

Perspectival Postmortem Awareness

How could a deceased person view events in the physical world in the absence of a body with sense organs? Philosopher Stephen Braude considers the difficulties that this problem poses for proponents of postmortem survival.

The Challenge

A challenge facing proponents of survival, or survivalists, is to explain how postmortem awareness and knowledge of the current physical world can occur in the absence of a physical body – a body that both experiences the world and represents it accurately enough to be the basis of veridical postmortem reports.



That is a challenge because mediumistic communicators often respond appropriately to and describe correctly—and, in fact, claim to experience—what is currently going on in the physical world. However, our everyday visual and auditory sense perceptions are *perspectival*—that is, they present themselves to us relative to and from the specific perspective of our location in space. That is why our experiences of seeing and hearing are always from a point of view. We see and hear things to the right, left, or straight ahead, and at a certain distance. Of course, we explain the perspectival nature of these experiences with reference to the fact that our sensory receptors occupy specific positions in space. But how can survivalists accommodate perspectival postmortem awareness if, by hypothesis, surviving communicators have no bodies, no sensory receptors, and do not literally occupy a position in space?

Initial Survivalist Strategy

Mediumistic communicators' claims seem to be evidence of survival precisely because they suggest the postmortem, disembodied, existence of ante-mortem personality and *its continuing awareness of and interaction with the physical world*. Thus, when mediumistic communicators respond appropriately to spoken sentences, or correctly describe what is currently going on either with the medium, sitters, or with more remote states of affairs, survivalists interpret that as evidence that a deceased person somehow survives bodily death and continues to be in touch with what is happening in the world of the living. In fact, the deceased's awareness of and interaction with the living is a *necessary condition* for mediumistic communication, at least of the sort documented since the early days of the Society for Psychical Research.

Now suppose it is true, as survivalists maintain, that after death we may continue having perspectival experiences in the absence of a body. And suppose further that some of those ostensible postmortem experiences and reports are veridical—that is, that they provide accurate information about states of the physical world. For example, suppose my deceased Uncle Harry reports through a medium that he notices the red necktie I'm wearing—something which, in the physical realm, can only be discerned from a point of view in space and with properly functioning sensory receptors. How are survivalists supposed to make sense of that? Since in disembodied survival nothing is literally *at* (that is, extended at) any relevant location in space, there is apparently no basis for the alleged reports (transmitted through mediums) of a postmortem individual's perspectival awareness of what the living are doing or saying (that is, things that normally can only be observed or experienced from certain points of view in space). Presumably, when a person's body has decomposed (or at least ceased all organic functioning), nothing in space can anchor and provide the spatial orientation of a sensory experience.

Initially, it might seem as if survivalists have a way to avoid this apparent problem. Perhaps they need only say that postmortem individuals experience physical states of affairs *as if* they are perceived from a spatial position. After all, by hypothesis these individuals no longer have (functioning) sensory organs to mediate sensory experiences. So perhaps survivalists should say that perspectival postmortem experiences are at best only *ostensibly* sensory, not genuinely sensory. But what does that mean? Under one reasonable interpretation, it even seems to undercut the survivalist position. For without sensory information arriving at spatially oriented sensory organs, why should we say that with these experiences postmortem individuals are actually *gaining information* about a certain location? They seem, rather, merely to be *imagining* what's going on at a location.

Some of the more astute writers on mediumship have, in fact, taken this position, or at least come very close to it. For

instance, Una Lady Troubridge offered the following in connection with Gladys Leonard's mediumship.

...Feda employs a vocabulary of very limited extent wherein erudite psychological terms have no place. Beyond the occasional emergence of such non-committal spiritualistic terms as 'I sense' or 'I get an impression of,' Feda is content to tell the sitter that she 'sees,' 'hears,' 'feels,' or 'smells,' as the case may be, though the medium's eyes are invariably closed and neither the sights, sounds, sensations nor smells described are perceptible to the sitter.^[1]

...there are certain aspects of the Feda phenomena which leave me very doubtful as to whether these simple sensory terms convey any accurate analogy with the processes really involved.^[2]

