

ON THE CENTENARY OF
FREDERIC W.H. MYERS'S
*HUMAN PERSONALITY AND ITS SURVIVAL OF
BODILY DEATH*

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ABSTRACT: Frederic W.H. Myers's book *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* was a hundred years old in 2003. While the purpose of the book was to argue for survival of bodily death, Myers also presented a unifying model of normal, abnormal, and parapsychological phenomena based on the workings of a subliminal or subconscious mind. *Human Personality* grew in the contexts of nineteenth-century Spiritualism, psychical research, and psychology and psychiatry. While Myers's book presented creative ideas, its association with psychic phenomena and ideas of interaction with the spiritual world brought many criticisms. Nonetheless, the book has been very influential and its content is still relevant to present concerns of psi functioning and the subconscious mind. It is also argued that some modern parapsychological work is consistent with Myers's ideas and that there are several lines of research that may be followed up to put Myers to the test.

The purpose of this book . . . aims . . . at the satisfaction
of scientific curiosity as to man's psychical structure
(Myers, 1903, Vol. 1, p. 68)

A hundred years ago several interesting works were published related to psychical research. These included Ernesto Bozzano's *Ipotesi Spiritica e Teoriche Scientifiche* (1903) and Joseph Maxwell's *Les Phénomènes Psychiques* (1903). Both authors, who emphasized mediumistic phenomena and their explanation, were influential in European circles. However, 1903 also saw the publication of a far more important and influential book said to "probably prove . . . to be a more or less epoch-making work in its field, no matter what may become of [its] conclusions" (Hyslop, 1905, p. 20). I am referring to *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903), by Frederic W.H. Myers (hereinafter abbreviated as *Human Personality*). In these comments I would like to discuss briefly this important book. My purpose is to bring to the attention of contemporary readers the content of the book as well as aspects of its intellectual context, reception, and current implications.

MYERS AND HIS INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

Frederic William Henry Myers (1843-1901) was an English classical scholar and a poet. In 1864 he placed second in the first class of both the Classical Tripos and the Moral Sciences Tripos at Cambridge University. A year later he held a fellowship and a college lectureship in classics at Trinity College (Gauld, 1968). On a more practical matter, Myers was employed as an inspector of schools. While his background did not include scientific nor psychological training, Myers educated himself in science over the years with special attention to psychology and psychiatry. For the purposes of this paper I focus on his far more important role as a psychologist and psychical researcher.¹

Myers was one of the founders and early researchers of the London-based Society for Psychical Research (SPR). In terms of theoretical developments, Myers was the most important of the nineteenth-century British psychical researchers. More than any other psychical researcher in his times, he contributed to the expansion of psychology and the establishment of a connection between psychology and psychical research. This was clearly developed in a series of papers on automatism published in the 1880s (e.g., Myers, 1884, 1885) and in important discussions of the functions of the subliminal or subconscious mind that appeared in the 1890s (e.g., Myers, 1892b, 1893). The culmination and final articulation of this work appeared in his *Human Personality*.

Soon after Myers's death in 1901 many eminent figures were already praising the importance of his work. Oliver Lodge (1903, p. 6) compared Myers to Francis Bacon, and William James (1903) stated that Myers "shows . . . a genius not unlike that of Charles Darwin for discovering shading and transition, and grading down discontinuities in his argument" (p. 30). These comparisons came from the fact that Myers had an unusual talent to conceptualize and synthesize a wide range of features and qualities of the mind so as to order existing knowledge and create new connections and relationships. In this context it is significant that Myers's colleague Edmund Gurney once told Frank Podmore (1901): "Whilst I am reading a book Myers will master a literature" (p. 30).

Myers's work was identified so much with the goals and work of the SPR that in his 1905 Presidential Address to the Society, French physiologist Charles Richet stated that he considered Myers to be the soul of the SPR (Richet, 1905, p. 4). Perhaps Richet's statement meant that Myers was the central figure of the SPR because he painted

such a wide range and far reach of the features, weaknesses, and potentialities of the human mind as to personify the best of the Society. His writings (e.g., Myers, 1884, 1892b) publicized and articulated the subject matter of psychical research in influential ways. Much of this work, not to mention *Human Personality*, gave cohesion and a theoretical structure to the then-new enterprise of psychical research.

THE CONTENT OF HUMAN PERSONALITY

Human Personality came out in 1903 in two massive volumes with 1,360 pages. Not counting an introduction, epilogue, and several appendices, there were eight chapters entitled: "Disintegrations of Personality," "Genius," "Sleep," "Hypnotism," "Sensory Automatism," "Phantasms of the Dead," "Motor Automatism," and "Trance, Possession and Ecstasy." Each of these chapters had an appendix devoted to cases and observations Myers compiled from the psychological, psychiatric, and psychical research literatures to support the arguments he presented in the book. The topics of the book were a mix of the normal, the abnormal, and what Myers called the *supernormal*, or a phenomenon "which goes beyond the level of ordinary experience, in the direction of evolution, or as pertaining to a transcendental world" (Myers, 1903, Vol. 1, p. xxii). This included telepathy, clairvoyance, hauntings, and other phenomena of psychical research.

