

IS A LIFE AFTER DEATH POSSIBLE?

[This article is adapted from an address delivered by Prof. C. J. Ducasse as a Foerster Lecture under the auspices of the University of California at Berkeley. (A more extended version of the paper appeared earlier this year in the *Newsletter* of the Parapsychology Foundation.) Prof. Ducasse teaches philosophy at Brown University and is the author of books recently reviewed in *MANAS*, *Nature*, *Mind*, and *Death*, and *A Philosophical Scrutiny of Religion*.—Editors, *MANAS*.]

THE question whether human personality survives death is sometimes asserted to be one upon which reflection is futile. Only empirical evidence, it is said, can be relevant, since the question is purely one of fact.

But no question is purely one of fact until it is clearly understood; and this one is, on the contrary, ambiguous and replete with tacit assumptions. Until the ambiguities have been removed and the assumptions critically examined, we do not really know just what it is we want to know when we ask whether a life after death is possible. Nor, therefore, can we tell until then what bearing on this question various facts empirically known to us may have.

To clarify its meaning is chiefly what I now propose to attempt. And finally, I shall consider briefly a number of specific forms which a life after death might take, if there is one.

To begin with, let us note that each of us here has been alive and conscious at all times in the past which he can remember. It is true that sometimes our bodies are in deep sleep, or made inert by anesthetics or injuries. But even at such times we do not experience unconsciousness in ourselves, for to experience it would mean being conscious of being unconscious, and this is a contradiction. The only experience of unconsciousness in ourselves we ever have is, not experience of total unconsciousness, but of unconsciousness *of this or that*; as when we report: "I am not conscious of any pain," or "of any bell-sound," or "of any difference between those two colors," etc. Nor do we ever experience

unconsciousness in another person, but only the fact that, sometimes, some or all of the ordinary activities of his body cease to occur. That consciousness itself is extinguished at such times is thus only a hypothesis which we construct to account for certain changes in the behavior of another person's body or to explain in him or in ourselves the eventual lack of memories relating to the given period.

Being alive and conscious is thus, with all men, a lifelong experience and habit; and conscious life is therefore something they naturally—even if tacitly—expect to continue. As J. B. Pratt has pointed out, the child takes the continuity of life for granted. It is the fact of death that has to be taught him. But when he has learned it, and the idea of a future life is then put explicitly before his mind, it seems to him the most natural thing in the world.

The witnessing of death, however, is a rare experience for most of us, and, because it breaks so sharply into our habits, it forces on us the question whether the mind, which until then was manifested by the body now dead, continues somehow to live on, or, on the contrary, has become totally extinct. This question is commonly phrased as concerning "the immortality of the soul," and immortality, strictly speaking, means survival forever. But assurance of survival for some considerable period—say a thousand, or even a hundred, years—would probably have almost as much present psychological value as would assurance of survival strictly forever. Most men would be troubled very little by the idea of extinction at so distant a time—even less troubled than is now a healthy and happy youth by the idea that he will die in fifty or sixty years. Therefore, it is survival for some time, rather than survival specifically forever, that I shall alone consider.

The craving for continued existence is very widespread. Even persons who believe that death means complete extinction of the individual's consciousness often find comfort in various substitute conceptions of survival. They may, for

instance, dwell on the continuity of the individual's germ plasm in his descendants. Or they find solace in the thought that, the past being indestructible, their individual life remains eternally an intrinsic part of the history of the world. Also—and more satisfying to one's craving for personal importance—there is the fact that since the acts of one's life have effects, and these in turn further effects, and so on, therefore what one has done goes on forever influencing remotely, and sometimes greatly, the course of future events. But survival in any of these senses is but a consolation prize—a thin substitute for the continuation of conscious individual life, which may not be a fact, but which most men crave nonetheless.

The roots of this craving are certain desires which death appears to frustrate. For some, the chief of these is for reunion with persons dearly loved. For others, whose lives have been wretched, it is the desire for another chance at the happiness they have missed. For others yet, it is desire for further opportunity to grow in ability, knowledge or character. Often, there is also the desire, already mentioned, to go on counting for something in the affairs of men. And again, a future life for oneself and others is often desired in order that the redressing of the many injustices of this life shall be possible. But it goes without saying that, although desires such as these are often sufficient to cause belief in a future life, they constitute no evidence at all that it is a fact.