For example, Troubridge reports that on one occasion Feda described 'to Miss Radclyffe-Hall with accuracy and in great detail a portrait of Miss Radclyffe-Hall herself'. Feda correctly noted the coloring of the picture, the pose of the figure and hands, and the seriousness of the figure's expression. According to Feda's own statements, she 'sees this picture and is able to describe it at such length, [but] never apparently for a moment grasps the fact that the picture being described by her is a portrait, and a striking resemblance at that, of the very familiar sitter to whom she is speaking'.^[3]

Similarly, Troubridge writes,

It is surely incredible that Feda or anyone else should see a person minus their most striking peculiarity of features or colouring, and yet this must frequently be presumed to be the case if Feda's seeing is to be accepted at face value. I have myself known her purport to see clearly a communicator whose appearance she minutely described, giving a perfectly accurate account of his features, complexion, expression, including the fact that he was remarkably handsome and struck her as having what she most evidentially described as 'a clear look', but she remained to all appearance in ignorance that the most distinguishing features of his appearance were prematurely snow-white hair of remarkable abundance, and eyes of a peculiarly vivid blue.^[4]

So Troubridge concludes that Feda's alleged 'sensory impressions could only be hallucinatory . . .'.^[5] Now, there is a venerable (if not exactly noble) tradition within psi research of speaking about veridical hallucinations—for example, in connection with apparitional experiences.^[6] However, even if that locution is defensible and not an oxymoron—which is certainly debatable—Troubridge seems to be using the term 'hallucination' in its more customary sense, according to which any correspondence between the content of hallucinatory experiences and actual states of affairs is fortuitous.

But survivalists should not want to treat all mediumistic perception reports as non-veridical in that sense. That is, they cannot treat communicators' ostensible perceptions *generally* as corresponding only fortuitously to the states of affairs in question, because those experiences are supposed to undergird some of the true claims communicators make about the physical world. And those true claims comprise most of the empirical support from mediumship for the survival hypothesis. On the contrary, survivalists must interpret *in causal terms* the ability of communicators to respond appropriately to interlocutors and to make true claims about the current physical world.

For example, they would say that when deceased communicator 'Uncle Harry' correctly describes the current location of an object in a sitter's house, what enables him to make that claim is his awareness of the actual state of the sitter's house. In that respect, at least, survivalists understand some ostensible postmortem cognitive states to be analogous to ante-mortem perception. Ordinarily we would say that I perceive—rather than merely imagine or hallucinate—the table before me because my experience results in part from my interaction with the object I perceive. And not only that. Ordinarily we suppose that my ability to *correctly describe* the objects I perceive is not random or accidental. In fact, we suppose it needs to be explained in terms of lawlike *causal regularities* having to do both with properties of the objects perceived and the physical properties of my sensory system.

For example, it is in virtue of those regularities that I am generally able to describe green objects as green or rectangular objects as rectangular. Granted, if I instead hallucinate or imagine the table, my inner episode might be qualitatively identical to a genuine perception of the table. But if the experience is not caused by the table before me, it is not a postmortem analogue to perception. Indeed, in the absence of relevant causal regularities between the object's properties and my own, it would seem to be a matter of sheer serendipity that I manage to describe the object correctly. So if postmortem communicators merely imagine or hallucinate things in the world, their alleged experiences would—at best—correspond only fortuitously to the states of the world they ostensibly represent. But that undercuts the principal basis for taking mediumship seriously.

So shrewd survivalists *must* claim that mediumistic communicators can interact causally with states of the physical world in a way that results in their having non-hallucinatory (or non-imaginary), non-bodily, and perhaps quasi-sensory

awareness of those states. And then we are back where we started; the question remains: In the absence of physical sensory receptors, how would a disembodied individual be able to correctly describe current physical states of affairs? What enables that individual to detect the causally relevant features of the object(s) correctly described? And what supplies the perspective from which the information is apparently received and from which veridical mediumistic claims seem to be made?

