

## TIME AND PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

MARTHA KNEALE (*Great Britain*)

Psychical research raises special problems connected with time, for it appears to reveal possibility of direct or non-inferential knowledge of future events. In an ordinary commonsense way we believe that non-inferential knowledge is gained only by acquaintance with what is present, as in sense-experience. The future, not yet existent, is not there to be known. Inferential knowledge (or true belief) of the future is non-puzzling, being gained from our knowledge of the present together with our ascertained knowledge of the laws of nature.

Non-inferential knowledge of the past exists in memory; there have been claims of such knowledge unrelated to memory, but they are rare. However, the past (though not existent as is the present) is regarded as fixed and determinate, while the future is held by many, particularly those who maintain any doctrine of free will, to be in some sense indeterminate. Paranormal precognition is therefore held to be more of a paradox than paranormal retrocognition.

Evidence for precognition may be of two kinds, spontaneous or experimental. The former may be found in various well-known instances of dreams, waking visions, voices and bare presentiments. The latter comprises deliberate and controlled effects such as those observed by J. B. Rhine, S. G. Soal, Whately Carington, and others. From both categories we may conclude that there is good evidence for existence of precognitive telepathy or clairvoyance, or both.

Various theories have been devised to explain precogni-

tion. In my view only two types of theory are possible, and one, when worked out, is unintelligible while the other is wildly implausible. If precognition is the acquisition of information about the future, this must be acquired either directly or indirectly. If the first, we must adopt some theory of multi-dimensional time. When worked out this is unintelligible. If the second, we must assume that precognition is unconscious inference, which is wildly implausible. In the light of this the earlier definition of precognition as non-inferential must be modified to include a possible theory that it is really inferential. The modified definition makes "precognition" mean "*apparently* non-inferential knowledge of the future."

J. W. Dunne's theory, set forth in his *Experiment With Time*, belongs to the first category. It begins with a metaphor, never gets beyond it, and this is its radical defect. Stating that it takes time to traverse time, he is committed to a "Time 2," then by the same logic to a "Time 3," and so on in an infinite regress. Mr. Dunne admits this, but thinks that his regress is harmless. To me, it is a flagrant case of the paradox of the actual infinite. This arises when we have a series which both *must* be, and *cannot* be, completed. The basic flaw is in the beginning and is based on the assignment of a mathematical meaning to the strictly colloquial and non-mathematical metaphor that it takes time to traverse time. The progress from here to next Tuesday is not analogous to the progress from here to London. It does not "take time." It *is* time. So there is no need to enter on Mr. Dunne's regress.

The second theory I would call the "calculating boy" or "unconscious inference" theory. Many persons know things without being aware of *how* they know them. This seems to be due to extremely rapid but unconscious inference from known facts. But precognition differs from the "calculating boy" faculty in that what the "calculating boy" infers are all *a priori* or necessary truths. What are precognized are particular events. Inference here is in-

ductive rather than purely deductive. But this kind of pattern is not one into which true precognitions can fit. The percipient could not have known in the normal way the factual premises necessary to the inference. If there is precognition, then, by inference, it must be from inference, from facts paranormally known, which is wildly implausible, in view of the nature of the required data.

The theory of precognition as unconscious inference can perhaps be rendered more plausible if we assume a temporary "coalescence" of minds, so that the actual inferential process is performed by the joint or common mind.