In this connection, it may be well to point out that, although both the belief in survival and the belief in the existence of a god or gods are found in most religions, nevertheless there is no necessary connection between the two beliefs. No contradiction would be involved in supposing either that there is a God but no life after death or that there is a life after death but no God. The belief that there is a life after death may be tied to a religion, but it is no more intrinsically religious than would be a belief that there is life on the planet Mars. The after-death world, if it exists, is just another region or dimension of the universe.

If absence of memories relating to a given period proved unconsciousness for that period, this would force us to conclude that we were

unconscious during the first few years of our lives, and indeed have been so most of the time since; for the fact is that we have no memories whatever of most of our days. That we were alive and conscious on any long past specific date is, with only a few exceptions, not something we actually remember, but only something which we infer must be true.

Another argument advanced against survival is that death must extinguish the mind, since all manifestations of it then cease. But to assert that they invariably then cease is to ignore altogether the considerable amount of evidence to the contrary, gathered over many years and carefully checked by the societies of psychical research. This evidence, which is of a variety of kinds, has been reviewed by Professor Gardner Murphy in an article published in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* (Jan. 1945). He mentions first the numerous well-authenticated cases of apparition of a dead person to others as yet unaware that he had died or even been ill or in danger. The more strongly evidential cases of apparition are those in which apparition conveys to the person who sees it specific facts until then secret. When one takes the trouble to study the detailed, original reports, it then becomes evident that they cannot all be just laughed off. To *explain* those facts, however, is quite another thing. Only two hypotheses at all adequate to do so have yet been advanced. One is that the communications really come, as they purport to do, from persons who have died and have survived death. The other is the hypothesis of telepathy—that is, the supposition, itself startling enough, that the medium is able to gather information directly from the minds of others, and that this is the true source of the information communicated. To account for all the facts, however, this hypothesis has to be stretched very far, for some of them require us to suppose that the medium can tap the minds even of persons far away and quite unknown to him, and can tap even the subconscious part of their minds.

Diverse highly ingenious attempts have been made to devise conditions that would rule out telepathy as a possible explanation of the communications received; but some of the most critical and best-documented investigators still hold

that it has not yet been absolutely excluded. Hence, although some of the facts recorded by psychical research constitute, *prima facie*, strong empirical evidence of survival, they cannot be said to establish it beyond question. But they do show that we need to revise rather radically in some respects our ordinary ideas of what is and is not possible in nature. It will be useful for us to pause a moment and inquire why so many persons approach the question of survival with a certain unconscious metaphysical bias. It derives from a particular initial assumption which they tacitly make. It is that *to be real is to be material*. And to be material, of course, is to be some process or part of the perceptually public world, that is, of the world we all perceive by means of our so-called five senses.

Now the assumption that to be real is to be material is a useful and appropriate one for the purpose of investigating the material world and of operating upon it; and this purpose is a legitimate and frequent one. But those persons, and most of us, do not realize that the validity of that assumption is strictly relative to that specific purpose. Hence they, and most of us, continue making the assumption, and it continues to rule judgment, even when, as now, the purpose in view is a different one, for which the assumption is no longer useful or even congruous. The point is all-important here and therefore worth stressing. Its essence is that the conception of the nature of reality that proposes to define the real as the material is not the expression of an observable fact to which everyone would have to bow, but is the expression only of a certain direction of interest on the part of the persons who so define reality—of interest, namely, which they have chosen to center wholly in the material, perceptually public world. This specialized interest is of course as legitimate as any other, but it automatically ignores all the facts, commonly called facts of mind, which only introspection reveals. I now submit that no paradox at all is really involved in the supposition that some forms of consciousness may exist independently of connection with animal or human bodies; and, therefore, that survival is at least theoretically possible.

If so, there now remains only to describe briefly some of the forms a life after death might conceivably take. The simplest form survival might take would consist in the continuation of a single state of consciousness after death. This state conceivably might be the last state of a given person's consciousness immediately before death; or it might be a state of blissful ecstasy analogous to that which the mystics report; or it might on the contrary consist of a feeling of anguish or pain; or it might be any other state of consciousness.

If some one state thus absorbed the whole consciousness and no change in it occurred, then even the passage of time would no longer be experienced and the given state would therefore be eternal in the sense of timeless, whether or not it were also eternal in the sense of enduring forever. The hypothesis that no change in it occurs evidently precludes the possibility that one might eventually get bored with the given state, since to suppose so would be to suppose that a new state, namely, consciousness of boredom, has supervened.

There is no evidence, I believe, that survival in this sense is a fact; nor, on the other hand, that it is impossible. But it could hardly be called *personal* survival; and it would hardly satisfy any of the desires we mentioned at the outset which make men crave survival.