Unsatisfactory Causal Strategies

Several potential survivalist maneuvers clearly will not work here. For example, survivalists cannot claim that the medium's body temporarily supplies the physical basis for a communicator's sensory perspective, and that this enables communicators to perceive what is happening in the physical world. For one thing, communicators report that they are still aware of events in the physical world even when they are not interacting with a medium. And for another, communicators often report physical states of affairs at locations perceptually remote from the medium. Moreover, survivalists cannot maintain that a secondary or astral body supplies the needed perspective, because in some survival cases information is provided about matters that cannot be perceived from *any* position in space—for example, the contents of a page in a closed book. Must we conclude, then, that survivalists are committed to a process (postmortem awareness, with perspectival features analogous to those in ordinary sight and hearing) that, given the hypothesis of disembodied survival, seems to be incomprehensible or impossible?

One proposed strategy for preserving both logical coherence and veridicality is to posit telepathic causal chains between sitters (or remote others) and mediumistic communicators. For example, Troubridge says she suspects

that in many instances where Feda describes persons and objects, she uses the term 'seeing' merely as a habit of speech, and that the process involved may be more likely a series of impressions received by her telepathically one at a time, or collected by her telepathically one by one from some mind incarnate or discarnate, as the case may be.^[7]

Although this strategy seems intelligible, it, too, cannot be generalized to cover all communicators' reports of apparent sensory experiences. That is because communicators sometimes accurately report physical states of affairs unknown at the time to any living person and which are subsequently verified. Leonard's book tests offer prime examples.

Unsatisfactory Philosophical Maneuvers

In his well-known essay, 'Survival and the Idea of "Another World",' HH Price argued—contrary to the usual skeptical dismissals of survivalist claims—that the concept of a disembodied life subjectively similar to our own is at least intelligible.^[8] He described how a dreamlike world of images could provide a postmortem individual with a first-person analogue to our subjective ante-mortem existence. And he suggested, further, that telepathic interactions between the deceased (including the telepathic production of apparitions) might furnish an analogue to objective relations and interactions between individuals in this world.

Now whether or not Price successfully demonstrates the intelligibility of a disembodied life in a next world, his conjectures are of no help to the survivalist in the present context. That is because Price fails to explain how postmortem individuals manage to acquire veridical and apparently perspectival awareness of *this* world. In fact, Price makes no effort to explain how the deceased, locked into their own exclusively postmortem nexus of paranormal causality, interact with the living to produce *evidence* of their survival. Evidence of survival within a Pricean next world requires empirically discernable manifestations of postmortem existence—in particular, the deceased's continuing psychology (intentions, concerns, and so on). But that, in turn, requires some chain of causality *running in both directions* between the living and the deceased, allowing for mutual awareness and communication. But that is precisely what Price fails to posit, and without it, anti-survivalist interpretations of survival cases (including those that posit nothing but living-agent or so-called 'super' psi) seem to have a clear explanatory edge.^[9]

Price even appears to grant as much in another paper, 'The Problem of Life After Death'.^[10] In that paper he suggests that mediums might engage in a kind of 'dreaming aloud', in which (as in normal dreaming) they imaginatively supply their own apparently perceptual perspective, and in which they occasionally acquire veridical information about this world by ESP. Of course, that is simply an appeal to the sort of refined living-agent ESP that many survivalists mistakenly argue is antecedently implausible. Later we will consider more closely why that survivalist position is mistaken.

But let us return now to the issue of apparently perspectival postmortem experience, and in particular to a proposal advanced by Terence Penelhum.^[11] At first, Penelhum seems to agree with Price that disembodied communicators enjoy

an inner life of dreamlike images. But then he suggests, further, that we can construe these merely *seeing as if* (that is, only apparently sensory) experiences as cases of *genuine* seeing. Unfortunately, however, that approach seems to suffer from problems analogous to those afflicting the claim (provisionally attributed to Troubridge) that all communicators' apparently sensory experiences are hallucinatory.