Although Myers had died in 1901, he had made arrangements to have the book prepared for publication in case of his death. The book was put in order for publication by Richard Hodgson and Alice Johnson. It incorporates sections of papers Myers published in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, such as those cited above. These papers clearly show that many of Myers's ideas had appeared before his book was published and that he had expressed belief in survival of death as early as the 1880s (e.g., Myers, 1889a). Soon after its publication *Human Personality* was translated into French (Myers, 1905, abridged edition) and Italian (Myers, 1909).

Myers stated his main concern clearly and openly on the first page of *Human Personality*: "The question for man most momentous of all is whether or not he has an immortal soul; or . . . whether or not his personality involves any element which can survive bodily death" (Vol. 1, p. 1). Such interest was an outgrowth of Spiritualism, whose main tenet was survival of bodily death and its study through reports of apparitions, haunted houses, and most specially,

mediumship. But in addition, Myers's early background, full of existential concerns and crises of faith (Gauld, 1968; Turner, 1974), had prepared him to explore Spiritualism for possible answers to such issues.²

In this exploration Myers insisted that if it were possible to study a spiritual world, this should be accomplished through empirical means. Inquiry, he stated in his book, must be based on the assumption that "*if a spiritual world exists, and if that world has at any epoch been manifest or even discoverable, then it ought to be manifest or discoverable now*" (Vol. 1, p. 7, Myers's italics).

In the book Myers analyzed many cases that he thought supported survival. He stated in chapter 9 in relation to apparitions and mediumship:

(a) In the first place, they prove survival pure and simple; the persistence of the spirit's life as a structural law of the universe; the inalienable heritage of each several soul.

(b) In the second place, they prove that between the spiritual and the material worlds an avenue of communication does in fact exist; that which we call the despatch and the receipt of telepathic messages, or the utterances and the answer of prayer and supplication.

(c) In the third place, they prove that the surviving spirit retains, at least in some measure, the memories and the loves of earth. Without this persistence of love and memory should we be in truth the same? To what extent has any philosophy or any revelation assured us hereof till now? (Vol. 2, pp. 256-257)

Myers discussed the mediumship of Mrs. Leonora Piper in chapter 9, arguing that it provided evidence for discarnate communication. Another evidence was the nature of telepathy. He argued that if telepathy were seen as the action of the incarnate spirit, a principle independent of the material body, perhaps this would support the idea of the existence of spirits without a body. Myers saw no logical reason to separate the existence of telepathy "and the conclusion that such faculty is exercised by somewhat within us which is not generated from material elements, nor confined by mechanical limitations, but which may survive and operate uninjured in a spiritual world" (Vol. 1, p. 24). Telepathy, Myers believed, was a law of the "metetherial," a term that he created to designate the "spiritual or

transcendental world in which the soul exists" (Vol. 1, p. xix). Later in the book he said that telepathy and telaesthesia (clairvoyance) were basically spiritual faculties, "survivals from the powers which that spirit once exercised in a transcendental world" (Vol. 2, p. 267). In Myers's view, "so soon as man is steadily conceived as dwelling in this wider range of powers, his survival of death becomes an almost inevitable corollary" (Vol. 2, p. 274). The assumption here was that the presence of spiritual powers while the person was alive indicated an element of human personality that continued after death into the spiritual world.

Another important argument for survival was what Myers referred to as *psychical excursion*. In his words, this "should involve not only the migrant spirit's perceptions *from* that point, but also perception of that point by persons materially present near it. That point may become a *phantasmogenetic centre*, as well as a centre of outlook" (Vol. 1, p. 232). This idea was used by Myers to discuss a variety of apparitions of the living that he saw as gradations of the same basic experience. Some of them were without consciousness of the person represented by the apparition (e.g., most arrival cases and "experimental" apparitions) while others had awareness of being in other locations, what we refer to today as out-of-body experiences. In addition, the cases also ranged from those in which the experiencer did not obtain veridical information and was not perceived at the remote location, to those in which information was obtained and someone perceived the experiencer (called *reciprocal apparitions* in SPR literature) (e.g., Gurney, Myers, & Podmore, 1886, Vol. 2, pp. 153-167). To refer to this separation or detachment of a psychical component of human beings, Myers coined the term "psychorrhagy," and referred to the propensity for this experience as a "psychorrhagic diathesis" (Vol. 1, p. 264). In the higher end of the excursive or psychorrhagic spectrum Myers speculated on the possibility of ecstasy, or the entrance to a spiritual world and to "communities higher than any which this planet knows" (Vol. 2, p. 194). Furthermore, and still emphasizing the importance of gradations or series of cases, Myers conceptualized these "self-projections" as "the one definitive act which it seems as though a man might perform equally well before and after bodily death" (Vol. 1, p. 297).³

In spite of all of these conclusions, Myers was to some extent conservative within Spiritualism. This is because he believed that most supernatural phenomena were "due to the action of the still embodied spirit of the agent or percipient himself" (Vol. 1, p. 6).⁴

The phenomena considered by Myers in his discussion were normal (e.g., sleep), abnormal (e.g., hysteria), and supernormal (e.g., telepathy) manifestations. These three types of phenomena were seen by Myers to be functions of the *subliminal* (subconscious) mind. In this conception Myers presented a comprehensive unified model to explain both psychological and parapsychological phenomena. This effort led William James (1903) to state that in *Human Personality* Myers “made a sort of objective continuum of what, before him, had appeared so pure a disconnectedness that the ordinary scientific mind had either disdained to look at it, or pronounced it mostly fictitious” (p. 22).