Another possible form of survival would consist in survival of the personality—that is, of one's memories, knowledge, interests, mental skills, and so on—but without advent of new impressions from an environment, or any action upon an environment.

On this hypothesis, the occupation of the surviving person could consist in reviewing memories, reflecting upon them, extracting from them such wisdom as reflection can yield; and possibly also in mental invention of various kinds, for instance, poetic, pictorial, musical, or mathematical. Persons not thus creative, however, would be restricted to reflecting on their memories and distilling such wisdom as might be latent in these. And, even if all one's lost memories were recovered, this process of mulling over them would inevitably sooner or later exhaust them and become boring.

Personal survival in this wholly subjective form would in any case fail to satisfy the desire for reunion with persons one loved; or the desire for continuation of objective achievement and of exploration of an objective universe; or the desire for correction of the injustices of life on earth, except so far as reflection on one's evil deeds might happen to generate punishing remorse.

No grounds appear for regarding survival in this sense as impossible; and the paucity of detail as to the after-death environment, in the communications purportedly received from surviving personalities, would be fairly consonant with what could be expected if survival were the kind just described. Moreover, the surviving personality might easily mistake memory-images of dead relatives for those relatives themselves; and it might mistake the images it itself constructed, of an after-death environment, for a truly objective environment.

A third possible form of survival would add to survival in the sense just described, the occurrence of novel images, caused, like our sensations now, somehow independently of the will, and, like them, resistant to alteration by the will except in accordance with laws not of its own making. It is well to note that even if these images were only of colors, they would nonetheless, in virtue merely of their adventitiousness and possession of intrinsic properties, be taken by the beholder, like our visual sensations now, as appearances of an environment independently existing.

If, however, those images were not only of colors, but also of sounds, odors, temperatures, pressures, and so on, then the surviving personality would have exactly the same reasons we now have for regarding itself as being in a material environment; although, of course, the material objects composing it might be as different in kind from those of earth as the objects to be found in the polar regions are different from those in the tropics.

Then, evidently, the question would arise: What relation is there in space or time between that after-death material world and the material world we now know? The former might conceivably be some planet in one of the many other solar systems. But it

might equally be this earth itself again, at some later period, the personality having perhaps in the interval been occupied in brooding over and distilling its memories in the manner already suggested.

Such a state of affairs would correspond to the idea, commonly called metempsychosis or reincarnation, that man has a life after death, and that it takes the form of later lives on this earth. W. R. Alger, in his elaborate *Critical History of the Doctrine of a Future Life* (p. 475), declares that "no other doctrine has exerted so extensive, controlling, and permanent an influence upon mankind as that of the metempsychosis—the notion that when the soul leaves the body it is born anew in another body, its rank, character, circumstances, and experience in each successive existence depending on its qualities, deeds, and attainments in its preceding lives."

Of the various conceptions of survival this is the most concrete. Because what it supposes is so like the life we know, it can be imagined most clearly. The skeptical philosopher, David Hume, although not himself professing it, asserts that metempsychosis is the only conception of survival that philosophy can hearken to. An examination of its merits in a little detail will therefore be of interest here. It has been held in a variety of forms, including that of rebirth as an animal or even as a plant. But rebirth in human shape is the only form of it which, among us, is likely to be thought worth considering. The remarks which follow therefore have it alone in view.

A number of difficulties in the way of it immediately suggest themselves. One is, of course, that we have no recollection of having lived before; another, that the native peculiarities of a person's mind appear to be derived from his forebears in accordance with the laws of heredity. A third is that an individual's personality is not something he is born with, but something he develops in the course of his life, out of his dealings with others and with nature. Hence rebirth would in any case not constitute *personal* survival. Indeed, one may well ask *what* then could be said to be reborn. Did one remember previous lives, they could be thought of as various parts successively enacted by one and the same actor, memory supplying the thread of identity.

But, in the absence of memory, no difference whatever appears to remain between rebirth and the birth, at some time after death, of another person altogether. Let us consider these difficulties and see what, if anything, might be said to meet them.

As for the fact that none of us remembers having lived before, I pointed out earlier that if absence of memory of having existed at a certain time proved that we did not exist at that time, it would then prove far too much. It would prove that we did not exist during the first few years of our present life, nor on most of the days since then, for we have no memories whatever of the great majority of them, nor of those first few years; and yet we have very good external reasons to believe that we have existed continuously since the time of our birth. Lack of memory of lives earlier than our present one is therefore no evidence at all that we cannot have lived before.

