differentiated as regards the *quasi*-sensory features of their ostensible objects. They are often accompanied by the same running commentary of inner questioning, inference, appraisal, etc. And they are occasions of at least equally strong emotional reaction. But in detail the persons and scenes that one has been ostensibly perceiving, and the bodily doings and sufferings in which one has ostensibly taken part, corresponded to nothing that was going on in the neighbourhood of one's body at the time, nor indeed to anything that was then or at any other time existing or happening.

Now there is no special reason to think that such ostensible rememberings of dream-experiences are wholly or mainly delusive, though from the nature of the case hardly any of the ordinary tests for veridicality can be applied to them. It seems to me reasonable to take them more or less at their face-value and I intend to do so.

To such fairly definite ostensible rememberings of dreams I would add, at any rate for my own part, the following vague testimony :

(i) Immediately on waking, or shortly afterwards, I often have an experience, which I cannot describe in positive terms, but which would lead me to make, with considerable conviction, one or other of the following two remarks : (a) ' I am practically certain that what I can now remember is only a small fragment of what I have been dreaming ', or (b) ' I am practically certain that I have been dreaming, though I cannot remember any-

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thing in detail of my dreams.' (I am inclined to think that this is closely associated with a state, which often supervenes very soon after waking, where one ostensibly remembers that one *was recently* ostensibly remembering a good deal of detail, but where one can no longer ostensibly remember much, if any, of that detail.) (ii) In the course of a day, in full waking life, it will not very seldom happen that an image suddenly wells up within my stream of consciousness, with regard to which I seem to be able to assert with considerable conviction that it is a memory-image of an experience which I have had in a dream on one or more (perhaps not specifiable) occasions. (iii) Lastly, on waking from disturbed sleep, when more or less feverish, I have often had a vivid ostensible memory of one form or another of an extremely worrying dream-experience, in which I seemed to be at once my ordinary self and another person, and realized in the dream that everyday language could not express, without verbal contradiction, the paradoxical situation.

The following additional points are worth noting here. (i) A waking person very naturally describes the dreams which he can ostensibly remember as '*my dreams*.' But he does not hesitate to say also : 'Though I cannot remember anything in detail of *my* dreams, I am pretty sure that *I* have been dreaming.' Thus, although the indicium of ostensible remembering here fails one, and although no other obvious indicium is available, one still uses the first personal pronoun. (ii) So far as I ostensibly remember my dreams on waking, it seems to me that the dreamer simply took for granted his identity with my ordinary waking self. Indeed, it is that very tacit assumption, together with veridical memories in the dream of things, persons, and events actually perceived in waking life, which sometimes makes a dream so paradoxical to the dreamer while it is going on. (iii) Except in a very few cases, e.g. that of Professor Flournoy's subject *Helène Smith*, the dream-experiences of successive nights do not hook on to each other in the way in which the waking experiences of successive days do. (iv) Except in the abnormal state of sleep-walking, the body lies inert whilst the individual is dreaming. It is certainly not receiving the normal *visual* sensory stimuli from its surroundings,

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and it is doubtful whether other kinds of sensory stimuli from without are being transmitted to the brain in the normal manner or are producing their normal effect there.

Dream-experiences are important for our purpose in two quite different ways. On the one hand, they show that a human being has within him the mechanism and the materials for producing an extremely elaborate, coherent, and sustained sequence of hallucinatory *quasi*-perceptions, as of an environment of things and persons in which he is living and acting and suffering, although at the time he is not having the externally initiated sensations which are the basis of normal waking perception. Since ordinary human beings can do this here and now, it is conceivable that, if a human person could and did survive the death of his present body, he might carry with him the mechanism and the materials for producing such internally coherent phantasmagoria, without needing external sensory stimulation. Secondly, dream-experiences throw light on what is our present main topic, viz. the limits of normal personal identity, continuity, and discontinuity. They form a convenient stepping-stone to cases of multiple personality, and to these I now turn.

Such cases are *prima facie* of two kinds, viz. where one personality *merely alternates* with another in the same human being, and where one claims to *co-exist* with the other. We will begin with the former.

Let us suppose that two personalities  $P_1$  and  $P_2$  alternate in the same human being  $A$ . This means that there are two personal streams of experience,  $S_1$  and  $S_2$ , associated with  $A$ 's body in the ways already described. There are gaps in the stream  $S_1$ , as judged by the personality  $P_1$ , and as narrated by him to other human beings when he is in control of the body and able to use its speech-organs. The same is true *mutatis mutandis* of the stream  $S_2$ , and the personality  $P_2$ . But the gaps in either stream are occupied by segments of the other, and each segment influences and is influenced by the contemporary behaviour and circumstances of the body in the normal ways. So, to an external observer,  $A$  does not appear to have alternating periods of consciousness and unconsciousness, except of course for the normal alterations of sleep and waking. But the circumstantial

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indicia, e.g. handwriting, expressions of emotional reaction, range of acquired knowledge and skill shown, and so on, change sharply when one personality alternates with the other. And these changes agree with the narrative indicia, coming from *A*'s mouth or pen, and reporting an interruption in one personal stream of experience and a reinstatement of the other. Sometimes an interval may elapse between the ending of a segment of one such stream and a beginning of a segment of the other. This interval may appear as a gap in the stream of personal experience both to  $P_1$  and to  $P_2$ , and during it *A*'s body may show the normal indicia of suspended consciousness, e.g. of being asleep or in a swoon.