Myers clarified his use of “subliminal”:

The word *subliminal*. . . has already been used to define those sensations which are too feeble to be individually recognized. I proposed to extend the meaning of the term, so as to make it cover *all* that takes place beneath the ordinary threshold, or say, if preferred, outside the ordinary margin of consciousness; — not only those faint stimulations whose very faintness keeps them submerged, but much else which psychology as yet scarcely recognises; sensations, thoughts, emotions, which may be strong, definite, and independent, but which, by the original constitution of our being, seldom emerge into that *supraliminal* current of consciousness which we habitually identify with *ourselves*. Perceiving . . . that these submerged thoughts and emotions possess the characteristics which we associate with conscious life, I feel bound to speak of a *subliminal* or *ultra-marginal consciousness*. . . . Perceiving further that this conscious life beneath the threshold or beyond the margin seems to be no discontinuous or intermittent thing; that not only are these isolated subliminal processes comparable with isolated supraliminal processes (as when a problem is solved by some unknown procedure in a dream), but that there also is a continuous subliminal chain of memory (or more chains than one) involving just that kind of individual and persistent revival of old impressions, and response to new ones, which we commonly call a Self, — I find it permissible and convenient to speak of subliminal Selves, or more briefly of a subliminal self. I do not indeed by using this term assume that there are two correlative and parallel selves existing always within each of us. Rather I mean

by the subliminal Self that part of the Self which is commonly subliminal; and I conceive that there may be, — not only *co-operations* between these quasi-independent trains of thought, — but also upheavals and alternations of personality of many kinds, so that what was once below the surface may for a time, or permanently, rise above it. And I conceive also that no Self of which we can here have cognisance is in reality more than a fragment of a larger Self, — revealed in a fashion at once shifting and limited through an organism not so framed as to afford it full manifestation. (Vol. 1, pp. 14-15)

Myers believed that the subliminal self was involved in the production and guidance of normal processes such as creative acts, dreams, the effects of hypnotic suggestion, and a variety of vital physiological regulatory processes. In terms of the abnormal or the pathological, the subliminal also controlled hallucinations and hysteria (including double and multiple personality). Finally, supernormal manifestations such as telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, telekinesis and other processes were linked to this unifying principle. Myers stated that “the telepathic message generally starts from, and generally impinges upon, a subconscious or submerged stratum in both agent and percipient” (Vol. 2, p. 5).

The range of the subliminal was very wide not only in terms of phenomena or processes but in terms of type of phenomena: “Hidden in the deep of our being is a rubbish-heap as well as a treasure-house; — degenerations and insanities as well as beginnings of higher development; and any prospectus which insists on the amount of gold to be had for the washing should describe also the mass of detritus in which the bright grains lie concealed” (Vol. 1, p. 72).

The creative act was the result of subliminal “uprushes.” In genius, as Myers wrote in the third chapter of his book, we see a “power of appropriating the results of subliminal mentation to subserve the supraliminal stream of thought” (Vol. 1, p. 71). In both hypnosis and hysteria the subliminal self acquired a notion such as anesthesia or paralysis that was then conveyed to the supraliminal. Hypnosis provided “access into subliminal knowledge and power” (Vol. 1, p. 67). To some extent Myers followed the Nancy school of hypnosis in terms of accepting the power of suggestion.⁵ In his view suggestion was the “successful appeal to the subliminal self” (Vol. 1, p. 169).

In hysteria, dream-like and incoherent subliminal material was postulated by Myers to intrude into the supraliminal by passing through a permeable barrier. In his view the main characteristic of

hysteria was the “instability of psychical threshold” (Vol. 1, p. 66) separating the supraliminal from the subliminal. As Myers described the hypothetical process: “The morbid subliminal activity attracts or sucks down scraps of *supraliminal* activity . . . and deprives the supraliminal self of thus much of its due scope of control” (Vol. 1, p. 46). However, phenomena such as secondary personalities, generally considered to be hysterical phenomena and marks of degeneration by the medical profession (e.g., Janet, 1889), were, according to Myers, not necessarily pathological. Sometimes they “may even appear to be in some ways an *improvement* on the primary” personality (Vol. 1, p. 62). Such was the case, Myers pointed out, with the secondary personalities of Mary Reynolds and Félicité X, well known nineteenth-century cases (Vol. 1, pp. 333-335, 336-338; on these cases see Azam, 1887 and Plummer, 1860). Similarly, Myers cautioned us not to conclude that psychosis was degenerative until careful study had ruled out the possibility of an enlargement of powers (Vol. 2, p. 86).