Moreover, there is occasional testimony of recollection of a previous life, where the recollection is quite circumstantial and even alleged to have been verified. One such case may be cited here without any claim that it establishes pre-existence, but only to substantiate the assertion that specific testimony of this kind exists. Evidently, testimony cannot be dismissed here any more than elsewhere merely because it happens to clash with an antecedent belief the empirical basis of which is only that we have not met before with such testimony. So to proceed would be to become guilty of the fallacy *argumentum ad ignorantiam*. If pre-existence should happen to be a fact, it is obvious that the only possible empirical evidence of it would consist of verifiable recollections such as testified to in the case about to be described.

It is that of "The Rebirth of Katsugoro," recorded in detail and with many affidavits respecting the facts, in an old Japanese document translated by Lafcadio Hearn. The story is in brief that a young boy called Katsugoro, son of a man called Genzo in the village of Nakanomura, declared that in his preceding life a few years before he had been called Tozo; that he was then the son of a farmer called Kyubei and his wife Shidzu in a village called Hodokubo that his father had died and had

been replaced in the household by a man called Hanshiro; and that he himself, Tozo, had died of smallpox at the age of six, a year after his father. He described his burial, the appearance of his former parents, and their house. He eventually was taken to their village, where such persons were found. He himself led the way to their house and recognized them; and they confirmed the facts he had related. Further, he pointed to a shop and a tree, saying that they had not been there before; and this was true.

Testimony of this kind is directly relevant to the question of rebirth. The recollections related in this case are much too circumstantial to be dismissed as instances of the familiar and psychologically well-understood illusion of *déjà vu*. And although the testimony that they were verified is not proof that they were, it cannot be rejected *a priori*. Its reliability has to be evaluated in terms of the same standards by which the validity of testimonial evidence concerning anything else is appraised.

Let us next consider the objection that, without the awareness of identity which memory provides, rebirth would not be discernibly different from the death of one person followed by the birth of another. In this connection, Lamont quotes Leibniz' question: "Of what use would it be to you, sir, to become king of China, on condition that you forgot what you have been? Would it not be the same as if God, at the same time he destroyed you, created a king in China?"

But continuousness of memory, rather than preservation of a comprehensive span of memories, is what is significant for consciousness of one's identity. Thus, for example, none of us finds his sense of identity impaired by the fact that he has no memories of the earliest years of his present life. And if, on each day, he had a stock of memories relating to, let us say, only the then preceding ten years, or some other perhaps even shorter period, this would provide all that would be needed for a continuous sense of identity. The knowledge he would have of his personal history would, it is true, comprise a shorter span than it now does, but the span in either case would have an earliest term, and in either case the personality known would have a substantial amount of historical dimension.

That the sense of identity depends on gradualness of change in ourselves, rather than on preservation unchanged of any specific part of ourselves, strikes one forcibly when he chances to find letters, perhaps, which he wrote thirty or forty years before. Many of them may awaken no recollections whatever, even of the existence of the persons to whom they were addressed. And it sometimes seems incredible also that the person who wrote the things they contain should be the same as his present self. In truth, it is not the same in any strict sense, but only continuous with the former person. Yet between then and now the sense of identity was at no time lacking. Nevertheless, a gap—a complete discontinuity—is constituted by the fact that no memory either of any discarnate or incarnate previous life is present in the new-born infant; nor is, in the vast majority of cases, gained at any later age. If, however, we suppose that memory of earlier lives is regained during the interval between incarnate lives, or at the end of the series of incarnations (if it has an end), then this would provide an intelligible sense (in terms of memories) for the statement that several incarnate lives are lives of *one* individual.

One more objection remains to be examined. As we have seen, the belief in survival has for one of its roots the desire that the injustices of this earth should eventually be redressed. That belief has therefore generally been coupled with a belief that they would be redressed after death. And, when survival has been conceived as later lives on earth, the belief that justice reigns has taken the form of belief that the good and evil deeds, the strivings, the experiences, and the merits and faults of one life, all would have their appropriate fruits in subsequent lives—in short, that as a man soweth, so shall he also reap; and, one might add, that as this or that experience is sowed into a man by events, so shall he bring forth.