Penelhum writes,

....there seems no difficulty in saying of a disembodied person that it might look to him as though there were objects before him which looked to him as they would to a normal observer under optimal circumstances from a certain position in space. I feel obliged to start from some such account as this because I can attach no sense to the notion of seeing from no point of view, or seeing non-perspectively. Given the intelligibility of this story, and given that there *are* objects in space arranged as stated, it seems quite pedantic to deny... that our disembodied person *sees* them[.] So let us say he does.^[12]

There are several issues here. First, Penelhum may be right that the notion of *seeing* from no point of view is unintelligible or empty. However, he may also have overlooked a viable option. The evidence from relatively humdrum clairvoyance indicates that subjects can be *aware* in some sense of physical states of affairs (for example, targets sealed in envelopes) whose sensory perception ordinarily requires being suitably situated in space, but which at the time could not be perceived from any position in space. Thus, the evidence from clairvoyance can be taken to show that veridical awareness of physical states of affairs is possible even when there is no actual point of view from which the states of affairs can be accessed by sensory means. So even if non-perspectival *perception* is unintelligible, non-perspectival *awareness* seems to be a genuine option in both logical and empirical space. We will return to this point later.

Moreover, it seems easy to demonstrate the implausibility of Penelhum's suggestion that a disembodied person really sees objects under the conditions he describes—that is, conditions we might have described instead as being merely of the *seeing as if* variety. Consider the following situation. Suppose an embodied person *S* hallucinates an object *X* as being before him. Furthermore, since every hallucination (even the most fantastic or seemingly arbitrary) has some cause or other, let us suppose that *S*'s experience occurs as the result of a hallucinogen mischievously added to his breakfast cereal. But suppose further that *X* is really before *S*, so that *S* would have had a qualitatively identical visual experience had he *seen* rather than hallucinated *X*. Now, because *S*'s experience of *X* is caused by his spiked cereal rather than by *X*, its phenomenal content corresponds only fortuitously to what is actually in *S*'s perceptual field. That is why we would not say that *S* saw or perceived *X* in this case. But then why attribute genuine seeing to a disembodied person *S_d* whose visual experience merely happens to be that which an embodied person would have from a certain position in space? It *does not* seem at all pedantic to say that *S_d* fails to really see the object.

Indeed, as noted earlier, whether or not *S* sees *X* is something that needs to be cashed out in terms of an appropriate causal story. In particular, the existence, veridicality, and perhaps also the phenomenal (perspectival) quality of *S*'s experience must be explainable, in part at least, as the *result* of lawlike causal relations obtaining between *X* and *S*. But on Penelhum's proposal, a sufficient condition for *S*'s genuinely seeing a person wearing a pink shirt is the mere fact that the person is wearing a pink shirt. Incredibly, it would not matter whether the content of *S*'s experience is causally related to the state of the world it ostensibly represents. Hence, for Penelhum, genuine seeing (or sensing) gets robbed of its essential nomological (lawlike) character.

Interestingly, Penelhum seems to recognize this. At one point he considers whether to assign the disembodied observer a location in space—that is, a position from which *X* would look to a normal observer the way it does to the disembodied *S*. And he writes: 'we have to say that the disembodied person is at the place from which, when a normal observer sees the objects which our survivor now sees, they look to that observer the way they look to our survivor. Roughly, he has to be at the centre of his visual field'.^[13]

But then Penelhum notes, 'the first thing that seems to follow is that his seeing things the way he does cannot be construed as a [causal] *consequence* of his being where he is, for his being where he is *consists in* his seeing things the way he does'.^[14] And once again, the example above about hallucinating *X* shows why this will not work. We must still be able to differentiate hallucinating or imagining *X* from seeing (or otherwise being genuinely aware of) *X*, whether or not *S* is embodied. But we cannot do that unless we can tell some causal story about how the existence and nature of *S*'s experience results (in part at least) from the presence of *X* in the world and also lawlike regularities obtaining between *S* and *X*.

Interestingly, there is a notorious philosophical position, *phenomenalism*, according to which physical objects—although real—are nothing more than logical constructs out of more primitive sense-data (that is, raw ingredients of perception,

such as patches of color, shapes, textures, odors, and so on). So, for example, phenomenals would say that the table before me is not really a lump of mind-independent matter affecting my equally material, mind-independent, and lumpy sense organs. Rather, the table is nothing more than a construct out of the sense-data I do in fact currently experience and also the sense-data I and others *would* experience under an indefinitely large array of possible (that is, counterfactual) circumstances. And those possible circumstances would likewise be analyzed in purely subjective sensory terms—for example, having the experience of seeing the table through tinted glasses, or having the experience of lying beneath the table, or of seeing the table from a great distance.