There is an obvious *prima facie* analogy between alternations of personality in the waking state and the alternations between waking and dreaming experiences in ordinary human beings. But the unlikenesses are at least as noteworthy as the likenesses. (i) Generally each alternating personality professes complete ignorance of the experiences of the other. In some cases, however, one of them (and only one) claims to be in some way directly aware of the other's experiences. But, even so, it never speaks of those experiences as '*mine*', but always as '*his*' or '*hers*.' (ii) In cases of alternating personality the experiences had by either person, on successive occasions when it is in control of the body, link up with each other across the gaps during which the other person was in control, as a normal person's waking experiences on successive days do, and as his dream-experiences on successive nights do not. (iii) Lastly, the body is active and in receipt of the normal sensory stimuli from its surroundings when either of the two alternating personalities is in control and the other is in abeyance.

It remains to say something about alleged cases of a plurality of *co-existing* personalities in a single human being. At the first move these resemble cases of merely alternating personality, such as I have just described. But now one of the alternating personalities, say  $P_1$ , when in control of *A*'s body and therefore able to make statements in speech or writing, claims to have persisted and to have had its own continuous personal stream of experience  $S_1$  even during those periods when the other personality  $P_2$  was in control of the body.  $P_1$  claims, e.g. to be

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still getting the usual sensations through the stimulation of the body even when  $P_2$  is in control of it ; though he and  $P_2$  may attend to very different selections from this common stock of sensory material, may put very different interpretations on it, and may feel very different emotions towards what they both simultaneously perceive. Moreover,  $P_1$  claims to be directly aware (or to be able to become so, whenever he takes the trouble) of the thoughts, desires, and emotions which  $P_2$  has when in control of the body. On the other hand,  $P_2$  makes no corresponding claims. When he is in control and able to communicate by speech or writing, he reports, with regard to the periods when  $P_1$  is in control, that they are for him just complete blanks in his personal stream of experience. In fact, he knows nothing of  $P_1$ 's existence, experiences, actions or character except by hearsy or by inference.

There is one significant fact to be noted here. Sometimes  $P_2$  claims that, in moments of relaxation or distraction, there occasionally well up in his personal stream of experience isolated images, which present themselves to him as referring to this or that specific *past experience*, but do not present themselves as referring to any past experience of *his*. If this be a correct account of such images, they cannot be called ostensible *memory-images*, for such an image is essentially *autobiographical* in its reference. On the other hand, they resemble ostensible memory-images in being *retro-referent*. We might therefore describe them as 'non-autobiographical ostensible retro-cognitions.' It is alleged that these curious experiences, which  $P_2$  occasionally has, often correspond very strikingly with certain past experiences which  $P_1$  in fact had when in control of the body. This kind of experience seems to me to bear some resemblance to one which I have already mentioned in connexion with dreaming, viz. the occasional welling up, in one's waking stream of experience, of images which present themselves as referring to dream-experiences which one has had on one or more unspecifiable occasions in the past.

I have now said as much as seems needful about the personalities of ordinary human beings, as revealed to themselves in self-observation and to their neighbours in speech, gesture, and action ; about the gaps which regularly occur within a



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single personal stream of experience, and the dream-experiences which often occur with such gaps ; and about the rare but well-attested cases, where two or more personal streams of experience are associated with one and the same human body, and the gaps in each are occupied by segments of the other. I shall devote the rest of the lecture to discussing, in the light of this, the possibility of a human personality surviving, in some sense or other, the death and destruction of the body with which it has been associated.

Before entering on this I will make one preliminary remark. The few contemporary Western philosophers who have troubled to discuss this question seem generally to have taken for granted that survival of a human personality would be equivalent to its persistence *without any kind of bodily organism*. Some of them have proceeded to argue that the very attempt to suppose a personal stream of experience, without a body as organ and centre of perception and action, and as the source of a persistent background of bodily feeling, is an attempt to suppose something self-contradictory or at least unimaginable. They have concluded that it is simply meaningless to talk of the possibility of a human personality surviving the death of its body. Their opponents in this matter have tried to show that the supposition of a personal stream of experience, in the absence of any kind of associated organism, is self-consistent and imaginable. They have concluded that it is possible (at any rate in the sense of self-consistent and imaginable) that a human personality should survive the death of the body with which it has been associated.

Now I have two comments to make on this. One concerns both parties, and the other concerns the second group of them.

