

MEDIUMSHIP AND MULTIPLE PERSONALITY*

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INTRODUCTION

Although the pioneers of psychical research studied subjects which many considered disreputable, in other respects their interests converged with those of mainstream academicians. Perhaps the major common area of interest was that of dissociation—in particular, the study of hypnosis and multiple personality. The founders of the S.P.R. believed, along with many others, that dissociative phenomena promised insights into the nature of the mind generally, including processes underlying normal mental phenomena. But certain of the S.P.R. stalwarts suspected, in addition, that the study of dissociation could illuminate the nature of *paranormal* mental phenomena. (Myers and Gurney were the most notable proponents of that position.) Perhaps psychic functioning could be *explained* in terms of dissociative processes. Or perhaps, at the very least, the forms of dissociation were kinds of *bridge* phenomena, linking normal cognitive functions to paranormal cognitive functions.

It is easy to see why parapsychologists were drawn to these issues. For one thing, some of the early studies of hypnosis suggested that dissociative states might be psi conducive. Many of those studies contained intriguing reports of ostensibly paranormal occurrences, such as apparent apports, materializations, and especially varieties of 'lucidity' (i.e., clairvoyance and telepathy) (see, e.g., Dingwall, 1967). And for another, the studies of hysteria and dual or multiple personality suggested possible connections with the phenomena of mental mediumship (and possession). Hence, some wondered whether mediumship might be nothing more than a type of dissociation, rather than a phenomenon indicative of survival. And others (including Myers) suggested that dissociative phenomena generally pointed to an analysis of the mind and human personality that embraced the reality of survival of bodily death.

Curiously, however, parapsychologists soon shifted their focus away from dissociative phenomena, although some maintained a lingering interest in the possible connections between psi and altered states. One reason for the change may have been the spectre of telepathic mind-control that haunted many of the early studies of hypnosis, particularly those seeming to demonstrate the induction of hypnotic states at a distance. One would think that any evidence for such influence would be extremely important, at least enough to have stimulated the development of an organized and reasonably widespread systematic program to replicate and probe the results further. So it is curious, and perhaps revealing, that the attempts to investigate influence at a distance were both infrequent and short-lived, even though they were apparently quite successful. Janet, Richet, Myers, and others engaged in those studies mysteriously discontinued them after only a brief period. Indeed, some abandoned the study of hypnosis altogether, and turned to much less intriguing lines of investigation instead, almost as if they had found nothing worthy of research (Eisenbud, 1970,

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pp. 55ff, 1982, pp. 142ff, 1983, chapt. 6). One can't help but think that the investigators were simply intimidated by the possibility of, and potential responsibility for, telepathic influence, especially as it might occur outside the experimental setting.

Furthermore, parapsychologists were undoubtedly affected by a sweeping change of intellectual fashion taking place within orthodox psychology and psychiatry. First, Freudian dynamics (and the concept of repression) replaced dissociation theory as the leading theoretical approach to the phenomena of psychopathology, and dissociation became widely regarded as merely a form of repression. Second, Bleuler introduced the term 'schizophrenia' around 1910, which seemed to cover many of the phenomena of multiple personality disorder (hereafter, *MPD*), and which caught on quickly within the community of academic psychologists and clinicians. In fact, it is quite possible that the sharp decline in diagnoses of *MPD* between 1910 and 1970 reflects the widespread application of the concept of schizophrenia, and that many multiples were incorrectly diagnosed as schizophrenic (Rosenbaum, 1980). And third, the rise of behaviorism in psychology was deflecting attention away from inner experience and toward outer behavior, and it, too, might have increased the likelihood of misdiagnosis of *MPD*. Moreover, within parapsychology it may have helped shift interest away from dissociative phenomena and toward the type of experimentation fashionable within orthodox experimental psychology. That, of course, was based (rather uncritically, in my view) on the formal techniques appropriate to the physical sciences.

But intellectual fashion has changed again, and the study of inner experience is regaining some of its former respectability. Moreover, in the years since 1970 there has been a pronounced revival of interest in the varieties of dissociation, as well as an apparent explosion of cases of *MPD*. To some extent, the current proliferation of cases is probably an artifact of years of misdiagnosis. But it probably also reflects a greatly heightened understanding of the phenomenon, especially its etiology and the presentation of symptoms. As a result, researchers interested in the conceptual issues surrounding *MPD* have more to work with than ever before, and they are now in an enviable position to re-evaluate older theories and long-standing issues in the light of new information.

So, I want now to take a fresh look at the comparison of mediumship to multiple personality. I believe that our current understanding of *MPD* can help us resolve some old disputes, and dispel some old confusions. The familiar, and related, questions I want to address are these. What *are* we to make of the ostensibly discarnate personalities communicating through the medium? Are they merely ordinary alternate personalities parading as post-mortem entities? Are they really post-mortem individuals? Or—and this option was more popular at the turn of the century than it is today (perhaps with good reason)—are alternate personalities really discarnate entities parading as elements of a person's psyche?

More generally, the underlying issue before us is this. When we compare cases of mediumship to those of *MPD*, do we find evidence suggesting that the two types of phenomena are fundamentally distinct? Or does the evidence suggest that they are fundamentally alike, even if they fall along rather distant points on a single continuum of dissociative phenomena?

Each of these options has had its partisans. And although commentators have advanced a number of quite different views, the literature divides into *three* major theoretical positions. Before examining these, however, let me introduce a minor terminological convention. To simplify matters, I want to clarify, if only slightly, what I mean by 'dissociation' or 'dissociative phenomenon'. I am not interested, at the moment, in *defining* 'dissociation'. That is actually a very complex task. Rather, I merely want to agree to use the term in a quite specific way. Henceforth, when I use the expressions 'dissociation' and 'dissociative phenomenon', I shall be referring to something explainable largely in terms of one individual's states and properties—for example, perceptions, beliefs, needs, interests, desires, motivations, and capacities, rather than by reference to outside agencies, much less discarnate agencies. Obviously, this is not to take a stand on what sort of phenomenon dissociation is—for example, whether it is largely physiological, phenomenological, or even a form of role playing. It is only intended to rule out processes or phenomena analyzable primarily or fundamentally with respect to *another agency*, whether that agent be another person (as in humdrum telepathy) or a discarnate entity (as in ostensible mediumship and possession).