So in the spirit of phenomenism, some might think we can salvage the hallucination/perception distinction by claiming that only in the case of perception can we tell an appropriately robust counterfactual story. What we would need to say would be something like the following: When a person genuinely perceives an object *X*, others, also having the experience of being suitably situated with respect to *X*, would also have experiences of *X* from corresponding points of view. However, if *S* merely hallucinated *X*, there would be no such correlations between what *S* experiences and what others do or *would* experience. For example, if I hallucinate (rather than perceive) a hippo in the corner, we would not expect others having the experience of looking in that direction also to have visual hippo-in-the-corner inner episodes.

Of course, ordinary folk would explain this difference between hallucination and perception with respect to actual or possible relationships between observers and mind-independent physical objects. They would say that in the case of genuine perception there really *is* some lump of matter that affects *S*'s sense organs in accordance with various causal laws, and which does or would likewise affect the sense organs of suitably situated others. But that avenue is not open to someone who construes physical objects as *constructs* out of actual and possible sense experiences, or as John Stuart Mill put it, 'permanent possibilities of sensation'.

So, unfortunately for the phenomenist, there seems to be no comparable causal story, since on that view there are no mind-independent lumps of matter to interact causally with a perceiver's sense organs. And that renders the difference between hallucination and perception completely mysterious. Unless one is prepared to abandon strict phenomenism and posit a deity behind the scenes either arranging things in advance (à la Leibniz) or holding models (archetypes) of objects in mind (à la Berkeley), phenomenists have no explanation of why suitably situated possible observers *would* have the experience of perceiving a physical object. Of course, if survivalists were to adopt this phenomenist strategy that might be the least of their problems. They would also inherit *all* the famous problems afflicting the phenomenist program, including having to defend themselves against the charge of solipsism and having to explain how—on their idiosyncratically empiricist grounds—they can justify reference to other minds. But that is another story.^[15]

A Non-Solution

With the foregoing in mind, we are now in a position to consider how survivalists might best respond to the puzzles about perspectival postmortem awareness. A promising strategy—arguably the only one—is to focus on the point noted earlier about humdrum clairvoyance—namely, that the evidence demonstrates how living persons can have a kind of non-perceptual awareness of remote physical states (for example, targets in sealed envelopes, pages of a closed book) whose perception ordinarily requires being suitably situated at a location, but which at the time could not be perceived from any position in space. Since that form of awareness apparently does not rely on ordinary (or, quite possibly, any) spatial cues, survivalists might therefore argue that postmortem awareness of the physical world is 'merely' clairvoyance, and that the only difference between ante-mortem and postmortem clairvoyance is the ontological status of the subject. Survivalists can thereby deflect concerns about perspectival perception; they would be positing no form of perception at all. On this view, mediumistic communicators (like successful clairvoyant subjects) can enjoy either perspectival or non-perspectival awareness (not perception) of physical states in the absence of suitably positioned sensory organs.

This strategy has several virtues. First, it connects the survival hypothesis to a large body of both experimental and anecdotal evidence for clairvoyance. So even though some aspects of the survival hypothesis strike many as wildly conjectural, this way of interpreting the hypothesis at least gives it a kind of empirical footing, albeit partial and still somewhat controversial. Second, it preserves the pretheoretically useful distinction between (on the one hand) hallucinating, imagining, or dreaming of an object and (on the other hand) having a veridical and non-fortuitous awareness of it causally mediated by that object. After all, however unusual it may be in other respects, clairvoyance is still a fundamentally causal concept. To posit clairvoyant awareness is to posit a causal link between the subject and the remote state of affairs of which the subject is aware. Granted, the mechanisms of clairvoyance, if there are any,^[16] may be mysterious. But assuming clairvoyance really occurs (as various converging strands of evidence indicate strongly), and especially if it ranges over objects not currently perceivable from any position in space, then we may need to regard it as a form of veridical awareness that differs profoundly from paradigmatically emanative or transmissive forms of perception

such as seeing and hearing.^[17]

