

ESSAY

Essay Review of *The Survival Hypothesis*

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The Survival Hypothesis: Essays on Mediumship edited by Adam J. Rock. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2013. viii+310 pp. \$49.95 (paperback). ISBN 978-0-7864-7220-8.

In his Introduction, the Editor of this book, Adam J. Rock, manages to present us in the space of twelve pages—no mean feat—with some key definitions, a “necessarily brief and incomplete history of mediumship,” an introduction to the ‘source of psi’ problem with respect to mediumship, an outline of the structure and contents of the present volume, and his concluding wish that survival-related topics, such as mediumship will receive more attention than hitherto within mainstream parapsychology.

Part I of the book is entitled Explanation and Belief, and opens with two closely linked essays by Stephen E. Braude on The Possibility of Mediumship: Philosophical Considerations, and by Michael Sudduth on Is Postmortem Survival the Best Explanation of the Data of Mediumship?

Stephen Braude is one of a rather limited number of writers in this field whose clarity and brio one can enjoy regardless of whether or not one agrees with his opinions. In the present article he tackles, with special reference to mediumship, the question of whether there can be a scientific or other rational basis for belief in the survival of bodily death. He notes at the outset that this question is hedged about with a variety of troublesome philosophical issues in which the unwary may become ensnared. One such philosophical tar-pit is the problem of personal identity. Many philosophers insist (p. 22) that “our personhood and personal identity are intimately and essentially tied to our physical embodiment,” so that “one might wonder whether *anything deserving to be called Stephen Braude* could survive my bodily death.” He does not, however, himself agree with this (more or less) received philosophical position. Most people, he says (p. 23), including scientists, “have only a very fuzzy notion of what identity is, or what a *person* is,” but nonetheless ordinarily “we have little if any trouble deciding who’s who.” And this is generally true even if we cannot see the person concerned, but can only (say) interact with him by telephone, or can see

him but observe no psychologically significant behavior. In fact, what we value most about persons are their psychological rather than their physical characteristics (I have met individuals whose practice suggests otherwise), and that is why we are often content to make identity judgments solely on the basis of psychological continuity, and to do so despite our conceptual difficulties as to what constitutes identity, our scientific difficulties as to the basis of bodily continuity, and our ignorance as to how psychological continuity is achieved. These facts Braude feels (and I am inclined to agree) “should be enough to undercut the claim that we can’t acceptably make identity judgments in cases of ostensible post-mortem survival” from which bodily continuity is necessarily absent. He proceeds, therefore, to consider possible explanatory options for such cases.

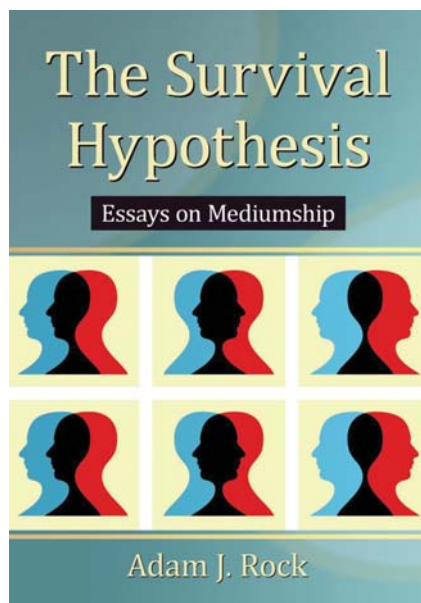
He quickly disposes of such obvious counter-explanations to post-mortem survival as fraud, misreporting, malobservation, and cryptomnesia (he calls them “The Usual Suspects”) as radically inapplicable to the best cases. He is better disposed toward a more exotic group of skeptical explanations (“The Unusual Suspects”) that he has himself promoted. One subgroup of these involves comparing certain mediumistic performances (also skills exhibited by some individuals who claim memories of previous lives) to “abnormal or rare processes, such as dissociative pathologies, rare mnemonic gifts, extreme or unprecedented forms of savantism,¹ or equally rare latent creative capacities,” all of which may manifest quite suddenly and without any obvious period of practice. Braude thinks (p. 25) that such cases “must be considered when evaluating a medium suddenly manifesting an ability associated with an ostensibly deceased person.” I have reservations as to the range of applicability of these ideas, but since he says the very best cases are still immune to them, let us press on to his second subgroup of more exotic explanations. These together constitute “The Living Agent Psi hypothesis” or “LAP,” a more restrained term which, following Sudduth, he prefers to the customary “super-psi hypothesis.”

The LAP counter-hypothesis rests on the point that if a medium produces putative information about some deceased person, and that information, though not available to her by ordinary means, turns out to be correct, there must, for it to have been verified, exist sources for that verification (the memories of still living persons, public records, archives, etc.), sources that would in principle be accessible to the medium through telepathy with the living or through clairvoyance. The LAP theory would, Braude thinks, be difficult, perhaps impossible, for a survivalist to rule out on the basis of mediumistic phenomena. For if it be replied, as it generally is, that this theory would in not a few cases require the medium to exercise psi of a degree never yet reliably reported, the answer would be (p. 27)

that survivalists must themselves “posit comparably impressive feats of ESP, simply to explain how mediums interact with deceased communicators and how deceased communicators are aware of current physical states of affairs.”

This sort of answer is not new for Braude. It was, for instance, propounded by Antony Flew (1953:69–70) as part of a lucid and highly critical analysis of the survivalist position. In fact, one thing that has always been clear about survivalist hypotheses—so clear that it is often taken for granted and not spelled out or discussed—is that any hypothesis that permits discarnate persons to communicate coherently with the living and with each other (and this is the only form of the hypothesis we can investigate or for which we can have evidence) necessarily requires that they possess psi abilities of a very high order. They are, after all, bodiless, or without bodies of the sort biologists could examine, and furthermore, according to some, it is the very release from the impediment of the flesh that frees the ‘spiritual’ faculties. So if the survival hypothesis is correct, there clearly has to be ‘super-psi’ somewhere in our universe.

What is not so clear is that, in order to pick up and pass on messages from the discarnate, mediums would in all cases have to perform “impressive feats of ESP.” Consider: Most such messages, assuming them to be ‘evidential,’ are supposedly conveyed ‘by telepathy,’ meaning in this context that information (in an everyday rather than a technical, mathematical sense) is, in some mysterious manner, obtained by one mind (the medium’s) from another mind (incarnate or discarnate) by means other than the ordinary channels of sense. But it is not hard to find cases in which, *prima facie*, the message has been in some sense transmitted by the medium to its presumed target (a sitter), and yet the medium has apparently not at any prior stage possessed the knowledge that she is supposed to have thus conveyed. Such, for instance, are cases of automatic writing in which an automatist, in a state of dissociation or of trance, comes out with information that (a) was not previously known to her and (b) only became known to her (if at all) in



consequence of what she herself had written. *Mutatis mutandis*, this could be true in some cases of table-tipping or of ouija board or planchette writing, or even of psychic raps centering round the organism of the medium. The upshot is that in such cases it seems incorrect to ascribe the messages to telepathy (as commonly understood) between the medium and either an incarnate or a discarnate person, for the medium did not at the relevant time possess the information transmitted. The alternative survivalist explanation would be that in these cases a discarnate communicator, possessed of that information, was somehow able to transmit it through the medium as instrument and unregistered by her, she being presumed to possess a suitably pliant psychophysiological constitution.