(1) Of all the hundreds of millions of men in every age and clime who have believed (or have talked or acted as if they believed) in human survival, hardly any have believed in survival *without a body*. Hindus and Buddhists, e.g. believe in reincarnation either in an ordinary human or animal body or occasionally in the body of a non-human rational being, such as a god or a demon. Christians (if they know their own business, which is not too common nowadays) believe in survival with a peculiar kind of supernatural body, correlated in some intimate and unique way with the natural body which has

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died. Nor are these views confined to the simple and the ignorant. Spinoza, e.g. certainly believed in human immortality ; and he cannot possibly have believed, on his general principles, in the existence of a mind without some kind of body. Leibniz said explicitly that, if *per impossibile* a surviving mind were without an organism, it would be ' a deserter from the general order.' It seems to me rather futile for a modern philosopher to discuss the possibility of human survival on an assumption which would have been unhesitatingly rejected by almost everyone, lay or learned, who has ever claimed seriously to believe in it.

(2) Suppose it could be shown that it is neither inconceivable nor unimaginable that there should be a personal stream of experience not associated with any bodily organism. That would be by no means equivalent to showing that it is neither inconceivable nor unimaginable that the personality of a human being should survive, in an unembodied state, the death of his body. Such survival would require that a certain one such *unembodied* personal stream of experience stands to a certain one *embodied* personal stream of experience, associated with a human body now dead, in those peculiar and intimate relations which must hold if both are to be counted as successive segments of the experience of one and the same person. Is it conceivable that the requisite continuity and similarity should hold between two successive segments of personal experience so radically dissimilar in nature as these two would seem *prima facie* to be? Granted that there might conceivably be unembodied persons, and that there certainly have been embodied persons who have died, it might be still quite inconceivable or overwhelmingly improbable that any of the former should be personally identical with any of the latter.

We can now enter on our main question. It seems to me that a *necessary*, though by no means a sufficient, condition for survival is that the whole or some considerable part of the *dispositional basis* of a human being's personality should persist, and should retain at least the main outlines of its characteristic type of organization, for some time after the disintegration of his brain and nervous system. The crux of the question is whether this is not merely conceivable, in the sense of involving

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no purely logical absurdity, but is also factually possible, i.e. not irreconcilable with any empirical facts or laws for which the evidence seems to be overwhelming.

To ascribe a disposition to anything is in itself merely to state a conditional proposition of a certain kind about it. In its vaguest form the statement is that, *if* this thing were at any time to be in circumstances of the kind *C*, *then* an event of a certain kind *E* would happen in a certain kind of relation *R* to it. In its ideally most definite form it would assert or imply a formula, connecting each alternative possible determinate specification of *C* which a certain one determinate specification of *E* and of *R*. This ideal is often reached in physics, but seldom or never in the case of biological or psychological dispositions. But, whether the conditional proposition asserted be vague or detailed, we do commonly take for granted that there must be, at the back of any such purely conditional fact, a *categorical* fact of a certain kind, viz. one about the more or less persistent *minute structure* of the thing in question, or about some more or less persistent *recurrent process* going on within it.

Now it is easy to imagine a persistent minute structure in a human being considered as a *physical object*. It is also easy to imagine recurrent processes, e.g., rhythmic chemical changes, changes of electric potential, etc., going on in the minute parts of a human being considered as a *physical object*. But it is very difficult to attach any clear meaning to phrases about persistent *purely mental* structure, or to the notion of *purely mental* processes other than experiences of the various kinds with which each of us is familiar through having had them, noticed them, and remembered them. So it is not at all clear what, if any thing, would be meant by ascribing to a human being, considered as a *psychical subject*, either a persistent purely mental structure or recurrent non-introspectable mental processes. Thus, it is almost inevitable that we should take for granted that the dispositional basis of a human being's personality resides wholly in the minute structure of his *brain and nervous system* and in recurrent *physical processes* that go on within it. Not only is that supposition intelligible and readily imaginable in detail. It is also in line with the view which we take without hesitation and with conspicuous success about the dispositional properties

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of purely physical objects, e.g. magnets, chemical compounds, etc. Moreover, it seems *prima facie* to be bourned out by what we know of the profound changes of personality, as evidenced in speech and behaviour, following on disease in the brain or injuries to it.

Now, on this assumption, it seems plain that it is impossible for the dispositional basis of a man's personality to exist in the absence of his brain and nervous system and therefore impossible for it to persist after the death and disintegration of his body.

Unless we are willing to drop the principle that every conditional fact about a thing must be grounded on a categorical fact about its persistent minute structure or recurrent internal processes, there seems to be only one view of human nature compatible with the possibility of the *post mortem* persistence of the dispositional basis of a man's personality. We must assume some variant of the Platonic-Cartesian view of human beings. This is the doctrine that every human being is some kind of intimate *compound* of two constituents, one being his ordinary everyday body, and the other being something of a very different kind, not open to ordinary observation. Let us call the other constituent in this supposed compound a '*ψ*-component.' It would be necessary to suppose that the *ψ*-component of a human being carries some part at least of the organized dispositional basis of his personality, and that during his life it is modified specifically and more or less permanently by the experiences which he has, the training which he receives, and so on.