And if we are willing to take that step, we might find it tempting to make a further bold move. We could entertain seriously the exciting possibility that ordinary sensory (that is, embodied) perception is merely a special, biologically-or organismically-mediated case of a more primitive form of clairvoyant awareness operating outside a strictly biological domain. That is, we could regard ESP (both telepathy and clairvoyance) as basic—and a typically unconscious or subconscious—way by which at least some complex organisms acquire information about mental and physical states of the world. Then we could take ordinary conscious and discursive forms of awareness to be considerably less frequent subsets of those interactions not only mediated by, but also constrained by, the organism's needs and limitations.

This would not be a new point. In fact, HH Price once cautiously advanced a similar suggestion and linked it to Leibniz's monadic theory.^[18] For Leibniz, each monad (mental unit) represents or expresses the entire universe from a point of view, and that process of representing or expressing the universe is what Leibniz termed 'perception'. Price controversially interprets that claim as meaning that perception for Leibniz is always both telepathic and clairvoyant. It is doubtful whether that reading of Leibniz is justified, but in any case there are more serious obstacles to resolving the present problems in terms of Leibniz's monadology. For one thing, it is probably not a good idea to dissolve the distinction between perceptual and non-perceptual awareness. As the preceding discussion has illustrated, that distinction has considerable utility. Second, Leibniz's metaphysics works only through the grace of a benevolent deity arranging all perception according to a principle of pre-established harmony. And third, even if we manage to purge this view of its theological trappings, we would still need to explain 'why there *seems* to be so little clairvoyance, and why the vast bulk of our perceptions or representations remain unconscious'.^[19] At any rate, important as this thread may be, it is an avenue of speculation that must be reserved for another time.

A third virtue of the approach we are considering concerns the fact that much of the evidence for clairvoyance points to a form of awareness not necessarily accompanied by rich mental imagery, or in fact any imagery at all. For example, in classic card-guessing experiments, many anecdotal reports, and even in some successful remote-viewing trials, subjects may report nothing outstanding in the way of internal imagery, although they often have hunches and impulses to act. In that respect, clairvoyance would resemble subliminal perception, which also occurs in the absence of reportable phenomenal correlates. However, it differs from subliminal perception in that the latter relies on familiar causal links to objects in one's vicinity, the same kind that account also for the perspectival nature of ordinary, non-subliminal perception. By contrast, in clairvoyance the spatial location of a person's sensory receptors presumably plays no causal role.

The reason all this is important is that it offers a precedent for those survivalists willing to claim that postmortem communicators can have veridical awareness of physical states in the absence of mental imagery caused by those states. Granted, communicators often use perception terms to describe their states of awareness, but as Una Lady Troubridge suggested, that may indicate nothing more than our limited linguistic options for reporting those states. We need not suppose that the awareness is actually accompanied by vivid, ordinary, or any mental imagery—the kind that has traditionally generated the puzzles we have been considering. So by modeling postmortem awareness after 'ordinary' clairvoyance, survivalists can posit a process distinguished from both hallucination and subliminal perception by either the existence or nature of their causal links to the physical world, but which (like subliminal perception) lacks the familiar phenomenal features associated with ordinary sensory perception.

Therefore, it may be prudent for survivalists to adopt a threefold strategy: first, to claim that postmortem communicators can be clairvoyantly (not perceptually) aware of physical states; second, to claim that this type of awareness may or may not be accompanied by internal imagery; and third, to claim that when there is imagery it is explainable either in terms of causal properties of the objects of which the subject is aware or else by the subject's own creative and idiosyncratic tendencies to generate internal imagery—just as seems to be the case with living subjects in successful clairvoyance experiments.^[20]

Of course, many survivalists will probably be reluctant to pursue this strategy, because then they would clearly need to abandon an argument they unwisely use against the rival living-agent-psi hypothesis—namely, that this hypothesis posits a kind and degree of psychic functioning that is antecedently implausible, or at least far in excess of any that has been demonstrated experimentally. Whether they like it or not, non-bodily postmortem awareness of the physical world would be a paradigm instance of clairvoyance. It would be an awareness of physical states unmediated by the physical and sensory mechanisms leading to ordinary perception. Moreover, in scope, consistency, or refinement it would not differ significantly from the clairvoyance that living-agent-psi proponents attribute instead to mediums or sitters. On the contrary, every exchange of information between a communicator and the mind of a living person, and every

apprehension by a communicator of a physical state of affairs, would be an instance of ESP. And of course, the mediumistic evidence for survival consists of a great many of these purported events, many of them quite startling in the specificity and obscurity of the information they provide.