This kind of view of ostensible mediumistic communication with the discarnate was probably quite widely held or presumed in the early days of the Spiritualist movement but at the present time would be generally rejected on the supposition that the medium must have had the information, however acquired, tucked away in her subconscious mind and ready to emerge in the right circumstances—a *de facto* untestable idea that brings its own additional quota of complexity to an already complicated situation.

But to return to the conventional accounts of the living agent and survivalist hypotheses: These two hypotheses are commonly (and to my mind wrongly) presented as rivals, and there follows from the protagonists of each a series of well-worn arguments and counter-arguments as to their respective merits. However, Braude sensibly steers clear of these routine issues, and instead discusses various illustrative cases or kinds of case, some real, some made up, with a view to demonstrating that, survivalists to the contrary, the discarnate person hypothesis has no advantages in terms of the degree of psychic functioning required over the living agent hypothesis. Taking a 'real' case picked on by Braude as an example, let us consider the curious instance of the supposed chess-playing communicator, the deceased Hungarian Grandmaster Géza Maróczy (1870–1951), between whom and the celebrated living Russian-born Grandmaster Viktor Korchnoi a match was arranged, on the lines of postal chess (Eisenbeiss & Hassler 2006, Neppe 2007). The German-based automatist Robert Rollans (who had initially no knowledge of chess) acted as medium and put up the moves as it were on Maróczy's behalf on a traveling chessboard. The match lasted for some seven years. 'Maróczy's' play was deemed appropriately old-fashioned but of high quality. He resigned after the 47th move.

Braude argues that for the deceased Maróczy to have been responsible for the 47 moves, he would have needed (p. 28) "repeated and accurate ESP . . . to know what the state of play is, and then ongoing and effective ESP . . . to convey the desired next move." And (disregarding here any

advantage that Maróczy's known prowess as a blindfolded chess player might have given him) this would amount to "virtually the same degree of psychic functioning" as the living agent hypothesis would require, presumably for the medium to pick the brains—if one may so speak—of an unawares advisory living grandmaster to whose subconscious he would first have needed telepathically to convey the state of the board and the excitement of the game. It would surely be simpler to suppose that the brains thus subconsciously picked might have been those of Korchnoi, who already had the state of play at his disposal and would have been thinking about 'Maróczy's' likely moves as well as his own. Korchnoi (whom the medium did not meet until near the end of the match) would thus have been unknowingly involved in playing both sides of the game. If this is the simplest account of the matter that the LAP theorist can provide, it might certainly encourage one to reassess the complexities that confront the discarnate person hypothesis, which at least does not require one to engage in so many unverifiable speculations about events in and interactions between the subconscious minds of the medium and assorted living individuals.

Braude goes on (pp. 28–29) to consider a further class of cases that might be thought to pose difficulties for the LAP hypothesis, namely cases which, on that hypothesis, would require the medium to access one or more obscure sources of information not already known to her. He points out that since we know so little about the nature and workings of ESP we are "in no position to insist that normally obscure information is also psychically obscure," or that "psychically accessing multiple sources of normally obscure information" is "more imposing than accessing one." Indeed, he queries whether we currently have grounds for assuming that psychic functioning has any limits at all.

Taking the last suggestion first, though the limits of ESP are certainly vague, we have no grounds for the extraordinary suggestion that it may have none. One might note here (for instance) the rather numerous and, so far as I know, totally unsuccessful attempts by ostensible psychics, from the days of animal magnetism to the early twentieth century—the celebrated Mrs. Piper among them—to give us new information about the other planets of the solar system and their inhabitants. More interesting is the question of how or whether the LAP hypothesis could handle cases that might require it to assume the psychic tapping of one or more sources of normally obscure information.

Let us consider the LAP hypothesis in its two most common forms, namely (1) that the medium acquires information through clairvoyance, i.e. through extrasensory awareness of certain (often distant) physical states of affairs, and (2) that she acquires it through telepathy with the living, i.e.

through extrasensory awareness of what is going on in another person's mind.

(1) The clairvoyant version. This might cover such putative phenomena as clairvoyant awareness of newspaper obituaries, wills, inscriptions on gravestones and monuments, private correspondence, biographical works, and so forth (let us for simplicity refer to all these as 'documents'). Now if a medium is to gather her information clairvoyantly from such sources, her task would have two phases or aspects. Firstly, she would need clairvoyantly to track down (from a doubtless very large range of irrelevant possibilities) a 'document' or 'documents'—which could be anywhere from the storerooms of a large library to a remote country graveyard—relating to the individual she has been assigned, or has taken, as her 'target.' And in many, perhaps most, cases, this could only be done not from the document's physical properties (e.g., a heading involving a certain series of letters of the alphabet), but from its sense (meaning) or reference (what or whom it is about), which in turn might be determinable only from its overall context.

So each candidate document would have to an extent to be cognised and understood and considered in its setting. Secondly, and following on from the last, each chosen document would need to be read in greater detail to extract from it such information as might constitute the sort of 'evidence' being sought.

Now while there have indeed been examples of supposedly clairvoyant 'living agent' psychics who have succeeded in 'reading' a few words (not known to the witnesses) from a piece of paper in a thick sealed envelope (usually placed before them), I don't think anything of this kind has ever been convincingly achieved with an archival document the length, say, of an ordinary newspaper obituary or a will. Without further strong evidence there can be little justification for claiming that such feats can be achieved through the clairvoyance of a medium.

(2) The telepathic version. In common usage 'telepathy' is generally supposed to involve one person coming to know (other than via the normal channels of sense) what is currently going on in another person's mind. A problem with the telepathic version, right from the early days of attempts at the scientific investigation of mediumistic phenomena, has been that the most likely candidates for a telepathic source of the information concerned (sitters at the sittings) have often firmly denied that any such thoughts had been passing through their minds,² indeed have sometimes claimed that they were not even aware of the facts concerned. The next move for the LAP hypothesis would be to suggest that some outsider must have been churning over those very thoughts at or soon before the relevant time and floating them on the psychic ether for an attuned sensitive to pick up. It

would be hard if not impossible to prove the negative here, but I don't think that positive evidence has very often if ever been found. A final move by the LAP theorist would be to invoke the subconscious minds or subliminal selves of source and medium (telepathy was widely supposed to operate below the level of consciousness and then suddenly emerge), a stratagem that would leave the occurrence or non-occurrence of the telepathy effectively unverifiable, but open to speculation.