Now there are at least two features in the traditional form of the Platonic-Cartesian doctrine which need not be accepted and which we should do well to reject. (ii) We need not suppose that a *ψ*-component *by itself* would be a *person*, or that it would *by itself* be associated with a stream of experience even at the sub-personal level, such as that enjoyed by a rabbit or an oyster. It might well be that personality, and even the lowliest form of actual experience, requires the combination of a *ψ*-component with an appropriate living body. The known facts about the intimate dependence of a human being's personality on his body and its states would seem strongly to favour that form of the doctrine. (ii) We need not assume that a *ψ*-com-

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ponent would be *unextended* and *unlocated*, and have none of the properties of a physical existent. If we gratuitously assume this, we shall at once be in trouble on two fronts. (a) How could it then be supposed to have minute structure or to be the seat of recurrent internal processes, which is what is needed if it is to carry traces and dispositions? (b) How could it be conceived to be united with a particular living body to constitute an ordinary human being? If we are to postulate a 'ghost-in-the-machine'—and that seems to be the *conditio sine qua non* for the possibility of the survival of human personality—then we must ascribe to it some of the *quasi*-physical properties of the traditional ghost. A mere unextended and unlocated Cartesian 'thinking substance' would be useless and embarrassing for our purposes; something more like primitive animism than refined Cartesianism is what we need.

Nowadays we have plenty of experience concerning physical existents which are extended and in a sense localised, which have persistent structure and are the seat of rhythmic modulations, which are not in any sense ordinary bodies, but which are closely associated with a body of a certain kind in a certain state. One example would be the electro-magnetic field associated with a conductor carrying an electric current. Or consider the sense in which the performance of an orchestral piece, which has been broadcast from a wireless station, exists in the form of modulations in the transmitting beam, in places where and at times when there is no suitably tuned receiver to pick it up and transform it into a pattern of sounds. Perhaps to think of what may persist of a human being after the death of his body as something which *has experiences and is even a person*, is as if one should imagine that the wireless transmission of an orchestral piece exists, in a region where there is no suitably attuned receiver, in the form of *unheard sounds* or at least in the form of *actual sound-waves*. And perhaps to think that *nothing* carrying the dispositional basis of a man's personality *could* exist after the death of his body, is as if one should imagine that nothing corresponding to the performance of an orchestral piece at a wireless transmitting-station could exist anywhere in space after the station which broadcast it had been destroyed.

Any analogy to what, if it be a fact, must be unique, is bound

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to be imperfect and to disclose its defects if developed in detail. But I think that the analogies which I have indicated suffice for the following purpose. They show that we can conceive a form of dualism, not inconsistent with the known facts of physics, physiology and psychology, which would make it not impossible for the dispositional basis of a human personality to survive the death of the human being who had possessed that personality.

Let us grant, then, that it is neither logically inconsistent nor factually impossible that the dispositional basis of a man's personality, or at any rate some part of it, might continue to exist and to be organized on its former characteristic pattern, for some time after the death of his body, without being associated with any other living body. The next question is whether there is any evidence (and, if so, what) for or against this possibility being realized.

The persistence of dispositional basis presupposes, of course, that ordinary human beings have the dualistic constitution which I have indicated. Now I think it is fair to say that *apart from* some of the phenomena which are investigated by psychical researchers, there is nothing whatever to support or even to suggest this view of human beings, and a great deal which seems *prima facie* to make against it. If, like most contemporary Western philosophers and scientists, I were completely ignorant of, or blandly indifferent to, those phenomena, I should, like them, leave the matter there. But I do not share their ignorance, and I am not content to emulate the ostrich. So I pass on to the next point.

As to the bearing of the phenomena studied by psychical researchers upon this question, I would make the following remarks :

(1) To establish the capacity for telepathy, clairvoyance, or precognition in certain human beings, or even in all of them, would not lend any *direct* support to this dualistic view of human nature. At most it would show that the orthodox scientific account of the range and the causal conditions of human cognition of particular things and events needs to be amplified, and in some respects radically modified. Since the orthodox scientific account is associated with a monistic view of the constitution of human beings, any radical modification of the

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former *might* involve rejecting the latter. But it is not obvious that it *must* do so. And it is quite certain that to postulate a dualistic view of the constitution of man does not by itself provide any explanation for such para-normal phenomena. At most it might be the basis on which an explanation could be built.