So, ironically, the best defense against the arguments noted earlier might be one that undercuts a standard attack that survivalists use against their chief parapsychological rival. It would require an explicit and serious concession to psi-sympathetic anti-survivalists: an endorsement of the view that the survival hypothesis presupposes the operation of refined or frequent clairvoyance and telepathy between the deceased and the physical world.

It seems, then, that survivalists are faced with the following challenge. First, they must learn to embrace the possibility of refined psi if they plan to count mediumship as a source of evidence for survival and if they hope to counter the puzzles we have considered about perspectival postmortem experiences. That is the only way survivalists can satisfactorily explain postmortem awareness of both physical states of affairs and also thoughts of the living. So not only is the appeal to postmortem ESP mandated by the survival hypothesis, it also offers significant explanatory benefits. But in that case, if survivalists hope to argue effectively against living-agent psi as a general alternative to the survival hypothesis, they must rely on some strategy other than asserting the implausibility of so-called 'super psi'. Probably, survivalists can escape this dilemma only by claiming—without any clear justification—that the anti-survivalist appeal to living-agent psi posits not simply the unfortunately labeled super-psi, but something much grander and considerably more implausible. Let us call it (with tongue firmly and appropriately in cheek) *supercalifragilisticexpialidocious psi*.

It should be emphasized that the foregoing is not an argument against the survival hypothesis, even though it appealed to clairvoyance to solve the more thoughtful puzzles raised about ostensible postmortem awareness. If the approach just noted has any merit, it merely demonstrates again, and from another angle, why survivalists should abandon the all-too-common insistence on the *general* implausibility of anti-survivalist appeals to psi among the living. Granted, it also reinforces a conclusion defended elsewhere at length: that it is exceedingly difficult to defend the survival hypothesis against the hypothesis of living-agent psi.^[21] Nevertheless (and perhaps most important), it demonstrates how survivalists can deflect the usual concerns about the intelligibility of the survival hypothesis without severing needed causal links between the worlds of the living and the deceased.^[22]

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References

Footnotes

- 1.^ Troubridge, 1922, p. 369.
- 2.^ Ibid.
- 3.^ Ibid, pp. 370-71.
- 4.^ Ibid, pp. 371-72.
- 5.^ Ibid, p. 369.
- 6.^ See Braude, 1997, for a discussion of this.
- 7.^ Op, cit., p. 371. See also Salter, 1921, pp. 87ff.
- 8.^ Price, 1953
- 9.^ 'Super psi' is a very unfortunate term which by now is probably too well-entrenched to abandon successfully. For a discussion of the problems with that clearly loaded expression, see Braude, 2003. The best alternative strategy is to follow Michael Sudduth in replacing the term 'super psi' with the less prejudicial and clearer 'living-agent psi' Sudduth, 2009.
- 10.^ Price, 1968.
- 11.^ Penelhum, 1970
- 12.^ Ibid, p. 25.
- 13.^ Ibid, p. 25.
- 14.^ Ibid, pp. 25-26.
- 15.^ See Aune, 1985 for a nice summary.
- 16.^ For comments on the possibly irreducible nature of paranormal causal connections, see Braude, 1997, 2003.
- 17.^ See also Broad, 1953.
- 18.^ Price, 1940.
- 19.^ Ibid, p. 57.
- 20.^ For more on the idiosyncratic and highly variable experiences of clairvoyant subjects, see Braude, 2003: chapter 8.
- 21.^ See Braude, 2003 and Sudduth, 2016.
- 22.^ This article is adapted from Braude, 2009. See the latter for some issues not addressed here.