The upshot of this would be that if someone, somewhere, can be supposed to possess the relevant information, i.e. to have it, even though not currently activated, within the potential reach of his or her memory, at least on a good day, the medium can be fancifully supposed, without possibility of contradiction, capable of gaining telepathic access to it. This in turn seems to lead inexorably toward the notion that each of us stores away 'memory traces' which a prying medium might telepathically flick through person by person and item by item until she hits pay dirt. We are getting close again to the idea that psi may have no limits. However, the notion of memory as a sort of filing cabinet, in whatever terms it may be couched, has been repeatedly criticized by philosophers and others as incoherent, with Braude (e.g., 2014) himself among them. It is perhaps not surprising therefore that after appearing, for much of the first half of his essay, to be inclining toward the LAP hypothesis, he starts to swing somewhat away from it. But I still find the exact reasons for his apparent change of heart, or rather mind, a mite obscure.

The change begins on pp. 31–32 where he lists ten desirable features of a case that might seriously strain the living agent psi hypothesis. Some of these relate to Braude's especial concern with psychopathology, psychology, and the motivations of medium and sitters (mediums should not be sufferers from dissociative identity disorder, the manifestations should make better sense in terms of the interests and motivations of the deceased rather than of living persons); some to the need to guard against the possibility of relevant information reaching the medium through normal channels; some to the need for careful and contemporary recording and the communication of verifiable facts; and some to the kinds of personal characteristics of and facts about the alleged communicator that the communications might most desirably bring out. Taken together the items constitute a compact and perceptive yardstick against which to measure the merits of any case that might come before one.

Although no cases ever fulfill all of Braude's requirements, he concedes (p. 33) that "the very best cases are rich enough to give us pause—at least if we don't have a metaphysical axe to grind." We may still not be able to say anything interesting about how survival could occur following bodily

death, and may be at a loss philosophically and scientifically, but (p. 34) “that’s hardly unique to post-mortem survival . . . practical considerations trump abstract philosophy every time.” After this proem, with which I entirely agree, he passes on to consider the bearing of all this on “the lure of physicalism,” and how it should be responded to or resisted. But I have to confess that I found his last few pages—with the exception of some well-put points, and his discussion of the views of the Cambridge philosopher J. M. E. McTaggart (1866–1925), a tad disappointing. It is as though he had not left himself the time or space to go into these issues in sufficient detail or quite with the enthusiasm he showed in dealing with some of them elsewhere. There is, however, no arguing with his concluding remarks (p. 38):

It’s clear . . . that philosophical issues . . . greet us at every turn in evaluating survival cases. These may be precisely the matters about which we need to be most aware, and to which we should also be the least attached as we interpret the evidence. Once we grant that sufficiently powerful cases *could* persuade us—despite our philosophical predispositions or cherished theories—that personal consciousness can survive bodily death and dissolution, the only relevant question then is whether the actual evidence pulls us sufficiently in that direction.

The ensuing chapter, by Michael Sudduth, is a systematic examination of the claim, often heard in one form or another, that post-mortem survival is the best explanation of the data of mediumship. Although I do not always find myself in agreement with his arguments, much work and much thought have gone into this paper, and anyone who takes the trouble to study it carefully and think about it at length will benefit.

The paper is in effect divided into two parts. In the first part, Sudduth attempts to undermine the survival hypothesis by showing that its predictive power is seriously defective and could well be outshone by that of the rival living agent psi hypothesis. In the second part, he tries to strengthen the LAP hypothesis and to defend it against some standard criticisms by developing what he terms a “robust” form of it. As a prelude he briefly discusses the philosophical problem of ‘inference to the best explanation’ (also known as ‘abduction’).

He says (p. 42) that the best explanation “is typically an antecedently credible hypothesis that leads us to expect observational data that are otherwise improbable . . . and where the hypothesis exhibits other explanatory virtues (e.g., simplicity, consilience, conservatism, and coherence).” As an example of inference to the best explanation he chooses Halley’s 1705 prediction, based on Newtonian celestial mechanics, that the comet, last seen in 1682, would return “about the end of the year 1758, or the beginning of the next.” The fulfilment of this prediction both confirmed the Newtonian

hypothesis and extended its scope (comets were little understood at the time, and Halley's has a retrograde orbit).

The case of Halley's comet becomes for Sudduth a kind of benchmark against which he measures the claims of the survival hypothesis to be the 'best explanation' of certain mediumistic phenomena. He begins (p. 47) with the observation that postulating a consciousness that survives death leads *per se* to no predictions whatever as to the kind of evidence for survival that such a consciousness might provide. For that (pp. 47–48) we would have to supplement the simple survival hypothesis with auxiliary hypotheses, e.g., that discarnate persons are intelligent agents with causal powers (ESP, PK), have beliefs, desires, and intentions, much as before, and can be aware of what is going on in our world. These further postulates might lead us to expect that there should be various kinds of evidence for survival. But we are still a long way from measuring up to the Halley benchmark.

To achieve that, the survival hypothesis would have to yield highly specific and preferably novel predictions comparable to the Halley one, for instance predicting who among the available deceased persons will communicate and when, what they will communicate, and whether through the organism of a medium, or in some other way. But the hypotheses we currently have do not yield predictions that even approximate this degree of precision. Of course (p. 49) given various arbitrary further assumptions, "the survival hypothesis can easily *ex post facto* accommodate just about any phenomenon that reveals veridical information about a deceased person." Such assumptions, however, are of no value unless they are not just stories but themselves lead to predictions that can be tested against further facts, which so far they have not been. All this, Sudduth claims (p. 51), deflates the explanatory power of the survival hypothesis.

A survivalist might reply (p. 51) "that but for the survivalist hypothesis the data would be inexplicable." For sometimes the mediumistic data seem to relate uniquely and in detail to some particular deceased person. But this is where the LAP hypothesis comes in. For the LAP hypothesis purports to offer an alternative account of the very data—uniquely indicating as they do a particular deceased person—which survivalists have claimed only they can adequately explain. And this brings us immediately to the question touched on above: What are the potential scope and the *de facto* limits of living-agent psi?

Here Sudduth deploys three lines of attack on the survival hypothesis.

Firstly, he raises the obvious point, touched on above, that if a medium's statements of fact can be verified from extant sources, those sources would be available to LAP, thereby undermining the claims of the survival hypotheses to uniqueness.

Secondly, he tries to show (pp. 52–53) that data from “paradigmatic cases of what we might call ordinary LAP” can help to further undermine these claims. He looks in turn at forced-choice ESP tests, PK experiments involving participants altering the output of random number generators, at free response ESP experiments, and at what he calls “spontaneous case data.” With regard to the free response experiments, he briefly mentions (p. 53) “telepathic, clairvoyant, and perhaps even precognitive acquisition of veridical information corresponding to complex and dynamic targets . . . often mediated by detailed mental imagery. As for the spontaneous cases, his examples somewhat surprisingly consist mainly of “large-scale PK effects,” many of which could hardly be described as “spontaneous.”