(2) What are described as 'out-of-the-body experiences' appear *prima facie* to be favourably relevant to the dualistic hypothesis. These are experiences in which a person seems to himself to leave his body, to perceive it from a position outside it, to travel to a remote place, and from a position there to view surrounding things, persons, and events. Such experiences become important for the present purpose, only in so far as the subject's reported observations can be shown to be correct in matters of detail, and where the details could have been perceived normally only by a human being occupying the position which the subjects seemed to himself to be occupying. Even so, if such experiences stood by themselves, it might be wiser to interpret them in ways that do not presuppose dualism, though this might involve stretching the notions of telepathy and clairvoyance far beyond the limits within which there is any independent evidence for them.

(3) From the nature of the case, much the strongest support for the dualistic hypothesis comes from those phenomena which seem positively to require for their explanation the persistence, after the death of a human being, of something which carries traces of his experiences and habits during life, organized in the way that was characteristic of him when alive. The phenomena in question are of at least two kinds, viz. cases of haunting, and certain kinds of mediumistic communication. The latter are the more important, being more numerous and better attested. I agree with Professor Hornell Hart in thinking that it is essential to consider the facts under headings (2) and (3) in close connexion with each other. For the two together give a much stronger support to the dualistic hypothesis than the sum of the supports given by each separately.

I would add here that, if there should be any cases in which there is satisfactory empirical evidence strongly suggestive of 'reincarnation', they would be favourably relevant to the

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dualistic hypothesis. For suppose that there were evidence which strongly suggests that a certain man *B* is a reincarnation of a certain other man *A*. The most plausible account would be the following. *A* was a compound of a certain  $\psi$ -component and a certain human body. When *A* died the  $\psi$ -component, which had been combined with his body, persisted in an unembodied state. When *B* was conceived, this same  $\psi$ -component entered into combination with the embryo which afterwards developed into *B*'s body. There would then be a unique correlation between *B*'s personality and *A*'s, by way of the common  $\psi$ -component. For this is the dispositional basis of both personalities, and the modulations imposed on its fundamental theme by *A*'s experiences may enter into the innate character of *B*. But there is no reason whatever why *B* should remember any of *A*'s experiences, or why there should be even as much continuity between *B*'s personality and *A*'s as there is between the several personalities which alternate with each other in a single human being in certain pathological cases.

It is plain that, even if reincarnation were a fact, it would be only extremely seldom that any evidence would be available for the proposition that a certain human being *B* is a reincarnation of a certain other human being *A*. It is true that, with certain subjects under hypnosis, a skilled operator can by suitable suggestions evoke highly dramatic and detailed ostensible memories, purporting to refer to one or more past lives. (The best examples known to me are to be found in a book entitled *De hypnotiska Hallucinationerna* by a contemporary Swedish psychiatrist, Dr John Björkhem.) But, unless such ostensible memories can be tested (which, from the nature of the case, is seldom possible), and shown to be veridical and not explicable by knowledge acquired normally, they provide no evidence for reincarnation.

My impression is that the notion of reincarnation seems strange and improbable to most people in the West, even if they accept the possibility of survival or believe it to be a fact. Yet it is, and has from time immemorial been, taken for granted in the Far East both by plain man and philosophers. Speaking for myself, I would say that it seems to me on general grounds to be much the most plausible form of the doctrine of survival,



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though I would not go so far as Hume, who said, in his essay *Of the Immortality of the Soul*, ' . . . *Metempsychosis* is . . . the only system of this kind that philosophy can hearken to.'

Let us now take the persistence of the dispositional basis as an hypothesis, and raise the following question : What are the alternative possibilities as to the kind and degree of consciousness which might be associated during a period of disembodiment, with what I have called the '  $\psi$ -component ' of a deceased human being ?

There seem to me to be at least the following four alternative possibilities :

(1) The  $\psi$ -component might persist *without any experiences whatever* being associated with it, unless and until it should again become united with an appropriate living organism.

(2) Either isolated experiences, or even a stream of more or less continuous experience, might occur in association with a disembodied  $\psi$ -component ; but the individual experiences might not be of such a nature, and the unity of the stream of experience might not be of such a kind and degree, that we could talk of *personality*. The consciousness might not reach the level of that of a rabbit or even that of an oyster.

(3) There might be a unified stream of experience associated with a disembodied  $\psi$ -component, and this might have some, but not all, the features of the experience of a full-blown personality. We may think of it by analogy with what we can remember of our state when dreaming more or less coherently. Such a stream of experience, in order to be of the personal kind, must contain states of ostensible remembering, and some or all of these might be veridical. But it might be that all of them are rememberings of *post mortem* experiences, and that there are no states of ostensibly remembering any experience had by the human being in question *before* his death. In that case the *post mortem* unembodied personality would be as diverse from the *ante mortem* embodied one as are the alternating personalities of a human being suffering from dissociation. On the other hand, it is conceivable that such a dream-like personal stream of experience might contain veridical ostensible rememberings of certain *ante mortem* experiences, just as our dreams often contain such rememberings of our earlier waking experiences.

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In that case it would be as legitimate to identify the *post mortem* unembodied personality with the *ante mortem* embodied one as it is to identify the dream personality and the waking personality of an ordinary human being.