But now, it is objected that, without memory of what one is being rewarded or punished for, one learns nothing from the retribution, which is then ethically useless. This, in fact, was the essential point of the passage from Leibniz quoted earlier. Leibniz was considering Descartes' conception of the

soul as a "substance" and therefore immortal, and contending that "like matter, so the soul will change in shape, and as with matter . . . it will indeed be possible for this soul to be immortal, but it will go through a thousand changes and will not remember what it has been. But this immortality without memory is wholly useless to ethics; for it subverts all reward and all punishment." And then comes the passage quoted earlier: "Of what use would it be to you, sir, to become king of China, on condition that you forgot what you have been?"

But all this is obviously based on a tacit and gratuitous ascription to the universe of the twin human impulses, vindictiveness and gratitude. It is these only which lead one to conceive a just future life after the analogy of a penitentiary or a pleasaunce, rather than after the analogy of a school. The circumstances and endowments of an individual in a subsequent life on earth could, however, be thought of, not as rewards or punishments, but as natural and quite automatic consequences of his conduct and experiences in preceding lives. This would mean that, even without the least realization by the individual that they are consequences, they could yet be of the very kinds suited to quicken or foster in him, for example, patience, or courage, or kindness, or reflectiveness, or veracity, or initiative, or whatever other virtues of heart, head, or spirit he happened to lack—and the lack of which was what, in some purely automatic way, had caused his rebirth now to be in a setup more or less conducive to their acquisition. That a given mathematical problem is *hard* is not a punishment for a student's lack of mathematical skill, but simply a consequence of the lack; and to have to solve a problem hard for him is the very thing he needs if he is to develop the skill he does not yet possess. The case might well be similar where the personal problems of the individual's life on earth are concerned. Then, as already suggested, this earth, viewed in cosmic rather than myopic perspective, would be for man essentially a school.

Thus, whether or not survival as plurality of lives on earth is a fact, it is at least coherently thinkable and not incompatible with any facts empirically known to us today. In one form or another it has been the conception of survival

probably most widespread among the peoples of the earth. Herodotus, who visited ancient Egypt, spoke with its people and with the priests in its temples, reports that it was accepted there. Among the peoples of the East it is to this day the most generally held. And it has commended itself also to some of the most acute thinkers of the West. Among these have been Plato and Plotinus, Origen and some others of the early Christian fathers. Indeed, the statement twice reported of Jesus (Matt. II:14; 17:12, 13) that John the Baptist was the prophet Elijah who was to come, suggests that Jesus himself perhaps held the doctrine.

Among Western philosophers of later times, we have already mentioned Hume as having considered it the only form of survival to which philosophy could hearken; and McTaggart, most recently, as having declared it the most probable form of survival. Schopenhauer's contention that death of the body is not death of the will, and that so long as the will-to-live persists it will gain bodily objectification, amounts to acceptance of the idea of rebirth.

To the present writer, as to McTaggart, it does seem that if survival is a fact, then the most plausible form it might take would be rebirth on earth, perhaps after an interval occupied by the individual in distilling out of the memories of a life just ended such wisdom as his reflective powers enabled him to extract. And this conception of survival also seems to be the one which would put man's present life on earth in the most significant perspective.

C. J. DUCASSE

Brown University
Providence, R.I.

REVIEW

VOICE OF THE VOICELESS

ON rare occasions, an artist succeeds in combining a theme of protest with the form of his art, so that you know that he could not have done otherwise. For him, however, it is no "combination," but a natural expression of what is in his heart. Richard Wright's *Black Boy* seemed to us such a work, a book written at high intensity of feeling, yet without a single sentence that smacked of rhetoric or striving for effect. Too often, works of art which purport to bear a "message" reveal only that a shotgun wedding between aesthetics and morals has taken place, producing a noticeably unpleasant servitude for either art or righteousness, perhaps for both. We found nothing of this sort of strain in *Black Boy*.

We now have what seems to us an equally notable success in this direction: *Land of the Free*, a portfolio of poems by John Beecher. Mr. Beecher is a former professor of social sciences who found that the demand for political conformity in public education exceeded the supply he had on hand. In fact, he had none to offer to the people who, mistaking their betrayal of the Bill of Rights for "loyalty," tried to turn California teachers into either servile or hunted men and women. They did not succeed with Mr. Beecher.

Land of the Free is a portfolio of nine poems on the state of the Union, with block print decorations by Barbara Beecher, exquisitely printed by the Morning Star Press, 849 Kingston Avenue, Oakland, California. The price is \$3.00. While they may seem expensive, we can only say that a knowledge of Mr. Beecher's work is something of a privilege. Other men have said "no" to the regimenters of opinion in the United States, but few if any of them have thought and felt about their position and set their conclusions down on paper as he has done.