It is impossible to go into all this in detail here. The results of forced-choice ESP experiments, particularly the more recent ones, are in general too variable in success rate, too low in significance, and too susceptible of varied explanations to be of much help to the LAP hypothesis. Free response experiments, which have often been combined with experiments on altered states of consciousness, seem *prima facie* more relevant, and some gifted subjects have ‘hit’ distant and quite complex ‘targets’ with unmistakable accuracy. It is, however, hard to know along what dimensions to evaluate such cases against the better mediumistic ones, and there will doubtless be differences of opinion as to the likely upshot of such an exercise. My own opinion is that the ESP displayed in such cases, if ESP it be, is still a long way from matching the achievements of the best mediums in terms of the scope of the items of specific and correct information delivered in connection with particular discarnate persons, the sequential delivery of such items in a relatively short space of time, and sometimes in a manner appropriate for the alleged communicator (a possibility, of course, not open in free response experiments).

As for the “large-scale PK effects” (poltergeists, the startling phenomena produced by such “physical” mediums as D. D. Home and Eusapia Palladino), these, where genuine, could certainly be called instances of ‘super-psi,’ but that does not *per se* make them directly relevant to either the survival or the LAP hypothesis. They could only (with perhaps some rare exceptions) have such relevance if verified information were transmitted through them, and in that event the survival versus living agent issue would be the same as in ordinary cases of ‘mental’ mediumship.

Thirdly (and this in effect brings us to the second part of his article), he advances his own version of the LAP theory, which he calls, or describes as, A Psychologically Robust Living-Agent Psi Hypothesis. He develops it to deal with what he regards as two remaining problems for the LAP hypothesis: Why should a medium who gains her knowledge by telepathy

present that knowledge (as sometimes happens) by assuming a *persona* with characteristics unique to some deceased person, i.e. in a manner that appears to support the survival hypothesis? And how would the LAP hypothesis lead us to expect (predict) the actual detailed knowledge of that discarnate person's life, concerns, friends, relatives, characteristics, verbal and behavioral mannerisms, etc., which the medium may so strikingly manifest?

His answer (pp. 54–55) is what Braude refers to as a “motivated psi hypothesis,” the gist of which seems to amount to something like this: Sitters typically have a powerful desire (usually but not necessarily consciously formulated) for reassuring contact with their departed loved ones. Many mediums have an overriding interest in providing comfort for their sitters. They may sense (by normal or extrasensory means) a sitter's need and pick up something about the discarnate person in question. We may then predict that they will follow this trail, pick up more detail about that person and his or her concerns, and organize the knowledge thus acquired into a sufficient semblance of the original personality to gladden the sitter. Mediums' abilities to perform such feats may be heightened by the dissociative states into which many of them fall, and which are widely believed to be “psi-conductive.”

It is once again difficult to know what to say about this hypothesis. There is a shortage of systematic data, though plenty of plausible-sounding off-the-cuff speculation, as to how far and in what ways sitters' emotions may influence the medium, and how far the urgency of a medium's desire to help a sitter may promote or hinder its fulfilment. And not a few verified cases are on record in which neither medium nor sitter(s) had any antecedent knowledge of, and corresponding emotional attitude toward, the ostensible communicator.³ With regard to the presumed psi-conductive properties of dissociative states—a long-established tradition, and tradition has undoubtedly some influence on the surface form of the phenomena—it is certainly possible to assemble plenty of cases in which this has apparently been so, but one needs also to bear in mind examples of highly successful mediums who did not habitually pass into ‘trance.’

A matter in which the motivated psi hypothesis might well have the advantage is the perennial problem of how some mediums are seemingly able to locate wished-for discarnate persons wherever in the universe they might be and forthwith summon them to an ongoing sitting. It might be easier to suppose that no-one is really summoned and no-one really arrives, and that the whole business is got up within the séance room by LAP.

If I had to pick the kind of evidence (other than neurophysiological) that is most awkward for the survival hypothesis and most encouraging

for the LAP hypothesis it would be none of those mentioned by Sudduth, but one that considerably impressed E. R. Dodds in his powerful paper *Why I Do Not Believe in Survival* (Dodds 1934:147–172). It relates to the performances of certain individuals whom one might loosely describe as ‘psychics,’ ‘sensitives,’ or ‘clairvoyants,’ and who commonly operated by ‘psychometry,’ i.e. they would be given, and hold in their hands, small objects about the history of which, or the past or present owners of which, information was desired. Dodds particularly mentions studies of such persons by E. Osty (1923), Director of the Institut Metapsychique in Paris, but there were other serious studies of them by other apparently careful persons.⁴ Dodds remarks (p. 157) of one of Osty’s subjects that she “has obtained numerous veridical communications both about the living and the dead, comparable in range and accuracy with those of the best mediums,” and the same appears to have been widely true of others. However, Osty’s work has been subjected to criticisms (Schiller 1924) that I cannot go into here, and I have expressed some reservations about it myself (Gauld 1982:133–137), though Prince’s short study of Pagenstecher’s comparable subject might be immune to them (Prince 1921).

Dodds points out that the same lady has no ‘controls’ and no ‘communicators’ and does not regard the dead as the source of her knowledge. He thinks that if she had had spiritualist convictions they would certainly have emerged in her sittings. And indeed little of a spiritualist kind of explanation appears in Osty’s published records, though one can of course not be sure what the private convictions of his sensitives may have been.⁵ Many celebrated mediums have had ‘guides’ who at times act very much like the clairvoyants we are discussing, and indeed liked to grasp ‘psychometric’ or ‘token’ objects while holding forth, though it is not clear that these were really of help to them. Dividing lines between psychometrists, clairvoyant mediums, and trance mediums are often unclear.

It will be noted that these cases go back to the period between the wars, and such ‘sensitives’ seem latterly to have been squeezed out of the parapsychological scene by laboratory experimentation on the one hand, and a renewed interest in mediumship and shamanism on the other. This is a pity, because some of the longer cases, difficult though they are to assess, become quite striking when read at length and in detail.

Sudduth raises a number of other interesting issues, but considerations of space preclude my broaching them. I will conclude instead by reverting to what might be called his opening gambit. He began his inquiry, as he well might, by asking what one is aiming at when one seeks to infer the ‘best explanation’ of the data. As a focus for his discussion he takes (as noted above) the example of the reappearance of Halley’s comet, which

was predicted from and therefore explained by the principles of Newtonian celestial mechanics. Now there is a fair-sized philosophical literature (not without controversies) on inference to the best explanation, and I certainly don't want to plunge into it, but it seems to me that for present purposes the Halley's comet example is not a very good one, and leads Sudduth into a necessarily fruitless fixation on exact prediction. What makes the Newtonian explanation such a good one is not just the accuracy of the prediction but also the fact (merely hinted at by Sudduth) that the same theoretical schema can also embrace such diverse other phenomena as the fall of an apple, the movements of celestial bodies in general, the mass of the earth, tides, the effect of changes of latitude on the workings of pendulum clocks, and the precession of the equinoxes. And it is upon this sort of feature (we might call it 'multiple subsumption') that the 'best explanation' status of many scientific theories largely rests. A favorite example has been the Darwinian theory of evolution, especially in its earlier stages. Exact prediction of the course of evolution was never possible, but the theory's strength lay in its having plausibly (and generally retrospectively) fitted various categories of observed facts into an overall explanatory framework. A somewhat simpler example might be the progress of the theory of continental drift as it led into plate tectonics. Of course what could be meant here by "plausibly fitting" is a question indeed.