Naturally, this terminological convention still leaves open the possibility that some *ostensibly* dissociative phenomena are actually direct expressions of an agent other than the subject. Similarly, it is compatible with the possibility that dissociative phenomena might manifest in forms that misleadingly suggest the intrusive action of another agency. The purpose of the convention, however, is merely to avoid confusion and to simplify the discussion below. Indeed, it allows us to state, fairly concisely, the three major hypotheses we must consider concerning mediumship and MPD.

Hypothesis 1: Mediumship and MPD are both forms of dissociation; neither requires a survivalist interpretation. Let us call this the *dissociation hypothesis*.

Hypothesis 2: Although some cases of mediumship may be nothing more than examples of dissociation, others are radically different, and manifest the agency of post-mortem individuals. This is the hypothesis which the dissociation hypothesis usually challenges, and we may call it the *survival hypothesis*. (Clearly, it is more specific than what is usually called the survival hypothesis—namely, the *general* assertion that human beings survive bodily death. By contrast, the present hypothesis is concerned merely with the interpretation of mediumship.)

Hypothesis 3: Although some (or many?) cases of MPD may be nothing more than examples of dissociation, others, like many (or most?) cases of mediumship, require positing the existence of post-mortem individuals. In other words, some alternate personalities are discarnate entities in disguise. Although this hypothesis, like the last, posits the survival of bodily death, it is supposed to account specifically for certain phenomena of psychopathology. And since, unlike cases of traditional mediumship, the ostensibly communicating agency manifests in individuals who do not overtly solicit that interaction, we may call it the *intrusion hypothesis*.

Now how does one decide between these rival hypotheses? One standard approach is to compare the symptoms of MPD to the behavior of entranced mediums, and then look for relevant similarities or differences. Let us call this the *comparative method*. Apparently, the assumption underlying this method is that if

the two types of phenomena are distinct, one would expect to find telltale differences in their manifestations. On the other hand, if the phenomena are essentially the same, then one would expect to find only superficial differences in their manifestations.

Unfortunately, the comparative method is both risky and somewhat limited. It is risky, of course, because different (similar) underlying processes may have similar (different) manifestations or effects. For example, phenomenologically similar (distinct) headaches may be caused by distinct (similar) processes. Or more relevantly, distinct (similar) behavior may be due to similar (distinct) causes. Moreover, the method is of little help in evaluating the very *possibility* of survival. The reason, obviously, is that one can defend or reject the possibility of survival quite independently of any similarities or differences between mediumship and MPD. Hence, not only might those similarities or differences be fortuitous, they might simply add nothing to already strong arguments for or against survival. Nevertheless, one cannot know *a priori* that the comparative method has no utility at all—that is, that the evidence has nothing to teach us, especially if one is undecided about the possibility of survival. Therefore, it is at least reasonable to look and see whether there are any *suggestive* differences or similarities between mediumship and MPD, even if they won't be conclusive. If (as I believe) the method does not help us select one of the three hypotheses, that itself is a result worth knowing. And in any case, the very process of inquiry will force us to grapple with some important issues along the way.

MEDIUMSHIP AND DISSOCIATION

Let us consider, then, to what extent the comparison of mediumship to MPD supports the three hypotheses mentioned above. And let us begin by examining the standard arguments in favor of the dissociation hypothesis—that is, the reasons for taking mediumship to be a form of dissociation, rather than a phenomenon indicative of survival.

(1) To begin with, the cognitive and behavioral traits of mediumistic personalities (controls, especially) are sometimes suggestively similar to those of alternate personalities. Perhaps the most impressive similarity concerns patterns of childish and mischievous behavior. To demonstrate the point, it will be helpful to focus on 'classic' cases of mediumship and MPD. But one can easily find additional examples from more obscure or recent cases. Consider, then, the resemblances between 'Sally' in the Miss Beauchamp case (M. Prince, 1905/1978), 'Margaret', in the Doris Fischer case (W. F. Prince, 1915/16), and Mrs. Leonard's Feda-persona (e.g., Salter, 1930; Troubridge, 1922).

As C. D. Broad (1962) observed, Sally and Margaret were 'entertaining and likeable', but apparently also 'devoid of any deep feeling' (1962, p. 267). Moreover, they were prankish, and somewhat disdainful and spiteful toward the host personality. They also showed little or no respect for the property of the host personality, but seemed strongly attached to items of their own. Feda, likewise, could be amusing or engaging in a childlike way, and was somewhat contemptuous toward Mrs. Leonard. She also showed little concern for Mrs. Leonard's possessions. For example, she would sometimes give away (or promise to give away) jewelry or other items valued by the medium. On the other hand, Feda would display a strong attachment to objects given or promised to

her—i.e., given or promised to the medium when she (Fedá) was in control. In addition, both Margaret and Fedá distorted or perverted the language in childish ways. (See also Gauld, 1982, p. 112.)

Unfortunately, these similarities prove almost nothing. For one thing, alternate and mediumistic personalities display a wide range of behaviors. In fact, in some cases of MPD no alternate personalities exhibit the childlike behavior of Sally or Margaret. Hence, it's clear that childlike behavior is not essential to the phenomenon of MPD. Furthermore, one would think that if communication with surviving spirits is possible, then the spirits needn't only be those of adults. Hence, the childlike behavior of some mediumistic communicators is not even clearly *suggestive* of dissociation. It is equally suggestive of the survival of a child (or childlike) spirit.