Many of these phenomena came to the supraliminal by way of messages from the subliminal conveyed by sensory and motor automatisms, Myers believed. Sensory automatisms referred to “inner vision or inner audition externalized into quasi-percepts,” and were mainly hallucinations (although also intuitions, impulses, crystal visions, and dreams) that conveyed supernormal knowledge to consciousness. However, sensory automatisms did not have to be supernormal (veridical). They could also be after-images, hypnagogic imagery, or memory images with subliminal material that was not veridical. Motor automatisms were the “movement of limbs or hand or tongue, initiated by an inner motor impulse beyond the conscious will” (Vol. 1, p. 222, for both quotes). This included trance speaking, table tilting and automatic writing and drawing, among other phenomena. Similar to the sensory automatisms, the motor ones expressed considerable nonsupernormal material from the subliminal. Both kinds of nonveridical automatisms were illustrated by the manifestations of medium Hélène Smith, who Myers said showed “every kind of automatic irruption of subliminal into supraliminal life” (Vol. 2, p. 132).⁶

The expression of subliminal messages came through what Myers referred to as the “readiest *path of externalization*” (Vol. 2, p. 84). These were pathways characteristic to each person that may in addition reflect the ways taken by pathological processes. “If epilepsy, madness, &c., tend to *split up* our faculties in certain ways, automatism is likely to split them up in ways somewhat resembling these” (Vol. 2, p. 84). As Myers put it, the situation was similar to that of a gifted musician

who used an instrument of limited range. The ability of the musician could come through, but it could do so together with the flaws of the instrument. The manifestation depended on the nature of the specific path the mind used to externalize its communications.

Also related to the externalization of subliminal content was Myers's view that the content of mediumistic communications could be affected by the use of the medium's brain-centers that expressed the habits and turns of speech of the supraliminal. Consequently the use of pathways by which the medium's conscious mind expressed itself could contaminate the communications in different ways (Vol. 2, p. 249).

Myers believed that telepathy and telaesthesia "cannot have been acquired by natural selection, for the preservation of the race, during the process or terrene evolution" (Vol. 1, p. 118). Neither evolution nor heredity, Myers believed, shaped the nature of the subliminal self. These faculties were part of our pre-terrene heritage, part of our spiritual nature. Nonetheless, both evolution and heredity could affect the manifestation of these faculties by bringing on the development of vents in the threshold separating the subliminal from the supraliminal.

The physical phenomenon of mediumship was one of the areas that did not receive much attention in *Human Personality*, at least not as much attention as the mental phenomena. However, the topic was not completely neglected, as seen in discussions of mediums D.D. Home and William Stainton Moses (Vol. 2, pp. 515, 533-537, 540-541, 578-582). In Myers's view telekinesis was a variant of motor automatisms directed by the subliminal self (Vol. 2, p. 207). In addition, physical phenomena were discussed by Myers in the context of his vitalistic speculative exercise entitled "Scheme of a Vital Faculty" (Vol. 2, pp. 505-554), where he argued that the subliminal mind and discarnate spirits could use the vital functions of the body to create luminous and materialization phenomena. Myers referred to what he called *ectoplasy*, "the power of forming, outside some special organism, a collection or reservoir of vital force or of vitalised matter, which may or may not be visible, may or may not be tangible, but which operates in like fashion as the visible and tangible body from whence it is drawn" (Vol. 2, p. 545).⁷

It is clear throughout the book that Myers believed the brain and the nervous system did not produce consciousness but consciousness (or the spirit) used the nervous system to manifest. In active telepathy, for example, Myers postulated what he called a "telergic" effect. In his view "the percipient's motor or sensory centres must receive an

excitation;—which excitation may be communicated, for aught we know, either by his own mind in the ordinary way, or by the agent's mind in some direct way,—which I may call *telergic*" (Vol. 2, p. 197). These telergic effects on the brain may be "movements in matter;—even though that matter be organised matter and those movements molecular" (Vol. 2, p. 204). Myers thought these molecular actions of the brain take place as we control our own brain and as we affect others at a distance telepathically.

Telergic effects were part of what Myers called the achievement of the will, phenomena that he considered as starting inside the body and ending with their emergence from it to affect other bodies, both organic and inorganic:

In the first place we have *hyperboulia*; — the extension of the Will's power over tissues in the organism which its mandates have ordinarily failed to reach. In the second place, we have *telergy*; — the extension of its power over the brain molecules of an organism other than that with which it is primarily in connection. And in the third place we shall have "telekinesis" and the like; — a group of phenomena involving control over inorganic matter, and over organic matter both within and without its own organism. (Vol. 2, p. 522)