The quality of his work may be illustrated by the concluding poem:

REFLECTIONS OF A MAN
WHO ONCE STOOD UP FOR FREEDOM

I'd say that gesture cost enough
but who can reckon up these things?

I'll hardly live to see the day
when I'll be justified at last
if ever that day comes. I wonder
often whether this is not
the onset of an age of darkness
covering all the earth. Could we be
quarantined against a plague
which saturates the atmosphere
we breathe and must continue breathing?
The world is indivisible
and so is freedom. Force and fraud
employed to scuttle human rights
in Spain or China, Mississippi
or Morocco, surely do
reverberate around the world.
They make the climate of our time
as certainly as when a storm
engendered in Siberia
with drifted snow can paralyze
New York and blast the orange crop
in Florida. Well, you might say
that it was my supreme misfortune
to recognize what kind of storm
was bearing down upon us. I sought
to warn the rest of you, for which
no thanks to me. The Jeremiah
role is rarely popular.
And so I got the old heave-ho
from my profession as perhaps
I should have known and after that
I found myself an outcast. Friends
quite naturally avoided me
lest my unclean touch defile them
and when I tried to find a job
all doors were closed against me. "Why,
it would be easier to place
a convict on parole than you!"
they told me at the office where
I went to seek employment. So
my son quit college and my daughter
also. She'd wanted to be a teacher
like me. She's now a secretary
while my son, embittered, drifts
from job to job. Their mother failed
to appreciate my heroism.
Quixotic was the kindest term
she found for my behavior. First
we separated. After that
divorce was natural. We'd been
so close for more than twenty years!
She couldn't understand of course
and, do you know, sometimes I can't.
I really don't know why I threw
my life away for principle.

It seems an empty thing from here
shoveling behind these cows.

The other poems are in the same somber mood, but show that the author is as sensitive to injustice to others as to what happened in his own case. It is as though a man of considerable stature suddenly becomes aware of the meanness and apathy that are all about him, and cannot contain his disappointment and his surprise.

The thing that is hard to bear is the loneliness of such men. Theirs is not a "personal" situation which can be privately relieved, since the comradeship that is longed for must have a spontaneous origin. Men of courage and integrity do not need "sympathy." They need courage and integrity in others, to make a civilized community that will nurture the qualities of life which all men of courage and integrity can enjoy and respect.

On the matter of poetry, of which little is ordinarily said in these pages: We don't know, exactly, what makes a poem a poem, and not something else, like a jingle, or a particular arrangement of sentences on a page. Obviously, the relation of feeling to idea has something to do with it, making it possible to take a passage of what is apparently "prose" and turn it into a poem of marked effect. Actually, the question doesn't seem to have much importance. Of Mr. Beecher's work, we can only say that certain inhibitions we have experienced in reading modern poetry immediately departed as we started to read *Land of the Free*. Perhaps it is that, in this case, the content freely determines the form, and a complete absence of literary constraint makes the invitation to the mind.

COMMENTARY
PERMISSION TO THINK

MORE than thirty years ago, Prof. Edwin A. Burt, who now teaches philosophy at Cornell University, first published his *Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science* (Harcourt, Brace). While the material in this volume was doubtless known to specialists in the history of ideas, it must for many readers have contained rather large surprises.

The book is now virtually a classic of the history of scientific thinking, having recently been made available in a low-priced paper-back edition (Anchor). In it, Prof. Burt shows that the chief founders of modern physics—and therefore of the other sciences, so far as basic assumptions and method are concerned—were also philosophers who held definite metaphysical beliefs, and that these views have had long-term effects on all subsequent thought.

The man-in-the-street is prone to think that Science has avoided both the blandishments and the pitfalls of metaphysics—that when he reads a book on science, or a book by a scientist, no speculations come between him and the account of "reality" the pages of the book bring him. This has been a resounding claim of some of the popularizers of scientific thinking, providing what may now be recognized as a spurious sort of intellectual security to the True Believers in scientific progress.

As a matter of fact, science is honeycombed with metaphysical assumptions. Prof. Burt makes this quite plain. Among philosophers, Prof. F. H. Bradley has been witness to the same fact, and among scientists, the Positivists have contributed additional testimony, although the latter have been chiefly concerned with repudiating rather than examining and understanding the philosophizing tendencies of earlier workers in scientific fields.