As far as I can see, the only way to strengthen the case for a dissociation interpretation of childlike mediumistic communicators, would be to argue first that communicators *generally* are not the surviving personalities they purport to be. For example, one might try to show that ostensible communicators are, on the whole, too transparently artificial or one-dimensional to be surviving personalities. But of course, if one can *antecedently* establish the artificiality of mediumistic communicators generally and thereby eliminate the need for a survivalist explanation, there is simply no point in arguing further against that explanation on the basis of similarities between childlike communicators and alters.¹

(2) Another initially interesting, but ultimately unpromising cognitive or behavioral similarity between mediumship and MPD is the following. Sometimes a medium's personality is relatively bland compared to those of communicating personalities (especially the control personalities). This appears to be true of Mrs. Leonard, but is much more conspicuous in other cases—e.g., Pearl Curran (the case of Patience Worth—see W. F. Prince, 1927/1964), and Mrs. Chenoweth (Hyslop, 1917). Similarly, in cases of MPD the primary or host personality is often less interesting than its alternates, just as Doris Fischer and the 'real' Miss Beauchamp were less interesting than Margaret and Sally, respectively. One might argue, then, that an appeal to dissociation accounts nicely for these resemblances. What happens, according to the argument, is that a dissociative process strips the subject of certain characteristics, or perhaps draws on latent or repressed attributes or traits, which then emerge in alternate personalities (or fragments) of one form or another. And of course these emerging (or re-emerging) traits will sometimes be quite interesting or vital. Moreover, to support the argument, one could attempt to show how a process of this sort has survival value for the formerly abused multiple, and a related utility for the medium, who can avoid taking personal responsibility for the socially provocative or risky behavior of communicators.

Unfortunately, as was the case with childlike behaviors, the alleged parallel between mediumship and MPD holds—at best—for only a limited number of cases. In fact, exceptions are rather common. Not only are some primary or host

¹ Broad, in any case was unwilling to argue for the *prima facie* similarity between *all* ostensible communicators and alternate personalities. He wrote, 'It is only a regular control, like the Fedá-persona, which bears much resemblance to any of the secondary personalities studied by psychiatrists' (1962, p. 268).

personalities quite interesting; mediums, especially, are sometimes fascinating and very engaging characters (Mrs. Garrett and Mrs. Piper are clear examples). Even more seriously, in cases of MPD it is often unclear which personality should *count* as the primary personality. Multiples tend to have a regular presenting personality, or a host personality who takes charge of or acts generally as spokesperson for the others. But these personalities are often not *historically* primary, and therefore not clearly analogous to the role of the medium in the overall personality system. Hence, quite apart from how interesting a multiple's different personalities may be, it is unclear which (if any) personality corresponds to that of the medium.

(3) A different sort of similarity concerns epistemological relations between apparently dissociated parts of a subject's mind. For example, mediums are often unaware of what transpires when a communicator is in control, just as primary or host personalities tend to be amnesic for periods when an alternate personality is in control. Moreover, some mediumistic communicators (such as Feda) claim to have access (if they wish) to all the mediums's thoughts and feelings, just as some alternate personalities seem to know the thoughts and feelings of the host personality.

Now this observation might hold more generally for mediumship and MPD than the preceding two. But there are still numerous exceptions, especially in connection with amnesia and mediumship. Although amnesia is commonly found in the host or presenting personalities of multiples, in general only *trance* mediums tend to be unaware of what transpires during ostensible communications. And even then, amnesia is common only in those trance mediums whose trance is *heavy*. By contrast, mediums who experience a lighter trance are often aware of the communicated material. In fact, they sometimes carry on other activities while the communications are in progress, such as preparing food in the kitchen, writing letters, or carrying on a conversation (e.g., during automatic writing).

But even when we focus only on those cases of mediumship where the similarity holds, there is no reason for insisting on a dissociative explanation. After all, one would think that amnesia, like headaches and broken toes, can have different sorts of causes. Hence, for all we know, these epistemological relations between medium and communicators might also be a natural result of a genuinely mediumistic process.

(4) A rather different similarity between MPD and mediumship concerns (on the one hand) the process of personality switching, and (on the other) the way mediums yield control to communicators. Mediums display a variety of ways in which they are 'taken over' by communicators. Some do it instantly, while others go through 'warm-up' periods of varying length, during which the medium's face sometimes acquires a vacant expression, and which may also be accompanied by groaning, eye-rolling, swaying, and other sorts of movements. But the same is true in cases of MPD. Until recently, the case literature tended to support the mistaken impression that switching of personalities took the rapid and 'clean' form familiar from some classic cases, and from portrayals of multiples in films. But really clean, quick switching is the exception rather than the rule. Many cases of MPD exhibit slower switching, from a few seconds to a couple of minutes. And in all cases (but especially in the slower ones), the subject may

temporarily acquire a vacant look, and there may also be accompanying physical movements (like eye rolling or rhythmic swaying).

Now here, at last, we find a genuinely pervasive similarity between mediumship and MPD. But once again, it is compatible with a survivalist interpretation of mediumship. And one needn't be especially sympathetic to the possibility of survival to grant this point. It would simply be rather foolish to expect all mediums to relinquish control to a communicating spirit instantly, or in the same way. Indeed, one would expect their 'reaction times', or styles of submission, to be as varied as the ways in which people normally respond to the everyday influence of others.

(5) Some cases of mediumship—particularly, trance-mediumship, suggest that the medium is engaged in a kind of unconscious role-playing, and that ostensible communicators are nothing more than trance-*impersonations*. These cases suggest that mediumistic communicators, like alternate personalities, result from the subject's own creative activity, however autonomous some of these creations might later become (as in cases of multiple personality). Of course, when the communicators are conspicuously artificial (e.g., as control personalities often are), this point seems both obvious and relatively uninteresting. It becomes interesting, however, in connection with more realistic communicators, especially those who offer information apparently unknown to the medium and sitters. A famous and unusually obvious—though, unfortunately, also quite controversial—example is the case of Gordon Davis (Soal, 1925). In this case, the medium, Blanche Cooper, presented a trance impersonation of one Gordon Davis, whom she did not know, and whom the sitter (S. G. Soal) claimed he believed had been killed in the First World War. The Gordon Davis in her impersonation presented itself as a discarnate entity, and offered information about himself that was later determined to be correct. But as it turned out, Davis was alive and well at the time, at work at his real-estate business.

