THE POSSIBILITY OF SURVIVAL AFTER DEATH

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My remarks on the subject of survival will mostly be confined to the question as to whether a life after death for the individual is theoretically possible, i. e., the supposition of it free from internal inconsistency and from inconsistency with scientifically established facts.

This question turns on the answer to the classical one as to the nature of the relation between the individual's mind and his body—his "mind," in the present connection, being taken to include also whatever may be meant by the vague words "soul" and "spirit."

The chief conceptions of the mind-body relation have been *materialism*, according to which "mind" is only a name for certain physiological processes in the brain; *behaviorism*, which conceives mind as the manner in which the body behaves in so far as it intelligently adapts itself to its environment, or its environment to itself; *epiphenomenalism*, which acknowledges the existence of states of consciousness as effects of certain brain processes, but holds that those states do not themselves cause any bodily events; *idealism*, polar opposite of materialism, which regards what are called material objects, including the human body, as sets of conjoined sensations and ideas; and *dualism*, which holds mind and matter to be each a substance, in the classical sense of something that can exist independently, whereas attributes or properties can exist only in a substance—dualism then conceiving the relationship between mind and body more specifically either as, with Descartes, *interactionism;* or, with Male-

branche, as *occasionalism;* or, with Spinoza, as *parellelism;* or, with Leibniz, as *preestablished harmony.*

On the present occasion, it would be neither appropriate nor possible to consider the objections to which these various conceptions of the mind-body relation have been found open. I can say only that interactionism—which holds that some events in the brain cause some mental events, and also that some mental events cause some brain events—does, I think, when formulated somewhat otherwise than by Descartes, provide the ultimately most adequate conception of the mind-body relation. What I propose to do, therefore, is first to mention the objections to interactionism most often raised and to say briefly why they are invalid; and then to consider the bearing which the nature of the relation between mind and body, as conceived by interactionism, has on the possibility of survival.

First, however, a few words—necessary for clarity of thought on the subject, but too often omitted—as to what exactly the two words, "material" and "mental," mean: The "material" world, I submit, comprises all the things, events, states, and processes, that are perceptually public; and also their minute constituents, which are not perceptible but are indirectly discoverable by scientific induction. "Mental," on the other hand, is the name applied to the things, events, states, and processes that only introspection directly reveals; and also to the subconscious ones, which elude introspective observation but are indirectly discoverable by scientific induction.

Now, concerning interactionism as traditionally conceived, one difficulty is that it assumes man's mind, and his body, to be each a "substance" in the traditional sense of something wholly self-sufficient; and hence that interaction between two substances—since it would breach their self-sufficiency—is inherently impossible.

The obvious reply is that that conception of substance is quite arbitrary. As ordinarily used, "substance," or

more particularly "material substance," denotes such things as iron, wood, sugar, water, etc., which patently act upon one another; and, in such usage, the nature of any substance consists of some particular set or system of causal capacities, or, to use the currently favored term, dispositions. The causal capacities of a mind would be different from those of a material object, but a mind too would be a substance because its nature too would consist of some complex of causal capacities.

Another objection, which has been advanced against the possibility of mind-body interaction, is that, because mental events and events in the tissues of the brain are so radically heterogeneous, they cannot possibly cause changes in one another. Here the reply is that the relation called "Causality" presupposes nothing at all as to the particular nature of events related as cause and effect. As the philosopher, David Hume, has made clear, theoretically any sort of event could be the cause of events of a given other sort; so that only observation tells us what in particular can cause what.

Again, it has been argued that interaction between mind and brain is impossible because it would violate the principle of Conservation of Energy. But Professor C. D. Broad, in his Tarner Lectures, *The Mind and Its Place in Nature*, has shown (pp. 103ff.) that interaction would not necessarily involve such violation. Moreover, Conservation of Energy (or of Mass-Energy) is only a defining postulate of the notion of an "isolated physical system"; and we do not know that the material world really is such a system.

Again, it has been said that we cannot conceive *how* the mental event called an act of will causes a molecular change in brain tissue, nor *how* another molecular change there causes the mental event called a sensation. But whenever, as in this case, *immediate* instead of *remote* causation is concerned, the question as to "how" becomes meaningless; for to ask "how" an event A causes an event

B is to ask through what *intermediate* chain of causes and effects B is remotely caused by A.

Finally, an interesting question, which at first seems incongruous but is really crucial in connection with that of the relation between mind and body, is this: Out of the thousands of human bodies which each of us perceives, how does he know which one of them is *his own* body? The answer, ultimately, is that, to say of a particular human body that it is "one's own" *means* that it is the only one in which he can cause movements *directly* by willing them; and the only one, stimulation of whose sense organs and consequent excitation of the regulated regions of the brain cortex, *directly* causes him to experience sensations of the corresponding kinds.

Now, if body and mind are conceived each as a substance *in the sense specified in what precedes*, between which two some interaction occurs; what then, if anything, follows as to the possibility that the mind lives on after the death of its body? To answer this question, we need to notice four kinds of possible causal capacities, some of which a substance might have. They are:

a) *Physico-physical* capacities, e. g., fusibility, solubility, deductibility, etc.
b) *Physico-psychical* capacities, e. g., visibility, odorousness, etc.
c) *Psychico-physical* capacities, e. g., capacity for voluntary movement, or for blushing from shame, etc.
d) *Psychico-psychical* capacities, of which all associations of ideas would be examples.

In the light of this classification, we can say now that all physical substances have physico-physical capacities; but that the particular sort of physical substance of which the brain cortex consists has, in addition, the physico-psychical capacity to affect, and the psychico-physical capacity to be affected by, events in the particular mind connected with the particular brain concerned.

Similarly, psychical substances, i. e., minds, have psychico-psychical capacities; but, in addition, such minds as have a living body have the capacity to affect, and to be affected by, events in the cortex of its brain. At the death of its body, a mind would lose these psychico-physical and physico-psychical capacities—or at least would lose the possibility of exercising them. But no contradiction is involved in supposing it to retain, and to continue exercising, its psychico-psyschical capacities. What a *post mortem* life, consisting wholly in the exercise of them, could be like has been illuminatingly described by Professor H. H. Price in a lecture "Survival and the Idea of 'Another World'" (S. P. R. *Proceedings*, Vol. 50, January 1953).

Now, if, as the remarks which precede would indicate, a life after death for the individual is theoretically quite possible, the next question is, Do we have any evidence of its being a fact?

As to this, what can be said is that some of the best communications by automatists—for example, Mrs. Piper's, and the "cross-correspondence" communications—provide much the same kind of evidence that the communicator is the particular deceased relative or friend he claims to be as would ordinarily convince us of the identity of a person telephoning us from a distant city. Some persons, however, who are familiar with those communications, contend that extensive powers of telepathy and/or clairvoyance exercised by the medium in trance are sufficient to account both for the contents and for the style of the communications; and hence that these do not conclusively prove survival.

This, then, leaves us with the question, *What sort of evidence, and in what quantity, would, if we could get it, constitute wholly conclusive proof of survival?* Until a definite answer to *this* question is agreed upon, the question as to whether proof of survival already exists has no definite meaning and therefore cannot be answered "Yes" or "No."