All this control assumed the supremacy of the mind (or the spirit) over the material and the organic realms. This was further illustrated by speculations on how a discarnate spirit communicated through a medium by using this individual's brain resources: "The spirit selects what parts of the brain-machinery he will use, but he cannot get out of that machinery more than it is constructed to perform" (Vol. 2, pp. 190-191). While Myers thought that the medium could produce veridical information unknown to her, he did not think it possible for a medium to produce "mathematical formulae or Chinese sentences, if the automatist is ignorant of mathematics or of Chinese" (Vol. 2, p. 191).⁸

In *Human Personality* Myers discussed survival of death and the functioning and dynamics of the subliminal mind, and he called for an expanded outlook of the mind in terms of recognizing the supernatural and the view that the mind was a causal agent independent of the body. Furthermore, the book served at least two other functions. First, Myers's discussion was also a reminder of the need to expand the range of psychology. As he wrote, his discussions covered "a multitude of phenomena which at present stand in the

text-books with no adequate explanation, as well as a multitude of phenomena which the text-books altogether ignore" (Vol. 2, p. 82). Second, the book was to some extent an overview of the state of the art in psychical research at the turn of the century. This was particularly true of work regarding telepathy, mental mediumship, and apparitions of different sorts, with emphasis on SPR work.

THE CONTEXT OF *HUMAN PERSONALITY*

Human Personality was crafted within several intellectual contexts. One of them was Spiritualism, especially British Spiritualism (Oppenheim, 1985). This movement clearly influenced the SPR and later parapsychology in important ways (Alvarado, 2003), not to mention psychology and psychiatry (Ellenberger, 1970; Le Maléfan, 1999; Plas, 2000). Many of Myers's ideas were discussed by spiritualists before the publication of *Human Personality*. This included the concepts of a basic spiritual nature in humankind, the transcendental nature of supernormal phenomena, the supernormal powers of the living, ideas of projection of the spirit during life and at death, the influence of spirits in mediumship, apparitions and haunting phenomena, the projection of vital force from the medium's body, and the concept of spiritual evolution (e.g., Ballou, 1853; Crowe, 1848; De Morgan, 1863; Kardec, 1863). Myers cited little of this literature to put his ideas in context. Perhaps he was trying to separate his efforts from those of the spiritualists, whom he probably perceived as having low evidential standards. We certainly see more acknowledgments to the psychological, psychiatric and psychical research literatures than to the writings of the spiritualists.

Other than the influence of Spiritualism, the content of *Human Personality* should be seen in the context of two important literatures: the joint literatures of psychology and psychiatry and that of psychical research. Concerning psychology and psychiatry, Myers drew heavily from French studies. Regarding dissociative phenomena, most of these workers focused on degeneration, pathology, and maladjustment and were generally hostile to the concept of normal dissociation (Crabtree, 1993; Le Maléfan, 1999). This is clear in Pierre Janet's (1889) classic *L'automatisme psychologique*, the subtitle of which states that Janet's topic was "inferior forms of human activity." That Myers was aware of this tradition is clear from his review of Janet's book (e.g., Myers, 1889b) and from the works he cited in his book. In chapter 2 (and the corresponding appendix) of *Human Personality*, entitled "Disintegrations of Personality," Myers cited the work of

authors such as Eugène Azam, Alfred Binet, Henri Bourrou and Prosper Burot, Ernest Mesnet, and Jules and Pierre Janet. These, and other authors, provided the basis for what Jules Héricourt (1889) simply referred to as the unconscious activity of the mind, a specialty based on the study of hypnosis and secondary personalities in which the French made notable contributions.

In addition, we should also remember that Myers's familiarity with French work came from personal contacts as well. He traveled more than once to France, where he observed telepathic hypnosis (Myers, 1886c) and transfer phenomena with magnets (Myers, 1886b). In addition, Myers (1886a) stated: "I have, through the kindness of Drs. Charcot, Féré, Bernheim, and Liébeault, myself witnessed typical [hypnosis] experiments at the Salpêtrière in Paris, in the Hôpital Civil at Nancy, and in Dr. Liébeault's private clinic; [and] have been allowed myself to perform experiments (with the aid of Mr. Gurney and Dr. A. T. Myers) on the principal subjects whose cases are recorded" (p. 6).⁹

The other major tradition informing *Human Personality* was psychical research. The main influence was the work of the SPR, some of whose members (Myers being a leading one) had made important contributions to the study of thought-transference, apparitions, hauntings, and mediumship, not to mention phenomena such as the stages of hypnotic memory and the psychology of automatic writing and hallucinations (Alvarado, 2002; Gauld, 1968, 1992). Many of the early SPR workers had a different goal from the reductionistic concerns of nineteenth-century psychiatry and psychology, and seriously considered the mind as a causal agent separate from the body. As stated by Oppenheim (1985): "Their goals were enormous, for they sought to resolve the mind-body puzzle by finding a *via media* between Cartesian dualism and a monism that threatened to eliminate mind entirely" (p. 266).

In addition to SPR work, Myers discussed in *Human Personality* psychical research work conducted in countries other than England. Examples of this are his citations of the work of Justinus Kerner in Germany (Vol. 2, pp. 570-571), William James in the United States (Vol. 2, pp. 599-602), Giovanni Battista Ermacora in Italy (Vol. 2, pp. 624-627), Alfred Backman in Sweden (Vol. 1, pp. 554-555), and Charles Richet in France (Vol. 1, pp. 486-487).