(4) Finally, there might be a personal stream of experience associated with a disembodied  $\psi$ -component, which was as continuous and as highly unified as that of a normal human being in his waking life. Here again there would be two possibilities. (i) The ostensible rememberings, contained in this personal stream of experience, might all refer to *post mortem* experiences ; or (ii) some of them might refer to *ante mortem* experiences, and all or most of these might be wholly or mainly veridical. In either case there would be a full-blown personality associated with a disembodied  $\psi$ -component. In the former case this would be completely dissociated from the personality of the deceased human being in whom the  $\psi$ -component had been embodied. In the latter case there would be the following two alternative possibilities. (a) The personality associated with the disembodied  $\psi$ -component might remember experiences had by the deceased human being in question, only as a human being in his waking states remembers isolated fragments of his dreams. (b) The disembodied personality might remember experiences had by the deceased human being, just as a human being in his waking state at one time remembers experiences had by him in his earlier waking states. In that case, and in that alone, could we say that the personality of the deceased human being had survived the death of his body, in the full sense in which one's waking personality is reinstated after each period of normal sleep.

We may sum all this up as follows. When a human being dies, at least the following alternatives (besides the obvious one that death is altogether the end of him) seem *prima facie* to be possible. (1) Mere persistence of the dispositional basis of his personality, without any accompanying experiences. (2) Such persistence accompanied by consciousness only at an *infra-personal* level. (3) Such persistence accompanied by a *quasi-personal* dream-like stream of experience, which may either (a) be completely discontinuous with the *ante-mortem* experiences of the deceased, or (b) have that kind and degree of

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continuity with them which a man's dreams have with his earlier waking experiences. (4) Such persistence accompanied by a full-blown personal stream of experience. This may either (a) be completely discontinuous with the *ante-mortem* experiences of the deceased ; or (b) be connected with them only in the way in which one's later waking experiences are connected with one's earlier dream experiences ; or (c) be connected with them in the way in which successive segments of one's waking experience, separated by gaps of sleep, are connected with each other.

Let us next consider the respective probabilities of these various alternatives, when viewed in relation only to admitted facts *outside* the region of psychical research. I should be inclined to say that, when viewed exclusively in that context, the alternatives which I have enumerated are in *descending* order of probability.

The most likely alternative (excluding for the present purpose complete extinction) would seem, from that point of view, to be mere persistence of dispositional basis, without any kind of experiences being associated with it. For we know that, when sensory stimuli acting on a man's body from outside are reduced to a minimum, he tends to fall asleep. And we know that, when in addition sensory stimuli from within his body are reduced to a minimum, his sleep tends to be dreamless. Now a disembodied  $\psi$ -component would presumably be completely free from both. Yet ordinary human beings, who are, on the present hypothesis, compounds of a  $\psi$ -component with a living human body, do have frequent periods of sleep which is to all appearance dreamless. The inference is obvious.

The least likely alternative, from the point of view which we are at present taking, would seem to be that the persistent dispositional basis should be associated with a full-blown personal stream of experience, connected with that of the deceased in the way in which successive segments of this waking experience, separated by gaps of sleep, were interconnected with each other. For we know that certain variations, which occur within the body and its environment during the life-time of a human being, are accompanied by profound breaches in the continuity of his consciousness, e.g. falling asleep, delirium, madness, alter-

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nations of personality, etc. Now the change involved in the death and dissolution of the body, with which a  $\psi$ -component has been united, must surely be more radical than any that happens during its embodiment. So it might reasonably be expected to involve at least as radical a breach in the continuity of consciousness as any that has been observed during the lifetime of a human being.

At this point the following questions may be raised. Some human beings have a *plurality* of personalities, which alternate with each other. In the case of such a human being we may ask ourselves the questions : If *any* of these personalities survive the death of the body, *how many* of them do so? And, if not all do so, *which ones* do?

This leads me to the following general reflexion. The single personality of the most normal human being is notoriously much less stable and comprehensive than it may seem to others or even to himself. The dispositional basis of it does not include by any means all of his dispositions, inherited and acquired. It consists of a predominant selection from that whole, much more highly organized than the rest, and organized in a certain characteristic way. It might be compared to a single crystal, surrounded by a mass of saturated solution, from which it has crystallized and in which it floats. The total dispositional basis of a human being with two personalities, which alternate with each other, might be compared to a saturated solution which has a tendency to crystallize out, sometimes at one and sometimes at another of two centres, and in two different crystalline forms. Suppose now that the dispositions of a human being are grounded in the structure and rhythmic processes of a  $\psi$ -component united with his body, and suppose that this  $\psi$ -component persists after his death and carries with it the structural and rhythmic basis of those dispositions. It seems not unreasonable to think that the  $\psi$ -component, which had been united with the body of even the most normal and stable human being, would be liable to undergo a sudden or gradual change of internal structure and rhythm, a disintegration or a reintegration on different lines, after its union with that body had been completely broken. These considerations seem to me to reinforce those already put forward for holding that straightforward survival

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of the personality of a deceased human being is antecedently the least likely of all the alternatives under discussion.