Now even if the Davis case turns out to be worthless, this line of argument might nevertheless be the most serious challenge so far to the survivalist interpretation of mediumship, especially for those undaunted by the possibility of refined unconscious psi. Curiously, however, it is also the most difficult to support by straightforward appeals to the evidence. Of course (as I've mentioned), when mediumistic communications are unimpressive, it is relatively easy to argue that the medium is engaged merely in a kind of role-playing. Examples of impressive mediumship, however, are more refractory. In that respect, the Gordon Davis case (if genuine) would be quite exceptional, since it very clearly discourages a survivalist interpretation. But generally speaking, in cases where ostensible communicators give information not normally available to the medium, it is much more difficult to establish that the communicator is not a genuine discarnate spirit, and that the medium is simply presenting a form of psi-mediated dramatization.

In fact, arguing for trance-impersonations in these cases is a complex and formidable project. To begin with, one would probably have to argue that the trance personalities are too lacking in depth and breadth to be genuine surviving personalities. And that, too, is no simple task, since it is unclear to what extent genuine communications from the deceased might be distorted, filtered, or

'watered down' by the process of communication. Survivalists, of course, can rely all too easily on this point, in order to wriggle away from evidence apparently unfavorable to their hypothesis. But their opponents, likewise, can rely all too easily on the assumption that genuine mediumistic communicators will be robust personalities. The frustrating fact of the matter is that we have *no idea* what to expect of a genuine mediumistic communication. For all we know, it might be difficult or impossible for a communicator to control a medium's organism, and still manifest his or her personality in all its robustness. For any number of reasons, it might be difficult to prevent trance-communications from seeming like personality caricatures. Still, one might argue that certain personality limitations are more revealing than others, and strongly suggest dissociation rather than discarnate survival. That is part of Eisenbud's strategy in dealing with Mrs. Chenoweth's Cagliostro-persona (Eisenbud, 1983); and it's a strategy that requires a deep grasp of human behavior and a keen eye for its nuances.

But quite apart from the issue of personality robustness, major obstacles remain in the way of showing that communicators are merely trance-impersonations. For example, one must explain the *dynamic relevance* of the medium's behavior. One must explain why *this* particular individual appears to communicate, rather than someone else with different characteristics and offering different information. And to do that, one would almost certainly have to make complex sets of conjectures about the lives, needs, and hidden agendas of the medium and sitters at a séance, and the underlying psychodynamics between them. Once again, the classic model for such a study is Eisenbud's analysis of the Cagliostro-persona (1983). And finally, to make matters worse, even if one had the ability and available information to successfully meet this part of the challenge (and I know of no one besides Eisenbud who has pulled it off), in most cases it would still be necessary to appeal to a degree of psi-functioning that many find intolerable.

On the whole, then, these various comparisons of mediumship to MPD lend very little support to the dissociation hypothesis. Not only do they not *demonstrate* that mediumship is simply a dissociative phenomenon; they are not even especially suggestive. Perhaps only the claim about trance impersonation is at all promising. But it is very difficult to defend, and will in any case appeal only to those (such as myself) who are open to the possibility of extremely refined psi-functioning. Of course, mediumship might still turn out to be nothing more than a form of dissociation (perhaps aided by virtuosic psi-functioning). The above considerations show only that this cannot be established simply by comparing mediumship to MPD.

MEDIUMSHIP AND SURVIVAL

Let us move on, then, to the survival hypothesis, and consider to what extent comparing MPD to mediumship supports the claim that at least some mediumistic communicators are post-mortem individuals. Just as many have felt that similarities between mediumship and MPD support a dissociationist interpretation of mediumship, others have argued that *differences* between the two types of phenomena support the hypothesis of survival. Granted, after seeing how the comparative method failed to support the dissociation hypothesis, we

should perhaps not expect better results in the case of the survival hypothesis. The problem seems to be more in the method than in the hypotheses. But, as before, the process of analysis itself can be very instructive. Indeed, in this case, we must confront some very important issues. Most of the arguments I discuss below are relatively standard; but I will focus on their most persuasive formulations in works by C. D. Broad (1962) and Alan Gauld (1982).

(1) Although alternate personalities are relatively independent of the host personality, and sometimes take over for extended periods against the will of the subject, mediumistic controls and communicators tend usually to appear only with the medium's knowledge or consent. As Gauld puts it, their 'comings and goings . . . , unlike those of secondary personalities, are strictly circumscribed' (p. 113).

Now, this alleged difference may be challenged on several grounds. To begin with, in some cases of mediumship, communicators spontaneously take control of the medium. For example, sometimes Feda took over Mrs. Leonard without her knowledge or consent. Moreover, the literature contains numerous reports of so-called 'drop-in' communicators, whom sitters at a séance apparently do not know, and whom they certainly do not invite. And as far as MPD is concerned, the more functional multiples often have considerable control over which personalities appear, and when they appear. The reason these multiples *are* functional is that they have a high degree of internal cooperation between their various personalities (e.g., a council, or something similar).

Some might find it odd that I should raise the subject of 'drop-in' communicators to *challenge* a point made in favor of a survivalist interpretation of mediumship. The reason is that drop-in communicators sometimes make statements about themselves which have later been verified. And since that information is unknown to the sitters, many feel that in such cases a survivalist explanation is especially plausible. But as Eisenbud's analysis of the Cagliostro drop-in demonstrates, the survivalist explanation is compelling only when one antecedently assumes that there are severe limits (or limits at all) to the scope and range of psi. And that assumption, as both Eisenbud and I have argued, is indefensible (Braude, 1986, 1987, Eisenbud, 1982, 1983). Moreover, Eisenbud has shown how the survivalist explanation may appear less plausible the more one learns about the depth psychology of those participating in the séance. Furthermore, as Gauld observed,

I do not know of a single instance in which a drop in communicator has tried to put the same message through two different mediums. Yet surely we might expect that some of them would try. In fact, cases in which any kind of communicator has convincingly manifested through more than one medium *without the presence of the same sitter* are fairly uncommon. (1982, pp. 110–11, emphasis added)

What that suggests, obviously, is that drop-in communications are more dependent on the needs and interests of the sitters than they appear to be. But then they are not clearly *prima facie* indications of post-mortem intelligences. Rather, they seem equally well explained in terms of hidden ante-mortem needs and motivations, and subconsciously stored and paranormally obtained information.