Myers's background in the last two mentioned literatures led him to try to balance the realities and miseries of life seen in hysteria and the like with optimal functioning as seen in creativity and in telepathy. In this synthesis, one that gave its place to the normal, the abnormal

and the supernormal, Myers was a pioneer and clearly an innovator. In addition, he saw parapsychological phenomena in the general context of human functioning and not as isolated anomalies. That is to say, the supernormal was connected to hysteria, hypnosis, multiple personality, dreams, hallucinations, and creativity because all of those phenomena were the province of the subliminal mind.

Attempts to relate the subconscious to the supernormal and to other psychological phenomena such as creativity and secondary personalities have been presented in previous books such as *The Law of Psychic Phenomena* (Hudson, 1893) and *L'être subconscient* (Gyel, 1899). However, neither of these works had the scope of *Human Personality*. While Myers presented many detailed and well investigated cases to illustrate the powers of the subconscious mind and its connections and continuities with a variety of phenomena, the previously mentioned authors limited themselves to short descriptions and few illustrative cases. The depths of subliminal life were well illustrated by Myers and, in comparison, poorly described by his predecessors. Myers also had a wider and farther-reaching concept of subconscious functions than the two mentioned authors. This was particularly true of Hudson, who talked about a "subjective" (or subconscious) mind that was dependent on the conscious for reasoning.

CRITIQUES AND RECEPTION OF *HUMAN PERSONALITY*

Regardless of the virtues of *Human Personality*, there were several problems with Myers's presentation. One of them was his writing style. William James (1903, p. 30) thought that in some parts it was too lyrical, while Alan Gauld (1968) described it as being sometimes "a kind of Cosmic chant" (p. 276). My own impression after reading the book is that some concepts are not described as clearly as one wishes and that some important ideas are not discussed in a focused way but instead are found throughout the book. However, it may be argued that Myers died before he could develop his ideas in more detail.

In addition, for many of us now (as well as for some of Myers's contemporaries) it is important to make a distinction between "subliminal psychology, as such, and the philosophico-religious system which Myers tried to outline" (Flournoy, 1911, p. 66). There is no question that Myers goes beyond the evidence in his speculations about the spiritual world, something that may alienate some of his readers. But before we discount his work we must remember that

every general theory has parts that are frankly speculative, and Myers was aware of the boldness of his speculations.

It has been said that Myers did not develop well his ideas of the subliminal in *Human Personality* and that he got sidetracked on the issue of survival of bodily death (E. Taylor, 1996, p. 147). To say that Myers was sidetracked from his emphasis on the subliminal to a concern with survival of bodily death perhaps may be understood by some as a suggestion that Myers lost his way. But such a view comes from an interest in and emphasis on the subconscious that was not Myers's and does not take into consideration the particular goals of some of the British nineteenth-century psychical researchers nor Myers's goals. Myers's explorations of the subliminal mind were embedded in the wider context of his attempts to determine if we as human beings could transcend physical limitations, particularly death (e.g., Cook, 1994). Survival of death was not a side issue, as an examination of Myers's life and work clearly shows (Cook, 1992; Gauld, 1968). This was instead a central concern in his system of thought and to argue the opposite is to misunderstand Myers completely.¹⁰

The evaluation of Myers's work soon after it came out must be seen in the context of the general skepticism of nineteenth-century science to the veridical (supernormal) phenomena of psychical research, particularly by students of the workings of the mind (for overviews see Coon, 1992; Le Maléfan, 1999; Oppenheim, 1985). The work of the SPR was widely criticized. One anonymous writer described it as "pseudo-psychology" (Review, 1888, p. 20). Psychologist James McKeen Cattell (1898/1986) stated that the SPR had done injury to psychology, while physician Charles Sedgwick Minot (1895) thought the whole thing was a "psychical comedy" carried on by literary men lacking scientific training. Following these trends it is not surprising that Myers's work, or parts of it, were considered controversial before the publication of *Human Personality*. As William James stated about Myers in a 1901 letter to English psychologist James Sully, he was aware of "how much psychologists as a rule have counted him out from their profession" (James, 1960, p. 69). We find authors such as Henry Goddard (1899), Pierre Janet (1889) and Boris Sidis (1898) praising Myers for some ideas but separating themselves from parts of his work they regarded too mystical or metaphysical. Such mixed feelings were also expressed later in regard to *Human Personality*. Myers himself was of course aware of how he was perceived by the psychological community. In a letter he wrote to Charles Richet, Myers (1891) made reference to his "psychological heterodoxy."