I don't wish to go into questions of plausibility of fit or multiple subsumption, but only to suggest that it is here rather than with a search for precise prediction that the issue between the survival theory and the LAP theory largely lies (a point clearly appreciated by F. W. H. Myers in his celebrated magnum opus of 1903).

The remaining three papers in Part I are largely concerned with what the authors of the first one, Chris Roe and Elizabeth Roxburgh, term Non-Parapsychological Explanations of Ostensible Mediumship. Roe and Roxburgh begin by remarking, with supportive data, that the general public tends to be quite favorable to "the claim that mediumistic communication has some evidential or practical value." The mainstream scientific view, however, is by and large quite different, and Roe and Roxburgh set out to explore some of the "stock sceptical responses." They start with 'cold reading,' the set of tactics by which a *soi-disant* medium can mislead clients, especially new ones, into believing that he or she knows more about their affairs than could possibly have been learned by ordinary means. Of these tactics Roe and Roxburgh's account, though brief, should be sufficient to inspire sitters and potential sitters with caution as to how they should assess a medium's statements and how they should respond during such occasions, and indeed dress for them.

The second part of the article is headed *Accounting for Physical Phenomena* and is so exiguous in relation to the scale of the topic that I shall pass it by. The third concerns the reported experiences of mediums themselves. Here the authors remark (pp. 1–2) that mainstream accounts of the mediumistic experience “have characterized it as a dissociative-type one that involves hallucinations, feelings of being controlled by an external power, personality shifts, and alleged post-trance amnesia.” This rather readily leads to comparison with certain psychiatric disorders. Pursuing this idea, Roe and Roxburgh review various studies, including their own, which have assessed medium’s scores on measures of dissociation, absorption, depersonalisation, ‘boundary thinness,’ temporal lobe symptoms, and general mental health. Overall there was a tendency for mediums and sensitives to score more highly than controls (though not inordinately so) on several of these measures. However, their scores on general mental health were, if anything, better than those of controls. This finding might perhaps be accounted for in terms of the supportive socio-cultural context from which many of them emerge.

Roe and Roxburgh express the view that in all three of the areas in which they have examined mainstream explanations for mediumistic phenomena, though the proffered accounts might seem plausible, very little empirical evidence has been amassed to provide a persuasive case. They call for further investigations, a suggestion with which there will surely be wide agreement.

The next article, by Krissy Wilson, will no doubt be of considerable value to those who wish to sample the flavor, and assess the standards, of contemporary hard-core scepticism. Some of her concluding remarks (p. 87), together with her list of references, rather strongly suggest that she may not have read many of the original detailed reports on some of the more remarkable mediums, and has relied perhaps (as often happens) on second-hand or third-hand accounts by individuals of orientation kindred to her own. She says that the evidence for survival is anecdotal, often inaccurate, and based mostly on wishful thinking, and is furthermore littered with fraud and questionable methodologies. So it is—if you look only at certain parts of it, including (as Wilson does) various popular television shows.

The succeeding article, *The Psychology of Belief in Discarnate Communication*, by Tony Jinks, leaves me somewhat uncertain as to its aim. He notes near the beginning (pp. 93–94) how much fraud has gone on in connection with mediumship, but then observes (p. 94) that “much of the contemporary psychological literature . . . is more comfortable associating mediumship experience with a sincere underlying experience, albeit one generated by psychological dysfunction.” The body of his article is devoted

to a review of the kinds of dysfunctional experience that may be involved.

The most obvious of these is dissociation, which, he says (p. 94) “exists as a continuum, from absorption to more intense depersonalisation, dissociative amnesia, and ultimately identity alterations.” It is, as he remarks, easy to understand how explanations of mediumistic phenomena might be offered in these terms. Although the more extreme forms of dissociation are likely to be regarded as pathological, not a few authorities regard the dissociative manifestations of mediumship as non-pathological and in some cultural circumstances even beneficial. Jinks further notes that the dissociative trait also interacts with other measurable psychological constructs, for instance hypnotizability, suggestibility, fantasy proneness, and transliminality (ready permeability of the threshold between ordinary consciousness and material from a putative ‘subconscious’).

It all adds up to what he felicitously calls a “medicalization of mediumship,” with which psychologists can be relatively happy. These constructs can also be used to explain (in some sense of the term) why mediums have unusual experiences, which may in turn—particularly against a background of Spiritualist beliefs and practices—convince them, and through them others, of their own psychic gifts. As for table rapping, automatic writing, and ouija board practices, these (p. 97) are “unremarkable events experienced as anomalous by susceptible individuals who subsequently develop mediumistic belief,” and who, in the case of the ouija board, may even lose sight of the fact that their own subtle behaviors arise from themselves and may in consequence develop “the psychiatric delusion of alien control.”

When it comes to the question of why members of the general public, both those who have attended mediumistic demonstrations and those who have not (the latter being a good deal more numerous than the former), should (some of them!) come to believe that mediums may possess psychic gifts, Jinks has a good deal to say, but much of it is obvious and little of it enlightening. He throws in the resistance of belief systems to change, the lack of scepticism in audiences, the influence of social environment, biases in information processing, cognitive dysfunction, and the lower intelligence of believers as compared to non-believers, but such a list is never going to add up in a way that will comprehensively explain all cases.

At the end (p. 102) he makes the following curious statement: “From this perspective, and if an assumption is made that mediumship practice is not scientifically legitimate, then standard psychological theories are valuable in explaining how [mediumistic] practice experience generates belief.” In other words, even those persons whose belief that there may be a truly paranormal element in some mediumistic communications is

based on a careful consideration of the best available evidence (and there are not a few such) are to be kept out of court by *fiat* or lumped in with the psychologically dysfunctional, whose views don't count. This may seem like staging *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark, but it exemplifies a rather common but largely misguided kind of procedure, which we may describe as dismissing awkward phenomena by impugning the mental stability of those who occasion or witness them. But in the current context this strategy (should Jinks seriously want to utilize it) for setting aside apparently well-evidenced paranormal phenomena (of which there are quite a few), and *a fortiori* any belief in them, simply will not work.

The reason for this is that a medium's mental state (whether normal, abnormal, or positively weird, and whatever her own opinions about it) is largely irrelevant to the question of whether the information ostensibly transmitted by or through her is correct and beyond anything she could have found out by ordinary means. That question—the question of the status of the evidence, good or bad, acceptable or not—can only be settled by competent investigators on the basis of detailed records and inquiries. The medium could be out of her mind and still produce remarkable evidence that she possesses knowledge of matters not accessible to her by ordinary means. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same goes for the table tippers, ouija board operators, and automatic writers on whose mental aberrations, real or supposed, Jinks also dwells.