Nevertheless, it may well be that the comings and goings of mediumistic communicators are, *on the whole*, more restricted than those of alternate personalities. It remains unclear, however, whether the difference would be significant. As Broad realized (1962, p. 267), it might only be a difference of degree rather than of kind. Obviously, one can explain the difference (if it exists) without positing radically distinct sorts of underlying processes, much less the existence of post-mortem individuals. After all, dissociation can play different sorts of roles in a person's life. For the multiple, apparently, the creation of alternate personalities begins as a reaction to intolerable suffering, and eventually dissociation tends to become ritualized (or habitual), and primarily a means of coping with a broad range of stressful situations. For the medium, however, dissociation might not be linked (at least so conspicuously) to the exigencies of psychological survival. Certainly, it is not rooted in earlier disturbing traumas of the sort that lead to full-fledged cases of multiplicity. It might instead have more to do with the way dissociative capacities can reinforce certain belief systems or world views (even just the belief in survival). And, of course, mediums tend to place themselves voluntarily in situations where they can exercise their mediumistic capacities. By contrast, the multiple does not (at least consciously) seek the stressful situations that cause switching of personalities.

(2) Gauld also suggests that multiple personality appears to be pathological, whereas mediumship does not. So perhaps that is a reason for thinking that mediumistic communicators are not merely alternate personalities. But we must be careful here. For one thing, mediumship *might* be pathological, but its pathology might simply be more covert than that of MPD. Once again, Eisenbud's (1983) conjectures about the sexual repressions of medium and sitters are a model of the deeper analyses we must make before drawing hasty conclusions about mediumship and psychopathology.

Besides, pathology is a matter of degree. Even if mediumship is a dissociative disorder, the fact that MPD appears more pathological may (again) reflect no more than an etiological difference between the two conditions, or a difference in the role dissociation plays in the subject's life. For example, the problems leading to classic cases of MPD might simply be more dramatic than those conducive to the development of mediumship. Whereas MPD arises from severe trauma or abuse, the generally less disruptive phenomena of mediumship may reflect a milder causal history. But then the phenomena of MPD and mediumship might not be fundamentally different. They might both be maladaptive (though to different degrees), or signs of an underlying psychological weakness or instability. Moreover, we should remember that not all cases of MPD are as dramatic as the classic cases, either in their etiology or in their clinical presentation. In fact, not only are some multiples far more functional than others, some mediums are clearly less functional than others, and have varying degrees of difficulty coping with their mediumship and with everyday life. Hence, when we consider the extent to which MPD and mediumship are pathological or maladaptive, there are reasons for thinking that the various cases can all be spread out along a single continuum.

(3) Now Gauld never explicitly said that MPD is pathological and mediumship is not. He only suggests it. His explicit point is somewhat different.

He claims 'There does not seem to have been anything disturbed about the normal personalities of Mrs. Piper, Mrs. Leonard, and other leading trance mediums' (p. 112). Presumably Gauld means that the primary personalities in cases of MPD *are* disturbed, by contrast.

But one *must* be careful here as well. It is not clear what Gauld means by 'disturbed'. One would think he means something like 'not well-adjusted'—that is, that a disturbed person behaves erratically, or responds inappropriately or self-destructively to life's daily turmoil, or in other ways shows little ability to handle everyday situations. But if that is what Gauld means, then MPD and mediumship may not differ in the way he suggests. For one thing, some primary or host personalities show few (if any) signs of being disturbed in this sense. In fact, they often appear quite stable, or at least as normal and well-adjusted as many non-multiples and non-mediums. Of course, criteria of normality are very tricky; and usually, one's important personality disturbances are not evident on the surface, or even under the sort of scrutiny accorded some great mediums. But in any case, there is no reason to suppose that mediums generally are well-adjusted, even if Mrs. Piper and Mrs. Leonard seemed to be. Quite probably, mediums are no better-adjusted, on the whole, than members of other occupational or avocational groups, most (if not of all) of which contain their fair share of troubled individuals. (Consider, e.g., weekend golfers, amateur photographers, bird-watchers, construction workers, airline personnel, account executives, ministers, politicians, and certainly academics.) But even if all mediums *were* well-adjusted, the difference between well-adjusted mediums and poorly-adjusted primary personalities may still be no more than a by-product of their distinct sorts of histories (traumatic, in the case of MPD). It may not point to any fundamental difference in underlying processes—that is, in the origin of the communicators.

Perhaps Gauld should have made a somewhat different, but related point—namely, that primary personalities seem more incomplete, or less well-rounded, than those of mediums. And *that* claim may be defensible, since the various personalities of multiple personality patients (even the most complete ones) often seem lacking in depth and breadth by comparison to at least some non-multiples (well-adjusted or otherwise). Nevertheless, I know of no sufficiently detailed comparative study of mediums and multiples to support the view that mediums are generally more robust as personalities.

In any case, the view is problematical. For one thing, as I noted earlier, it is often hard to tell which (if any) of a multiple's personalities is *historically* primary—hence, which should be compared to the medium's personality. But even if the personalities of mediums were, on the whole, more well-rounded than *any* of the personalities in cases of MPD, that, too, needn't be understood as indicating that alternate personalities and mediumistic communicators differ radically in kind or origin. It might show only that mediums and multiples represent somewhat different dissociative processes.

For example, perhaps it is true that the formation of alternate personalities always *subtracts* something from the multiple's total remaining cognitive, perceptual, emotional, or behavioral repertoire, so that both secondary and primary personalities will inevitably be somewhat lacking in depth and breadth. But even if one could defend that view, it may still be of little use to proponents of

the survival hypothesis. For one thing, it might be that mediums and multiples alike dissociate into temporary or long-term dissociated personalities or fragments, but that mediumistic dissociation, being less profound than the dissociation in MPD, does not greatly deplete the personality of the medium.