Still, there was some praise for Myers from Pierre Janet, who later criticized him. Janet (1886) called Myers “an English psychologist of talent” (p. 588). In the same paper Janet described one of Myers’s (1885) studies as a “very ingenious work demanding serious study” (p. 588). Both Jules Héricourt (1889, p. 268) and William James (1890, p. 173) also mentioned Myers in the context of important work on the concept of a secondary self. Alfred Binet (1892) stated that Myers was one of the authors who understood spiritistic phenomena. In Binet’s view, Myers “summarized very accurately the theory of multiple personalities at a moment when the studies of M. Janet about somnambulism and ours on hysterical insensibility . . . had not yet begun” (Binet, 1892, p. 299). Praise for Myers also came from the widely cited J.P. Durand (de Gros), who argued in 1900 at the Fourth International Congress of Psychology that among the many skillful and courageous men studying the subconscious mind two had distinguished themselves: Pierre Janet and F.W.H. Myers (Durand [de Gros], 1901, p. 650).

While some, such as Lodge (1903), had nothing but praise and admiration for *Human Personality*, others had more balanced views. Both Théodore Flournoy (1903) and William James (1903) believed Myers had presented a good map to serve as a guide for further explorations, but they were aware that the system needed further empirical support. As James wrote about Myers’s facts: “Myers has ascribed a universality and an extension to them for which he has no warrant, . . . he has drawn his rules from the exceptional cases, and made his spiritual universe too continuous” (p. 30).

English psychologist George Frederick Stout (1903) felt that many of the facts Myers presented to support his idea of the subliminal self could be explained in other ways. Janet (1904) stated that in *Human Personality* Myers showed “exaggerated generalizations and adventurous hypotheses” but also “remarkable descriptions and useful indications” (p. xiv). Another long-time critic of psychical research, American psychologist Joseph Jastrow (1906), also felt that Myers’s concept of the subliminal was supported by data of questionable origin.

Another example of outright rejection of Myers came from American psychopathologist Morton Prince. Although he made no reference to *Human Personality*, the comments that follow most probably referred to the book. In a letter written on November 26, 1910, Prince wrote to psychoanalyst James Jackson Putnam that he considered Freud’s ideas to be “based on carefully observed data arrived at by scientific methods,” in contrast to those of Myers, which

he considered to be “a philosophy not science” (Hale, 1971b, p. 324). Most probably these were reactions to Myers’s interests in survival of death and, more generally, in the supernormal.

Psychical researchers from different countries also had objections to Myers’s conclusions. In England, Frank Podmore (1910) argued in his book *The Newer Spiritualism* that Myers’s system was based on insufficient data and on phenomena still not accepted by science. In the United States, James H. Hyslop (1913) considered Myers’s subliminal to be over-inclusive, grouping with mental processes physiological ones that should not be part of the subliminal. In France René Sudre (1926) stated in his textbook *Introduction à la Métapsychique Humaine* in reference to survival that Myers’s ideas were not supported because the facts indicated survival of memories, not of the conscious self. In Germany Rudolf Tischner (1924) did not find Myers’s evidence of survival convincing.

To be fair to Myers, I have so far emphasized the negative reactions to his work and have not mentioned more positive comments in some of the writings I have cited (e.g., James, 1903) and also in some of the spiritualist publications not reviewed here to keep the discussion brief (e.g., The Myers book, 1903).

On a different issue, the reception of *Human Personality* is one thing, but its influence is quite another. Myers did not revolutionize psychology and psychical research in the sense that historians of science conceptualize scientific revolutions (e.g., Cohen, 1985), as evidenced by the fact that he is missing from discussions of the intellectual history of psychology (e.g., Robinson, 1986). Nonetheless, this is far from saying that Myers had no influence.¹¹ Myers did have a wide influence within psychical research similar in some ways to Sigmund Freud’s influence on psychology. Freud encountered much resistance, but his system was adapted and assimilated in a variety of ways, sometimes in the form of general, nonspecific concepts that were not connected to its originator, as it happened in the United States (Hale, 1971a; Shakow & Rapaport, 1964). So while there was no general agreement with all of Myers’s ideas, and frequently he did not get credited at all for his influence, many of his concepts were widely influential.

René Sudre (1956/1962) called Myers’s book “the Bible of British psychical researchers” (p. 378). Although Sudre’s statement is an exaggeration, there is no question that many British researchers were deeply influenced by Myers. This was evident in William Barrett’s *On the Threshold of the Unseen* (1917) and in G.N.M. Tyrrell’s *The Personality*

of *Man* (1947b). These authors referred to the subliminal self as an important concept in psychical research.

More than anyone else, Myers gave psychical research the idea that ESP and other phenomena were subconscious functions of personality.¹² As he said about telepathy, the agent “is operating on the percipient’s subconscious self by means of a telepathic impulse” (Vol. 2, p. 8). The concept has filtered down in the literature to our days. A few years after the publication of Myers’s book, Usher and Burt (1909) were speculating that telepathy was a process between the subliminal minds of two individuals. Carrington (1914) stated that a medium’s subliminal mind “acts as a sort of matrix in which the whole mould of the supernormal is cast” (p. 79). Years later Tyrrell (1947b) wrote: “Telepathy is a relation between the subliminal portions of two personalities” (p. 70). Different forms of the concept can be found among French researchers such as Sudre (1926) and Warcollier (1938) as well as in more recent writings (e.g., Tart, 1976; R. Taylor, 2003). In Hoyt Edge’s (1982) words, “the theory is widely accepted that psi information is received on the level of the unconscious and that it is then transferred to the conscious mind by a variety of mechanisms” (p. 193).