As for the ordinary folk whom Jinks envisages attending, and uncritically admiring, public mediumistic performances, such individuals may indeed be regularly present, but that hardly affects the validity of evidence collected under more favorable conditions or (in rather rare circumstances) at the meetings in question.

Part 2 of this book is headed Culture, Psychopathology, and Psychotherapy, and consists of five chapters. The first is a densely packed—sometimes rather too densely packed, not to say opaquely expressed—piece by Joan H. Hageman and Stanley Krippner on Cultural Aspects of Personality, Beliefs, and Attentional Strategies in Mediumship. After summary sections (surprisingly detailed) on theory and measurement of personality and theory and measurement of mediumship and mediumistic practices, the authors settle in to describe (p. 112) their own multicultural studies of “personality temperament and the personality traits of absorption among mediums and mediumistic-like practitioners with their cultural counterparts.” Following the typology of Keirsey, they divide their subjects into 16 personality types, which they assemble into four larger groups of “temperaments,” labeled Artisans, Idealists, Rationals, and Guardians, the latter group being absent from their sample. It takes the authors three pages

to give us word-pictures of the characteristics of these groups, and I would not care to attempt a further digest. However, from the point of view of assessing the frequency and influence of experiences of dissociation and absorption across the various groups, this perhaps does not much matter. Differences between groups (as measured by various standard scales and questionnaires) appeared, at least in part, to reflect the cognitive and attentional strategies embedded in each group's traditional mediumistic and meditative practices, and could bring different benefits. For instance, (p. 117) "the capacity to become fully absorbed and suspend belief may help mediums to deal, in their cultural role, with people under stress and it may also help in meditative practices." Likewise, dissociative capacity "may help mediums to differentiate and to dissociate their ordinary identity during their hypnotic-like ritual procedures." But even when these mediumistic or mediumistic-like episodes involve experiences as of encountering spirits, ancestors, or deities, or undergoing spiritual or ecstatic experiences, it does not follow that the practitioners cannot function normally in their jobs and personal lives. The authors suggest in conclusion (p. 118) that rather than focusing upon whether or not these practitioners are deluded in their beliefs and experiences, scientists should try to clarify "how these individuals use these abilities, and in particular *how* and *when* these practices become adaptive and life affirming," or the reverse.

The next paper, *Shamanism and Mediumship: Confluence and Difference* by Rafael G. Locke, Adam J. Rock, and Roger N. Walsh, tackles the often controversial matter of the relation (overlap, similarities, and differences) between shamanism and mediumship. As an initial working definition of shamanism they take (p. 124) one by co-author Walsh. Shamanism is "a family of traditions whose practitioners focus on voluntarily entering altered states of consciousness in which they experience themselves, or their spirit(s), traveling to other realms at will and interacting with other entities in order to serve their community." Shamanic journeying imagery is held (pp. 124–125) "to be consistent with the shaman's cosmology," which they say "typically consists of a multi-layered universe featuring various NPWs [non-physical worlds]," each of which may contain different categories of inhabitant. Within this context they pass on to problems in distinguishing between shamanism and mediumship.

Their solution is the 'visionary practice' model of shamanism recently developed by Locke. This notion is aimed (p. 127) "at identifying the core features of both experience and action in shamanism and related phenomena (e.g., mediumship, healing, mysticism, meditation) by adopting an existential phenomenological attitude." We shortly find (p. 127) that "the notion of SoCs [states of consciousness] becomes redefined as states of

being (SOB; in and from worlds); that is, being is always in some world and those worlds are both emergent and intentional from the actions of shamans.” After this, I fear, I largely lost track of the visionary practice model, which avowedly owes a lot to the early work of the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1907–1961). I was sorry for my non-comprehension, because at times it seemed that something interesting might lie behind the opaque exposition, even something awfully important:

Our view is that a useful starting point is the virtual space of embodied consciousness and the intentional arcs through which worlds are engaged and realized . . . SOB's revolve about these axes of embodiment and intention in such a way that agency, and its associated identities and actions, is defined in a comprehensive ontology which would then inform neuroscience, psychology, and anthropology. (p. 131)

The most interesting part of this article is its itemized analysis (pp. 128–130) of the “intersection of mediumistic and shamanic vocational expressions and phenomenology.” If we set aside the predominance of contact with departed persons in a medium’s job specification, the difference between shamanism and mediumship seems to consist mainly (though not exclusively) in the latter being a somewhat or even considerably watered down version of the former. Thus shamans are more likely to gain control of spirits, and western mediums to be more passive-receptive with regard to them; shamans have “a much greater repertoire of roles than mediums (e.g., prophets, magicians, sorcerers, and mediums for minor deities and the spirits of totem animals); shamans have a greater range of expedients for changing state than mediums (most notably the use of drugs and of sensory deprivation); shamans tend to be much more physically active in the expression of their vocation, as in dancing, singing, and feats of strength and endurance; shamans’ contact with other worlds “might be used to divine new ways of collective governance, dealing with environmental challenges, warfare, and disease”; a shaman’s transformations are often aided or accompanied by group rituals.

These features may be considered in connection with the next article by Christopher C. Cott on Communications with Gods and Spirits in East and Southeast Asia, notably China, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, and Indonesia. It is a scholarly, interesting, and (to me) surprising piece of work. It seems that practices unmistakably from the shamanism–mediumship tradition are quite widespread in these regions, may involve ostensible contacts not only with ancestors and other discarnate humans, but also with superior and inferior gods, and with undesirable evil spirits. Mediums may come to their vocations by various different routes, and have

affiliations to one or other of the leading religions of those regions. What it would be interesting to know is whether from all these activities there sometimes emerges any such 'evidential' material, as is claimed for Western mediumship.

The next two articles move into the terrain of psychopathology and psychotherapy. In a wide-ranging and informative essay, Jacob Kaminker homes in, after raising some introductory general issues about mediumship,⁶ on the tendency, pervasive until recently among mental health professionals, to pathologize extraordinary human experiences, mediumship among them. He enquires—with due recognition of cross-cultural differences—whether, how, and to what extent one can differentiate mediumship from psychopathology, questions which have in the past, though now fortunately rather less so, evoked rather strong feelings.

Epilepsy, historically often advanced as an explanation of supposed possession, Kaminker regards (p. 153) as highly unlikely to explain mediumship completely. Epilepsy often involves sudden and unintentional onset, which is not often the case with mediumship, and in any case the presence of brain disorder, as in epilepsy, "does not discount the possibility of contact with the deceased" (p. 153). Turning to schizophrenia, Kaminker notes that fewer studies have drawn a direct correlation between schizophrenia and mediumship, a possible relation between schizophrenia and shamanism being more often mooted. But while it is the case that a modest percentage of shamans seem to undergo psychotic episodes during their (often stressful) initiations, there appears to be little evidence that established shamans are commonly thus afflicted.