Another consideration which seems relevant here is this. The personal stream of experience of any ordinary human being has the following characteristic features among others. (i) It contains a core of bodily feeling which generally changes but, slowly in the course of one's life. (ii) Objects other than the body are perceived as from a centre within the body, and as orientated about it at various distances from it. (iii) It contains experiences of making, carrying out, modifying, dropping, and resuming various plans of action, which involve initiating, controlling, and inhibiting bodily movements. (iv) In particular it contains experiences of speaking and writing, of listening to the talk of others, engaging in conversation with them, reading their writings, and so on. An extremely important part of the dispositional basis of any embodied human personality is organized dispositions to have such experiences and to initiate and control such bodily movements.

Now it is not very easy to believe that a set of organized dispositions, so intimately connected in origin and in exercise with the body and its functions, can be located in something other than the body and only temporarily connected with it. Let us, however, waive that difficulty. Let us suppose that a disembodied  $\psi$ -component does carry with it specific modifications of structure or rhythm answering to such dispositions. Even so, it is plainly impossible that those dispositions should be manifesting themselves in *actual* speaking, writing, listening, etc., during a period of disembodiment. It is also impossible that there should be at such times experiences of *actually* perceiving from a bodily centre, or of *actually* carrying out intentions by initiating and controlling bodily movements. Nor is it possible at such times that there should be a core of feeling *actually* arising from the body and its internal states and processes. But it would not be inconceivable that there should be a stream of *delusive quasi*-perceptual experiences, as of speaking, listening, reading, writing, doing and suffering, such as we have in our dreams. And it is not inconceivable that there might be a core of feeling or of imagery, qualitatively like that which one gets from one's body during one's life-

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time, but not actually arising from an organism and its internal processes.

So much for the antecedent probabilities of the various alternatives, when considered *without* reference to the phenomena studied by psychical researchers. Let us now introduce these into the background of our picture, and see what differences, if any, they make.

(1) I think that the fact that some human beings are capable of telepathic or clairvoyant cognition tends to weaken the otherwise strong probability that a  $\psi$ -component, so long as it was unembodied, would merely persist without any kind of experience being associated with it. In order that a disposition may express itself in actual experience or actions it needs to receive an appropriate stimulus. The appropriate stimuli for calling forth *normal* experiences in a human being are undoubtedly certain events in his brain and nervous system. Such stimuli presumably could not act upon a disembodied  $\psi$ -component. Suppose, now, that we postulate a dualistic account of human beings ; and that we admit, as we must, that they sometimes have telepathic or clairvoyant experiences. Then it would seem plausible to suggest that such experiences are evoked by some kind of *direct* stimulation of an embodied  $\psi$ -component by the action of other  $\psi$ -components, embodied or disembodied. Since this kind of action would not be mediated by the body, even in the case of an embodied  $\psi$ -component, there is no reason why it should not continue to operate on a  $\psi$ -component after it had ceased to be combined with a body. It might even operate much more freely under such conditions.

(2) Most of the well attested cases of haunting suggest no more than the persistence and the localization of something which carries traces of a small and superficial, but for some reason obsessive, fragment of the experiences had by a deceased human being within a certain limited region of space.

(3) Many mediumistic communications, which take the dramatic form of messages from the surviving spirit of a deceased human being, imparted to and reported by the medium's 'control', obviously require no more radical assumption than telepathic cognition, on the medium's part, of facts known (consciously or unconsciously) to the sitter or to other living

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human beings connected with him. But this kind of explanation seems to me to become intolerably strained in reference to some mediumistic phenomena.

Here I would call special attention to the many well attested cases, where the dramatic form of the sitting is direct control of the medium's body by the surviving spirit of a certain deceased human being, and where the medium speaks with a voice and behaves with mannerisms which are recognizably reminiscent of the alleged communicator, although she has never met him or heard or seen any reproduction of his voice or his gestures. (An elaborate account of such a case will be found in Vol. XXXVIII, Part 107, of the S.P.R. *Proceedings*, in an article by the late Mr Drayton Thomas entitled *The Modus Operandi of Trance Communications*.) There are also cases in which it is alleged that a medium produces automatic script, purporting to be written under the control of the spirit of a certain deceased human being, and undoubtedly in his highly characteristic handwriting, although she has never seen, either in original or in reproduction, any specimens of his manuscript, I do not know whether any such cases are well attested ; but, if they be, they fall under the same category as the direct-voice cases, some of which certainly appear to be so.