Prof. C. J. Ducasse, of Brown University, who examines the possibility of a life after death in this week's lead article, stands as another pioneer in the liberation of modern philosophy from the bonds of unsuspected assumption. He has carried the viewpoint represented by Burt and Bradley to a higher plateau, taking advantage of this declaration of independence for the mind and showing that science has by no means relieved human beings of their responsibility to think

long and independent thoughts about the nature of things.

Prof. Ducasse is interested in the idea of human immortality and in considering the various sorts of survival of death which may be possible. He is also interested in the various degrees of probability which may attach to alternative theories of survival. His method of examining these alternatives is cautious and disciplined. He carefully avoids the enthusiasm so often born of intuitive receptions on these questions, accepting the burden of a scientific sort of responsibility, if not what we commonly think of as "scientific method," in his reflections.

While we are frank to admit that the direction of the thinking in this paper—to the conclusion that survival in the form of rebirth on earth is of all theories of immortality the most plausible—is of particular interest to us, it should be pointed out that the most important thing about the contribution of Prof. Ducasse lies in his reasoned rejection of the "unconscious metaphysical bias" which, until quite recently, has discouraged all such speculation as running counter to "scientific facts." He shows that there is no adequate ground for the familiar assumption that "*to be real is to be material*," proceeding to the declaration:

I now submit that no paradox at all is really involved in the supposition that some forms of consciousness may exist independently of connection with animal or human bodies; and, therefore, that survival is at least theoretically possible.

The implications of this statement are somewhat momentous. It represents a battleground over which Prof. Ducasse has often tramped through many laborious actions, and readers who wish to give attention to the foundations as well as the consequences of this view are invited to inspect the major works of this philosopher, named in the Editor's Note at the beginning of the article.

FRONTIERS

Letter to a Psychiatrist

DEAR DOCTOR:

For some time, now, we have wondered about your "unofficial" thoughts—the sort of thing you speculate about, but neither wish nor feel able to publish in the form of a professional paper. Let us say, first, that we feel an extraordinary respect for men who are able to meet and deal with unsettled minds and twisted emotions with the same equanimity and competence that a medical doctor shows in regard to, say, a broken leg or a badly inflamed appendix. The ordinary doctor we can understand; his knowledge and capacity, while tremendously impressive, can at least be thought of as a kind of medical technology. But the thoughts and feelings of human beings seem to have an incommensurable aspect, even though, no doubt, there is uniformity enough in mental ills for them to be classified according to broad categories of disturbance.

You spend your days—your "fifty-minute hours"—listening, with a little talking, to people who need your help. Are there not moments when even you are awed by the anguished strivings of a *psyche*, struggling to be free? We notice in a current book review that a Viennese psychiatrist, Viktor E. Frankl, now acknowledges that psychiatry has become a "medical ministry," urging that the problems of values and ethics must be faced by both analyst and patient. This implies considerably more than the "technique" of healing, however subtly applied.

Sixteen years ago, a Harvard psychologist, Henry A. Murray, wrote for the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* (April, 1940) an article which asked: "What Should Psychologists Do About Psychoanalysis?" The article was both tribute and critique. The tribute was by way of a comparison of psychoanalysis with academic psychology, in which the former carried off practically all the honors. Dr. Murray wrote:

The analysts spend eight or more hours of the day observing, listening to what a variety of patients say about the most intimate and telling experiences of their lives, and they spend many evenings at seminars exchanging findings and conclusions. The professorial personologist, on the other hand, spends most of his time away from what he talks and writes

about. He labors over apparatus, devises questionnaires, calculates coefficients, writes lectures based on what other anchorites have said, attends committee meetings, and occasionally supervises an experiment on that non-existent entity, Average Man. He makes little use of the techniques that analysts have perfected for exposing what occurs behind the stilted laboratory attitudes. In addition, the analysts have read more and to better profit in the great works of literature (collections of the best guesses of highly conscious men), and this practice has served to sensitize and broaden their awareness.

Dr. Murray devotes several pages to exploring the usefulness of psychoanalytical concepts, although he by no means swallows them whole. For example, after discussing the many ways in which the ideas of the "id" and the "unconscious" serve to throw light on the obscurities of human behavior, he adds:

Of course to speak of "the id" or "the unconscious" is a mere makeshift, but it is too early to imprison in tidy operational definitions the myriad varieties of noted facts. The ego is an elusive being which has not yet been caught in any conceptual corral, as a first approximation, however, the notion of a discriminating semi-conscious entity, standing between two environments—signs and pressures from within and without—is a convenient one.