Moreover, it is unclear how one could defend *any* sweeping generalization about the complexity or robustness of mediumistic communicators as compared to alternate personalities. It is difficult enough to evaluate the relative complexity of two ordinary personalities. But it is substantially more imposing to make such comparisons across *populations* of personalities. Besides, the personality of a *non-multiple* may be limited (even severely) in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. Hence, even if we were to find suggestive *limitations* in the personalities of mediums and their communicators, we should not leap to the conclusion that mediumship is merely dissociative. As we noted in connection with the dissociation hypothesis, those limitations might result from something other than dissociative depletion—for example, natural constraints of the process of communicating with discarnate spirits.

Perhaps some will feel that an important point is being overlooked. It concerns the fact that the most robust alternate personalities tend to be those that have had considerable time in executive control of the body—i.e., time in which to develop and mature. Now if it could be shown that mediumistic communicators are robust *to begin with*, with little or no time to develop into well-rounded personalities, that might indeed suggest a significant difference between alternate personalities and communicators. Perhaps the complexity of mediumistic communicators could be explained most parsimoniously as an indication of post-mortem intelligence. Unfortunately, though, mediumistic communicators have not been notoriously robust, or conspicuously more robust than well-rounded alternate personalities. But even if one *could* demonstrate that communicators are distinctively more complex than alternate and host personalities, it would still be difficult to build a case for survival on that fact. One would first of all have to justify the underlying assumption that dissociated personalities *cannot* emerge full-blown or well-rounded, without first having time to develop while in control of the medium.

Interestingly, Gauld observes that Doris Fischer developed into a versatile medium after her original hysterical symptoms and their associated secondary personalities had disappeared. But Gauld considers this a point *in favor of* interpreting mediumistic communicators as alternate personalities. And I agree. The Doris case might indicate only that the manifestation of alternate personalities took on a different form as Doris' psychological well-being improved. For all we know, once Doris became a medium, her dissociative capacities were serving a different set of needs, and simply manifested in a healthier (or at least less profound or cripplingly maladaptive) form.

(4) A rather different kind of comparison of mediums and multiples seems particularly questionable in the light of recent evidence. Broad (1962, p. 268) mentions the once familiar point that in cases of MPD, personalities do not present themselves as discarnate entities. But of course that's clearly false; some alternate personalities do claim to be post-mortem entities. (I'll have more to say about this later.) Granted, most of the examples of such personalities are described in reports written considerably after Broad's *Lectures*. But earlier

examples can be found in the literature, even in the major cases Broad considers. For example, in the Doris Fischer case, 'Sleeping Margaret' claims to be a surviving spirit (W. F. Prince, 1915/16, p. 1264).

Nevertheless, *most* alternate personalities make no such claim. But that still does not clearly support the survivalist interpretation of mediumship. Even if *no* alternate personalities claimed to be surviving spirits, that would not show that mediumistic communicators are what they purport to be. It might show only that the underlying psychodynamics of mediumship are unusually conducive to the production of alternate personalities or fragments that pass themselves off as discarnate individuals. That is, there might be perfectly understandable depth-psychological reasons why some alternate personalities (particularly, those of mediums) claim to be discarnate. I'll return to this point also.

(5) Another point apparently undermined by recent evidence is the following. Gauld claims 'that the number of distinct personalities which may control a trance medium during the course of her career greatly exceeds anything for which the annals of multiple personality provide a parallel' (1982, p. 112). But this, too, seems plainly false, given the now relatively common reports of huge inventories of personalities and fragments in some cases of MPD.

But in fact, it is unclear what to make of the recent evidence. Interpreting it raises a major issue in *individuation*—namely, how to distinguish two different personalities (or fragments) from one personality (or fragment) assuming different names? This problem has not been sufficiently appreciated by clinicians who rather glibly claim that their patients have large numbers of alternate personalities. But it is equally a problem in determining the number of actual communicators expressing themselves through mediums (whether they be dissociated parts of the medium's psyche or genuine post-mortem individuals). If we count personalities and communicators simply on the basis of the number of *names* claimed, or the number of separate identities claimed by or through the subject, then mediums and multiples have comparably extensive inventories. But since alternate personalities and communicators often exhibit only the most subtle behavioral differences, and sometimes differ only in what they *claim* about themselves, and since the appearance of counterfeit new personalities or communicators can sometimes be explained in terms of demand characteristics of the therapeutic or mediumistic situation, one can't be sure how large the actual inventories really are. Hence, this sort of 'head counting' is unlikely to yield any useful information about the relationship between mediumship and MPD.

(6) Gauld also says he knows of no 'complete parallel for the simultaneous and apparently quite full manifestation of two personalities (one through the hand and one through the voice), which occurred quite commonly during one period of Mrs. Piper's mediumship' (1982, p. 112). Now first of all, Mrs. Piper's case is not unique in this respect, although it is uncommon. Another impressive case is that of Mrs. Curran, who could converse or write letters with one hand, while the other hand produced the Patience Worth scripts on the ouija board.

But it is unclear why this phenomenon would count against a dissociationist interpretation of mediumship. To begin with, the literature on MPD contains numerous reports of submerged personalities expressing themselves through automatic writing, while another personality is in executive control of the body.

But even if some mediums exhibit simultaneous and robust personalities to a degree unmatched by any case of MPD, the interpretation of that phenomenon is still far from clear. As we have already seen, it might (for all we know) be a rare form of dissociation, perhaps explained in terms of etiological differences between mediumship and MPD, or perhaps in terms of differences in demand characteristics. We must remember, once again, that the varieties of dissociative phenomena might reflect no more than a variety of dissociative functions or contexts for dissociation.

(7) Some might think that etiological differences between mediumship and MPD would support the survival hypothesis. For example, in most cases of MPD, the phenomena begin in childhood; and alternate personalities often have extended histories out in the world. But mediumship can begin in adulthood; and more importantly, the communicators tend to pop in and out of the medium's life, just like the 'visitors' or possessors they claim to be.