Now it seems to me that any attempt to explain these phenomena by reference to telepathy among the living stretches the word 'telepathy' till it becomes almost meaningless, and invokes something under that name for which there is not a trace of independent evidence. *Prima facie* such phenomena are strong evidence for the persistence, after a man's death, of something which carries organized traces of his experiences, habits, and skills, and which becomes temporarily united during the seance with the entranced medium's organism. But they are *prima facie* evidence for something more specific and very surprising indeed. For they seem to show that dispositions to certain highly specific kinds of *bodily* behaviour, e.g. speaking in a certain characteristic tone of voice, writing in a certain characteristic hand, making certain characteristic gestures, etc., are carried by the  $\psi$ -component when it ceases to be embodied, and are ready to manifest themselves whenever it is again temporarily united with a suitable living human body. And

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so strong do these dispositions remain that, when thus temporarily activated, they overcome the corresponding dispositions of the entranced medium to speak, write, and gesticulate in *her own* habitual ways.

(4) Most of the well attested mediumistic phenomena which are commonly cited as evidence for the survival of a deceased human being's personality seem to me not to support so strong a conclusion. They fit as well or better into the following weaker hypothesis. Suppose that the  $\psi$ -component of the late Mr Jones persists, and that it carries some at least of the dispositional basis of his personality, including organized traces left by his experiences, his acquired skills, his habits, etc. Suppose that a medium is a human being in whom the  $\psi$ -component is somewhat loosely combined with the body, or in whom at any rate the combination does not prevent the body having a residual attraction for other  $\psi$ -components. (We might compare a medium, in this respect, to an unsaturated organic compound, such as acetylene.) When the medium is in trance we may suppose that the persisting  $\psi$ -component of some deceased human being, e.g. the late Mr Jones, unites with the medium's brain and nervous system to form the basis of a temporary personality. This might be expected to have some of the memories and traits of the deceased person, together with some of those of the medium's own normal personality. But, unless the persistent  $\psi$ -component has a personal stream of experience associated with it during the periods when it is *not* combined with the body of a medium, no evidence would be supplied at any sitting of *new* experiences being had, of *new* plans being formed and initiated, or of any *post mortem* development of the personality.

How it seems to me that the *vast majority* of even the best mediumistic communications combine these positive and these negative features. That is not true, I think, of quite all of them. Some few do seem *prima acie* to suggest the persistence of something which forms plans and initiates them between successive sittings. (The best of the cross-correspondence cases obviously fall under this heading. A useful collection of a variety of relevant instances has been published by Mrs Richmond in a little book entitled *Evidence of Purpose*.)



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Of course, if the dispositional basis of a man's personality should persist after his death, there is no reason why it should have the same fate in all cases. In some cases one, and in others another, of the various alternatives which I have discussed, might be realized. It seems reasonable to think that the state of development of the personality at the time of death, and the circumstances under which death takes place, might be relevant factors in determining which alternative would be realized. Obviously there might be many other highly relevant factors, which our ignorance prevents us from envisaging.

Again, it would be rash to assume that those  $\psi$ -components of the deceased, for the persistence of which we have some *prima facie* evidence, are a fair selection of those which in fact persist. The nature, or the circumstances, or both, of the very few which manifest their continued existence, whether as ghosts or through mediums, may well be highly exceptional. Plainly, in the case of the vast majority of the dead, either they never had  $\psi$ -components ; or their  $\psi$ -components have ceased to exist ; or they have been re-embodied either on earth or elsewhere, in human or in non-human bodies ; or else they have lacked opportunity to communicate, or have failed (whether through lack of desire or of energy or of capacity) to make use of the opportunities which were available. For, if anything is certain, it is that the vast majority of dead men tell no tales and, so far as we are concerned, have vanished without trace.

In conclusion, I would say that I am inclined to think that those who have speculated on these topics have often oversimplified the subject in one or both of the following ways. In the first place, they have tended to ignore the discontinuities and abnormalities which are known to occur in the personalities of ordinary or pathological human beings. Secondly, in dealing with traces and dispositions, they have confined their attention to very narrow and old-fashioned physical analogies. I suspect that they tend to think of the dispositional basis of a personality by the old analogy of a ball of wax, on which experiences make traces, as a seal might leave impressions. It is plain that this analogy *must* be inadequate and positively misleading, even on a purely anatomical and physiological

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view of the facts of memory, of association, of heredity, etc. *A fortiori* it must be hopelessly cramping to anyone who is trying to envisage a basis of dispositions which might persist after the death of a man's body.

Once we get outside this narrow sphere, and consider analogies with persistent vortices, stationary waves, transmitting beams, etc., we can envisage a number of interesting and fantastic possibilities. We can think of the possibility of partial coalescence, partial mutual annulment and reinforcement, interference, etc., between the  $\psi$ -components of several deceased human beings, in conjunction perhaps with non-human psychic flotsam and jetsam which may exist around us. There are reported mediumistic phenomena, and pathological mental cases not ostensibly involving mediumship, which suggest that some of these disturbing possibilities may sometimes be realized. It is worth while to remember, though there is nothing that we can do about it, that the world as it really is may easily be a far nastier place than it would be if scientific materialism were the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