Concerning the theory of the unconscious, he writes:

It [the theory] is invaluable in interpreting neurotic accidents and illness. The unconscious is an historical museum of the breed and of the individual, exhibiting tableaux of development. But also, in a sense, it is the womb of fate, the procreating source of new directions, of art, and of religion. It is here that one must seek for novelty, for the incubating complex that will govern the next move. No creator can afford to disrespect the twilight stirrings of the mind, since out of these arise the quickening ideas that are his life.

The critique, however, is as searching as the tribute is generous. Dr. Murray seems incisively accurate:

Freud's theory, I submit, is an utterly analytic instrument which reduces a complex individual to a few primitive ingredients and leaves him so. It has names—and the most unsavoury—for parts, but none for wholes. It dissects but does not bind up the wounds that it has made. Unconcerned with

psychosynthesis and its results, it is of little use either in formulating progress in personality or in helping a patient—after the transference neurosis and the levelling that an analysis produces—to gather up his forces and launch out in a better way of life. This is the flaw which Jung was quickest to detect and remedy, by directing his therapeutic efforts to an understanding of the forward, rather than to the backward, movements of the psyche. . . .

One might have thought the Freudians, so quick to see perverted streaks in other men, would have been polite enough to tell us frankly what sublimated promptings were back of their scientific labors. It would then have been unnecessary for some rude unmasker like myself to speak of voyeurism, depreciating sadism, and the id's revenge on culture, the superego, and the ego. Why not expose and prove the value of these motives? Being sociable with the id myself, I cannot but sympathize with its efforts to get on to a new Declaration of Independence. But the question is, have the Freudians allowed the id enough creativeness and the ego enough will to make any elevating declaration? What is Mind today? Nothing but the butler and procurer of the body. The fallen angel theory of the soul has been put to rout by the starker theory of the soulless fallen man, a result—as Adam, the father of philosophy, demonstrated for all time—of experiencing and viewing love as a mere cluster of sensations. Little man, what now?

In the history of psychoanalysis, sixteen years—since Dr. Murray wrote this article—is a long time. Already there have been notable beginnings to answers to his question, as for example, by Erich Fromm, in *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, *The Forgotten Language*, and, more recently, in *The Sane Society*.

Murray's question, "What is Mind today?", is still, however, a good question to ask. Has analysis—or psychiatry—yet evolved a name for "wholes"?

Is there any sort of "angel" or "ego" in man, that is something more than a switchboard for the forces of heredity and environment? Is there, in short, a *man*?

Speaking of Freud's doctrines, Murray writes:

Ego. The ego is a conceptual entity which still defies descriptions and definition; but in listing what it *does* (repression, adaptation, etc.) Freud has shown us the way. Two classes of phenomena, however, have been left out: those associated with the will and the satisfactions of self-mastery, and those associated with integration and the reasonable ordering of one's

drives—the Hellenic ideal of harmonious expression. In practice I am inclined to assign moral responsibility to the ego, and I attempt to judge the work it has to do by estimating the strength of the insurgent tendencies (which vary from one individual to another) that must be managed.

Murray also wonders about certain commands of conscience. The "superego," he observes, which according to Freud is "the internalization of parental and social mores, does not cover all of conscience." In some men there emerge "original (id-born) moral conceptions, derived from sensitiveness to pain, from empathy and love, which are often 'higher' than anything that parents or authorities teach or practice." This, we might remark, gives considerable resources to the "id," which is named, perhaps, by Prof. Murray to avoid invoking any "supernatural" origin for such qualities. Yet their reality is undeniable:

If not, how can one account for the prophets, romantic idealists, and reformers who have raised the superegos of their societies to new levels? The most moral men are not submissive citizens but nonconformists. Finally, Freud did not take account of the mores during war, when the leaders say "kill," and a man suffers death (according to the ordinances of the navy) if he does not fire. Freud could not concede that a man may be born with a few "better" instincts than society demands. He sides with St. Augustine and the Calvinists.

Well, if the psychiatrists are too shy, and the analysts too retiring, to answer this letter, we shall settle for Prof. Murray's questions, which are more valuable than answers which close the door on further inquiry. Among modern psychologists, Prof. Murray reminds us more than anyone else of the bright and intensely honest mind of William James, who might have asked similar questions, had he lived until 1940.

There is the possibility, of course, that the time is not ripe for any more of an answer than we now have from these very busy men—the only men we have to meet problems of desperate urgency. Perhaps a little more body of experience with minds, both sick and well, is needed, to lay the foundation for answers which will be both scientific and philosophical. But there's no harm in asking.