But, like the other differences I've discussed, this doesn't show very much. Although it might (at best) support the view that mediumship is not a form of MPD, mediumship could still be a dissociative phenomenon. Once again we must remember that dissociative phenomena come in varieties and degrees. For example, mediumship might be akin to hysterical fugue, which typically occurs later in life than MPD. Moreover, fugue states seem less profound and more ephemeral than alternate personalities, presumably because the subject's personality, after a certain age, is too solidified and developed to be deeply and permanently fragmented. Another possibility is that communicating personalities are analogous to certain artifacts of hypnosis (e.g., the 'hidden observer'). That is, they might be products of a kind of self-hypnosis; and their features might be influenced by demand characteristics of the séance.

(8) Perhaps a related point about etiology will fare somewhat better. It concerns the different degrees to which alternate personalities and mediumistic communicators make sense in terms of the subject's life history. Generally speaking, we can understand why alternate personalities develop and why they have their distinct sets of attributes. We can understand their functions relative to traumas or other incidents in the patient's history, and we can see how they fit into a larger personality *system*, as well as the patient's ongoing efforts to cope with everyday problems. By contrast, mediumistic communicators seem to play no comparable role in the medium's life; they seem to be *dynamically fortuitous*. But then perhaps they are not simply created by the subject, and are instead genuine discarnate communicating entities.

It should be clear by now that this suggestion can be attacked for reasons considered earlier. While it might be true that mediumistic communicators do not play the *same* role in the medium's life as alternate personalities play in the life of a multiple, it would be rash to conclude that they play no role at all. As Eisenbud's analysis of the Cagliostro-persona reminds us, mediumistic communicators might simply serve a different kind of function. Granted, communicators might not be created in response to traumas, either directly or by means of subsequently developed coping techniques. But dissociative processes might serve a wide variety of needs and interests; and their role in the life of a medium might be far more subtle than in cases where subjects have experienced major traumas, and where alternate personalities are clearly trauma-specific.

I think we must conclude, then, that the comparison of mediumship to MPD does not support the survival hypothesis. Of course, it might still be the case that some mediumistic communicators are post-mortem individuals. But it seems futile to argue for that claim by comparing cases of mediumship to those of MPD.

MULTIPLE PERSONALITY AND SURVIVAL

That brings us, finally, to the intrusion hypothesis, the claim that some alternate personalities are really discarnate entities passing themselves off as mere fragments of the person's psyche. This hypothesis differs in important respects from the other two. First, it has relatively few supporters. And second, it is seldom supported by means of the comparative method. Perhaps that is why it is the easiest of the three to evaluate. In fact, it can be easily evaluated *whether or not* one accepts the hypothesis of survival. Indeed, even those sympathetic to survival tend to reject the intrusion hypothesis. The reasons are relatively straightforward.

(1) For one thing, as McDougall (1905) observed, in cases where *integration* of personalities seems to have occurred, it is not especially plausible to interpret alternate personalities as post-mortem individuals. Integration is presumably a form of *making whole again* or *reintegration*. Hence, it suggests a process of simply *putting back together* elements that previously had formed a whole. But *ex hypothesi*, post-mortem individuals were not parts of the subject to begin with.

No doubt some will find McDougall's argument unconvincing. For example, one might object that the term 'integration' is simply an unfortunate choice in this context. The process it denotes might not be a mere reuniting of parts that once formed a whole. Perhaps after integration a *new* person can result from a synthesis of old parts and new ones imported from the spirit realm. Or, if that seems too bizarre, perhaps in the integrated subject, the original self acquires skills and traits from formerly invading spirits who then depart. Or, if that still seems too bizarre, one could always argue that the integration is only illusory to begin with. For one thing, attempted integrations often seem quite unstable. And perhaps that's because one can't merge a multiple's post-mortem personalities with its ante-mortem personalities. Perhaps, like oil and water, these entities simply don't mix (or mix only temporarily). Or perhaps the integration is illusory in another respect. As some clinicians concede, multiples may feign integration for a variety of reasons. So perhaps the subject is motivated to appear as if integration occurred. In any case, no matter what one thinks of these various speculations, the fact remains that many multiples seem either unable or unwilling to integrate. So at best, McDougall's point is quite limited in scope.

(2) But other points are not. For one thing, as I noted above, it is generally clear how alternate personalities fit into the multiple's life history and how they together form a kind of personality *system*. That is, it is generally clear why multiples develop the kinds of personalities they display, and what role the personalities continue to play in the life of the patient. But in that case, the survivalist hypothesis seems unnecessary and unparsimonious.

And that is true even in cases where alternate personalities claim to be communicating spirits. In a well-known paper, Cutler & Reed (1975) discuss a case of hysterical MPD, in which the patient has one personality claiming to be

from the 18th century, and another from the 21st century. Now the patient's other personalities were transparently adaptive; their roles concerned types of behavior and situations she had difficulty handling, especially those involving her sexuality. But the temporally-displaced personalities likewise seem clearly adaptive. They, too, appeared to have an important function in the patient's overall emotional and psychological makeup.

Of course not all personalities in a multiple's personality-system have clearly identifiable functions and reasons for existing. But that hardly warrants treating those alternate personalities as discarnate spirits in disguise. A more reasonable conjecture is that not enough is known about the multiple to be able to identify the personality's origin and role.

(3) Ralph Allison (1985) reports that many of his patients present personalities who claim to be spirits of deceased people (some of whom had been multiples in earlier incarnations). Others claim to be spirits never previously embodied. Usually, these personalities claim that their function is to help cure the patient. Allison calls alternate personalities who help the patient *Inner SelfHelpers* (ISHs); and this subset of the ISHs he calls *Higher Helpers* (HHs).

Obviously, Allison's data may be interpreted along either survivalist or non-survivalist lines (Allison prefers the former). A survivalist would contend that at least some HHs really are discarnate individuals. Opinions may then divide over why certain spirits (rather than others) intervene in the subject's life, and what situations are conducive to that intervention. For example, one fairly obvious approach would be to argue that invading spirits have needs and interests converging somehow with those of the subject, and that a multiple's psychological weaknesses and already existing fragmented state give them 'room' to enter. A non-survivalist, however, would simply regard the HHs as a particular class of personalities or personality fragments, taking a form psychologically useful to the subject.