That leaves us with the favorite candidate for a psychopathological interpretation of mediumship, namely that it arises from dissociative tendencies (including trances and identity disorders with subsequent amnesia), often taken to be a defense against the recollection and effects of earlier traumatic episodes. Reviewing relevant studies, Kaminker's view seems to be that the evidence on the connection between mediumship and dissociation is probably linked to cultural differences and variations in training. Some studies (p. 154) found no significant relation between mediumship and dissociative symptoms, others that people with histories of spirit possession "had significantly more severe dissociation than healthy controls." The same went for reports of traumatic experiences, but much depended on whether the mediums were compared with 'normal' controls or with groups of those diagnosed as suffering from dissociative identity disorder (DID). Kaminker concludes (p. 156) that ". . . it is clear that the post-positivist dismissal of mediumship, and the indigenous explanation of all psychopathology as spirit possession, are both oversimplifications." In

a field where almost all professed statements of fact and proposed theories are most probably oversimplifications, this appears highly likely to be true.

Rafael G. Locke writes under the heading of Mediumship and Psychotherapy, but his topic is not what this title might immediately suggest, to wit that psychotherapy might cure mediums of their strange idiosyncrasy. His idea is the rather more interesting one that in certain cases, which might (whatever their origins) be called cases of latent, or potential, or suppressed mediumship or shamanism, with somewhat unnerving or distressing symptoms, the most effective direction of 'treatment' might be to release what has hitherto been latent or suppressed and (p. 166) "engage in consolidating the challenging experiences, providing a new and meaningful framework for them, and settling them into a social environment which understands and supports the person and their otherwise unusual experiences." Locke suggests at the beginning that a partial analogy is provided by the way in which, during the nineteenth century, mediumship in its various forms (p. 160) "allowed many women to challenge the traditional roles and correlated career pathways which Victorian society imposed with its associated maladies of body and mind." But there are certainly instances in the literature of mediumship and of shamanism in which individuals have suffered from bizarre and worrying symptoms that disappeared when they were induced to 'go with' the symptoms (subsequently attributed to promptings from the world of spirits) and admit the psychic side of their natures.⁷ At the end of his article Locke describes his own successful treatment of two (not uninteresting) cases of this general kind.

As in a previous chapter, Locke's favored theoretical foundation for his ideas and practice is a phenomenological one founded on the earlier views of Merleau-Ponty and leavened this time by input from transpersonal psychology. There are certainly interesting thoughts and suggestions in his exposition, and my own failure to grasp quite how they fit into a coherent whole or constitute a better framework for thinking about and dealing with such matters than any other that patients might find persuasive may be ascribed to my own shortcomings or to the limitations of the space available to Locke, or to both.

Part 3 is headed Empirical Approaches and consists of a further five articles of which the first, by Julie Beischel, is on Advances in Quantitative Mediumship Research. Quantitative approaches to mediumship research are generally undertaken in the context of a methodology that aims at demonstrating statistically or otherwise (a) that a medium's correct statements (if any) are not simply due to her coming out with commonplace statements likely to be true of a good many persons in her possible client base; (b) that such statements are not prompted by cues inadvertently provided by

interactions with the sitter (even responses confined to “yes” or “no” can be developed into a subtly conducted game of ‘Twenty Questions’), or by the sitter’s appearance, hands, dress, jewellery, mannerisms, tone of voice, accent, etc.; (c) that nothing is or can be given away by any experimenter involved; (d) that the medium’s apparent success rate is not artificially boosted by over-generous assessment by sitters scoring their own sittings; (e) that a medium’s successes cannot be due to prior acquaintance with the sitter.

Beischel’s article is not greatly concerned with quantitative (i.e. statistical/mathematical) methods but rather with issues of experimental design and control in cases where the principal aim is to demonstrate the occurrence of ‘Anomalous Information Reception (AIR) by the medium. She deals only with research carried out in the late 1990s or after (she reviews this pretty incisively), and her principal focus is on the issue of the ‘blinding’ of participants in mediumistic sittings. The normal condition in ordinary sittings is ‘unblinded,’ that is medium and sitter (questions of ‘trance’ apart) both see and hear each other during the reading. In single-blinded sittings the medium is kept from the sitter before and during the reading, and may or may not receive feedback through a proxy. The sitter afterward scores the reading and knows it is his or hers. In double-blinded sittings sitters score the record without knowing whether it is their sitting or someone else’s. In triple-blinded readings the experimenters running the sittings are each kept in ignorance of what the others know so that no single individual could give correct information to the medium, or to sitters acting as scorers.

Beischel greatly favors triple-blinding, which she thinks should be mandatory for studies aimed at demonstrating AIR in mediums. One might well suspect that the progressively less personalized conditions imposed by the successive grades of blinding would inhibit a medium’s paranormal gifts, but Beischel and her collaborators have obtained significant results even with triple blinding. It would be interesting from several points of view to institute carefully controlled comparisons between the various degrees of blinding.

She also briefly discusses the use of quantitative methods in studies of the phenomenology of mediumship and of the personality and psychological well-being of mediums.

The complementary chapter on qualitative mediumship research is by Kylie Harris and Carlos S. Alvarado. An initial problem for these authors is which of the numerous and varied possible meanings of the word ‘qualitative’ they should adopt. They proceed (p. 196) by taking over an earlier definition of rather wide scope, according to which qualitative

research explores a social or human problem, and “The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports the detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (Cresswell 1998:15). This has only a rather limited overlap with dictionary definitions of “qualitative,” but is used by the authors to licence general overviews of the early history of mediumship research, of psychological studies of the ways in which mediums receive putative information from discarnates, of mediumship as a social role, of the once widespread view that mediumship is a form or symptom of psychopathology, of mediums’ own views of their experiences and how to handle them, of anthropological studies of mediumship and kindred matters in other cultures, and of sociological studies of the interaction between mediums and their sitters in Western or other cultures. The article is perhaps best regarded as a valuable source of information and references on a diversity of interesting mediumship-related issues.

Elizabeth C. Roxburgh and Chris A. Roe follow with a chapter advocating that mediumship research should preferably be approached by a mixture or combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. This is surely indisputably true, and in fact the authors spend much of their article discussing mixed methods designs with examples of their application and advantages from their own work.

The succeeding article by Graham A. Jamieson and Adam J. Rock is entitled *A Systems Level Neuroscience Approach to Mediumship and the Source-of-Psi Problem*. Its ultimate, and very laudable, aim would appear (p. 248) to be “to integrate descriptions of the conscious psychological processes identified in the medium during readings with the analysis of neural network dynamics recorded in those same readings.” I must confess, however, to becoming seriously bogged down in parts of their exposition. After some scene-setting general remarks about the ‘source-of-psi problem’ in mediumship, the authors take up the question of knowledge of other minds, not from a philosophical but from a practical point of view. They point out how important it is for social mammals, particularly primates, to be able to identify and respond to “three core features of another’s mental states: what are they attending to, what are they feeling, and what are their goals” (p. 239). Their ‘primary awareness’ of these factors is underpinned by discrete neural systems, and is evident in many features of the interactions of mother and child.