Although I'm not opposed in principle to the hypothesis that people survive bodily death (though I'm not in favor of it either), I must say that Allison's belief in the survivalist interpretation of HHs is not well-founded. There are several reasons for this.

(i) To begin with, it is tempting once again to raise the issue of personality-robustness. If HHs are temporarily embodied or re-embodied spirits, why should they be relatively one-dimensional personalities, like most alters? Why should they seem so much like helpful parts of a fragmented psyche, rather than more full-bodied personalities using a full repertoire of affect or responses to aid the patient? The fact is, HHs simply *seem* only to be personality fragments who claim to be spirits. Except for claiming to be non-corporeal, they are not conspicuously different from other helpful alters (say, with regard to their limitations or functions in the patient's overall psychology).

But, as we've seen, one can't simply assume that discarnate spirits suffer no limitations during possession or in the process of communication. To be fair to the survivalist, we must admit we have no idea what sorts of personality distortions might occur under the circumstances. Moreover, there is no reason to insist that a possessing or communicating spirit is either compelled or motivated to appear in its most robust form. Perhaps it reveals or gives only as much of itself as the situation demands.

(ii) A more serious problem with Allison's position concerns the reliability of his data. One reason Allison believes that HHs are not merely alternate personalities is that they remain after the patient is integrated (1985). Of course, Allison could be mistaken about whether his patients were fully integrated. Like many others working in the field, Allison may well have misjudged the success of his integration attempts, whether or not the error was motivated by a prior belief in survival. But quite apart from the issue of successful integration, Allison's data strongly suggest iatrogenic contamination. We know that pseudo-personalities and personality fragments may be created in hypnotic or other therapeutic settings. So we might wonder how antecedently sympathetic Allison was to the survival hypothesis, and how he might have subtly communicated that to the patient. Moreover, we should recall an important fact from the history of hypnosis—namely, that practitioners of different schools of hypnosis tended to see correspondingly different sorts of hypnotic symptoms. Those researchers, in other words, got the distinctive sorts of dissociative phenomena they expected. Clearly, the same could be true for Allison.

(iii) Perhaps the most important objection of all to Allison's view and (more generally) to the intrusion hypothesis concerns the psychological utility of HHs and their ilk. Considering how much HHs resemble ordinary alternate personalities in their clinical presentation, we should ask: Why might it be important for a multiple to regard certain alternate personalities as temporarily embodied spirits? Two reasons in particular stand out. When the ostensible spirit serves the function of a helper personality, the patient might feel as if his guidance and cure is directed by something transcendent, something inevitably more powerful or wise than the patient feels himself (or his therapist) to be. Besides, as Allison concedes, HHs do not offer *evidence* of survival; they merely claim to be spirits. Therefore, since helper personalities appear in many (if not most) cases of MPD, it seems reasonable to suppose that HHs are merely a subset of the set of helper personalities. They would be those ISHs that, for reasons of deep psychological importance to the patient, claim to be entities who possess the wisdom gained from higher plains, or from the experience of a former life.

Moreover, in cases where the ostensible spirit is not a helper, the patient might benefit in a rather different way. Unlike part of one's own fractured self, an invading spirit would conveniently deflect responsibility for behavior away from the patient and onto the spirit realm. The patient would not have to feel personally responsible for behavior that would normally be provocative or emotionally risky. Interestingly, some skeptics about the genuineness of MPD (e.g., Kenny, 1986) think that even ordinary alternate personalities result from a kind of role-playing, and offer similar advantages to the multiple (or 'primary' personality). Now whether or not that view is defensible (and there are good reasons for thinking that it is not—Braude, 1988), it is clear that by assigning risky feelings or behavior to a discarnate entity, rather than to another part of oneself, the subject can deflect responsibility to an even greater degree.

These last considerations lead us back to mediumship. Obviously, mediumistic communicators might play a role similar to that of ostensibly discarnate alternate personalities. In fact, there are two major reasons why a medium might prefer to see communicators as genuinely discarnate, rather than as elements or

creations of her own psyche. First, quite apart from the social utility or notoriety some might find in being a medium, there is considerable psychological value in believing the messages to be conveyed by something transcendent. The medium might neither trust nor respect words of wisdom, comfort, advice or guidance, or even bits of mundane information, if she felt they came from her own mind. And of course, the medium's sitters might share and reinforce this point of view. Second, a belief in one's mediumship psychologically takes the medium off the hook, with regard to successes as well as failures. Since a medium believes that she is merely an intermediary for communications and information provided by discarnate entities, she never has to feel responsible when a séance goes awry (i.e., when no phenomena, or only disappointing phenomena occur). And perhaps more important, when successes occur (i.e., when good information is communicated), the medium never has to fear the extent of her powers, particularly when the séance is over. She does not need to attribute successes to her own ESP, which, for a first-rate medium, would suggest a degree of psychic functioning that I believe frightens most people very deeply. And when we consider the deeper psychological needs which the communicators' information or behavior might satisfy—needs which we might be reluctant to acknowledge—how convenient, then, if the information or behavior is provided by a third party, a communicator for whom we can feel (say) contempt. Once again, the medium herself can feel blameless for anything the sitters find objectionable. (And again, I recommend Eisenbud's essay on Cagliostro.)

I must reiterate that I'm not ruling out the possibility that mediums really do provide communications from the dead. But I find it interesting that, once again, the literature on MPD gives us reason to question the survivalist interpretation of mediumship. Granted, merely comparing mediumship to MPD does not undercut the survival hypothesis. But as we deepen our grasp of the etiology and dynamics of multiplicity, we inevitably see how the underlying dynamics of mediumship might also be more complex than they have seemed. Accordingly, it becomes easier to make conjectures about the ways in which dissociative phenomena might manifest in forms appropriate to a mediumistic séance. Indeed, that seems to be a major irony in the parapsychological study of MPD. Ever since the founding of the S.P.R., many have expected the study of dissociation to help *strengthen* the case for survival (for example, that seems to have been Myers' view [1903]). But in fact, it only gives us better reasons for treating mediumship as one of many possible forms of dissociation.

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