Reverting to mediumship, they remark (p. 239) that a medium’s “encounter with a discarnate mind (if veridical) is fundamentally the encounter of an embodied human agent with another mind.” They go on to propose (p. 241) that when a medium ‘communicates’ by speech or writing

there must be an extensive chain of complex neural activity ultimately generated by the source of information and by the causal mechanism linking that source to the medium. Now if this chain of neural activity originates from the medium's encounter at some level with another mind we might expect it to reveal features that indicate activation of our deeply ingrained systems for detecting the presence of an external agency. Of course (given that the communications in question are veridical), we still would not know whether the external mind in question was that of a living or a discarnate individual. The authors ingeniously suggest (p. 250) that this problem might be overcome by experimentally manipulating the beliefs, expectations, and motives of the putative living agents, and observing (or not) "corresponding changes in the structure of the mental states disclosed in the communication sequences received by the medium."

A considerable part of the article is devoted to an overview of neurophysiological and psychological techniques by which the activities of the suppositious systems in mediums' brains might (just possibly) be detected and identified and their relationships to known neural networks established. It reads rather like, and probably is, the basis for a research proposal. If so, I wish the authors success—and long lives.

Concluding Part 3 is a particularly interesting article by Julio F. P. Peres, Alexander Moreira-Almeida, and Leonardo Caixeta on Neuroscience of Trance and Mediumship. Near the beginning there is a numbered list of very sensible recommendations for avoiding theoretical and methodological pitfalls in this area of work, and near the end a further such list of hints (based on the author's own experiences) for making volunteer mediums feel comfortable during laboratory procedures. Between these two are a useful survey of previous neurophysiological studies of mediumistic and possibly related spiritual and religious phenomena (which, are said [p. 259] to have "reignited old debates over mind-body dualism and the soul") and an account of the authors' own neuroimaging studies of the brains of mediums during the production of dissociative writing in a trance state.

The subjects of these experiments were 10 mediums, 6 female and 4 male, specializing in trance writing (psychography), all well-educated or relatively well-educated, five classified as experienced and five as less experienced. With one exception, all were psychologically well-adjusted, and none were paid for their participation. The method of brain imaging used was SPECT (single-photon computed tomography), which assesses activity in different parts of the brain through changes in regional cerebral blood flow (rCBF). The results were not as predicted, but of course all the more interesting for that reason. During 25 minutes of trance writing, all subject groups showed overall reduced activity in important areas of both brain

hemispheres compared to their activity during a control period of non-trance writing. Furthermore, the more experienced group showed a significantly greater reduction than did the less experienced one, and overall there was a trend in both samples for the (independently assessed) complexity of the trance scripts to be greater than that of the control ones, i.e. for greater complexity to be associated with lower brain activity. The content of the trance writing was original in the sense that it had not been previously produced. It seems not to have contained veridical communications but to have “involved ethical principles, the importance of spirituality, or joining science with spirituality” (p. 266).

The authors are cautious as to the interpretation of their findings. They note (p. 268) that “the lower level of activity in the temporal cortex and precentral gyrus, as well as the hippocampus and anterior cingulate in experienced mediums lends support to their subjective reports of being unaware of content written during psychography.” They also note (p. 269) that the fact that experienced mediums showed reduced rCBF changes during psychography is consistent with the notion that an outer source was planning the written content. And they go on to point out that brain regions involved in planning writing “were activated less, even though the content was more elaborate than their non-trance writing. These findings are not consistent with faking or role-playing.” However, they rightly conclude (p. 269): “As the first step toward understanding the neural mechanisms involved in non-pathological dissociation, we emphasize that these findings deserve further investigation both in terms of replication and explanatory hypotheses.”

Part 4 consists of two items, the first being an essay by Julie Beischel, Mark Boccuzzi, and Edwin C. May on *Mediumship and Its Place within Parapsychology*. It adopts a position of what might be called qualified optimism with regard to the future and possibly central place of mediumship research within parapsychology, and a considerably more guarded optimism as to its possible applications in the wider world. The second item, a collection of short pieces on *The Future of the Field of Mediumship*, gives the various contributors a chance to express their views on this topic and to offer any concluding reflections.

Looking back on the contents of this volume, it would be easy enough to pick on shortcomings. It contains, for instance, rather an excess of acronyms, all too fashionable these days, which may look impressive and save expenses, but can be irritating for the reader, and are not always clarified in the (rather inadequate) Index. It is curious, too, that in a volume devoted to the problems and ramifications of mediumship there is so little in the way of accounts (even condensed ones) of mediums (particularly

the more remarkable ones) in action, to give readers some feeling for what, basically, it is all about. It is as if someone were to write a treatise on autistic savants that did not give detailed examples of the gifts that they may actually possess.

Again with regard to the various possible interpretations of mediumistic phenomena, notably the tangled issue of survivalist versus living agent approaches—and (as Flew [1953:68–69] remarks) tentative and cautious terms such as ‘interpretations’ and ‘approaches’ are far more appropriate here than the more ambitious ‘theories’ or ‘explanations’—these questions can only be properly considered within a much broader context than that of just the phenomena of ‘mediumship’. One might mention here such obvious matters as ostensible cases of possession, reincarnation, OBEs, NDEs, and certain cases of veridical apparitions, dreams, and visions. These topics could not be effectively dealt with in anything smaller than a considerable tome, but it should be possible to indicate, in one chapter (with references), that such cases do occur and would have a bearing upon the matter of inference to the best explanation.

Despite all this, it would be fair to say that this book fills a niche that needed filling and that it conveniently opens up a good selection of interesting and important issues within its subject area. It was also encouraging to note how much more work is going on in most of these interesting areas now than there was a few years ago. Even though that amount of work is still quite limited, and still seriously underfunded, the main tenor of the book is toward the future rather than being, as so often happens in these areas, simply a review of what pioneers, however worthy, achieved in decades now receding from view.

Notes

- ¹ One might well wonder if there could be such a thing as ‘psychic’ savants. D. A. Treffert, a leading authority on autistic savants, mentions (2010:23 and cf., 46–47) that he has been criticized in print for even mentioning in a review article that some parents have referred to ‘extrasensory perception abilities’ in their autistic children.
- ² Examples can readily be found in the early papers on Mrs. Piper, e.g., Hodgson (1892, 1898).
- ³ I have in mind here ‘proxy’ sittings, in which a proxy sitter substitutes for the person who wishes for communications, and ‘drop in’ cases, in which a ‘communicator’ unknown to medium and sitters ‘drops in’ and delivers subsequently verified information about himself or herself.
- ⁴ For example, Osty (1926), Pagenstecher (1922), Prince (1921), and cf. Barrington, Stevenson, and Weaver (2005).

- ⁵ Pagenstecher's subject believed that she was under the influence of 'higher spirits'. And Osty's subject, Pascal Forthuny (Osty 1926), began his career by attempting (without much success) to receive automatic writing from his late brother.
- ⁶ I was mildly taken aback to find Kaminker attributing to me (p. 146) views on the survival issue that I have never expressed, and certainly not in the reference he gives.
- ⁷ There are some interesting examples from Iceland in Dempsey (2013).

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