The last part of Edge’s comment is precisely what Myers referred to as sensory and motor automatisms. This idea has come to our days through the works of many researchers and writers, including Eleanor Sidgwick (1922), Jean Charles Roux (1937), Hereward Carrington (1940), Ernesto Bozzano (1942), G.N.M. Tyrrell (1947a), and Louisa E. Rhine (1953), among others. L.E. Rhine was influential in keeping this concept in the minds of modern parapsychologists both in her early 1953 paper and in later publications (e.g., L.E. Rhine, 1981). She did not cite Myers, relying instead on Tyrrell (1947a). But Tyrrell’s concept came directly from Myers and from other SPR work (e.g., Gurney, Myers & Podmore, 1886). As sometimes happens to the discussion of overarching concepts in science, over time the origins and early influential work supporting an idea are forgotten although the idea becomes a common assumption that is part of the canon.

HUMAN PERSONALITY AND MODERN PARAPSYCHOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY

Human Personality can still speak to modern psychology and parapsychology in different ways. Nonetheless, several aspects limit both the interest in and acceptance of Myers’s ideas today. Contemporary students of the mind in general do not believe the mind is independent from the body, that human beings have

“supernormal” powers, that these powers prove humankind have a spiritual nature, nor that survival of death is an idea worth taking seriously. As a philosopher stated about the survival hypothesis, this “contains metaphysical presuppositions so bizarre, and so at odds with ordinary scientific and empirical concepts, as to be, for most people—including me—close to incomprehensible” (Radden, 2000, p. 58). Until the current worldview changes, Myers’s *Human Personality*, like the field of parapsychology, will not find widespread acceptance within psychology.

Furthermore, in recent times parts of psychology have changed from emphasis on models assuming subconscious selves to models of the mind based on a variety of cognitive mechanisms, as seen in discussions of the cognitive unconscious (Bowers & Meichenbaum, 1984; Kihlstrom, 1987). In other words, we have lost the older emphasis on what James (1890) called the hidden self. Modern cognitive psychology has emphasized a computer-like model of the mind, discussing how information is processed by human beings and how it is perceived, organized, recognized, encoded, analyzed, and integrated into memory (Baars, 1986; Tallis, 2002). The emphasis is on preconscious processing, a concept different from Myers’s subliminal self. These psychologists, Tallis (2002) points out in his brief account of the development of cognitive psychology and its relationship to the concept of the unconscious mind, “were using the more restrained vocabulary of computer science. The new model did not require unconscious agencies or submerged secondary personalities. . . . All that was needed was a hierarchy of processing stages, processing from lower to higher levels” (p. 95).¹³

Explorations of those sub-selves or independent cognitive systems that Hilgard (1986) has called the “hidden observer” in hypnosis, and that Watkins and Watkins (1986) referred to as ego states, could be related to the concept of the subliminal self or at least explored with that viewpoint in mind. But we should bear in mind that those concepts are not meant to be such a basic aspect of human nature as Myers’s subliminal, a construct much wider than mere fragmentation states or cognitive sub-systems.

Topics such as implicit learning (Frensch & Rüniger, 2003), executive control of thoughts, skills, and habits (Logan, 2003), and unconscious perception (Merickle & Daneman, 1998) are discussed today without reference to the subconscious as conceptualized by Myers. Similarly, modern research and theorization on hallucinations (Bentall, 2000), hypnosis (Fromm & Nash, 1992), and creativity (Sternberg, 1999), for example, do not depend for the most part on

the concepts of sensory automatism, suggestions on the subliminal self, or subliminal uprushes. Instead there is interest in developmental, personality, cognitive, situational, and psychophysiological variables. Psychology and psychiatry have become a multivariate enterprise in which there is less reliance on a single explanatory concept such as the subliminal. In other words, the study of psychological phenomena is more complex today than in Myers's days.

Following psychologists, many parapsychologists today do not emphasize the subconscious as much as Myers did. If anything, they consider it as a factor but not necessarily the main one. Many discussions of psychological processes related to ESP rely on the interaction of different psychological variables (Irwin, 1979b; Schmeidler, 1988).

The issue of survival of death is not the main concern of parapsychology today. So Myers's analyses of apparitions and mediumship may not attract much attention. Furthermore, most of the main contemporary discussions on the topic do not follow Myers's approach in *Human Personality*: that is, the study of gradations of a variety of normal, abnormal, and supernormal phenomena. Instead there are examinations of different parapsychological lines of evidence (e.g., Braude, 2003) and studies of specific spontaneous experiences (e.g., Fontana, 2003) or mediumship (e.g., Schwartz, Geoffrion, Jain, Lewis, & Russek, 2003) that do not have the wide scope of Myers's approach.

Nonetheless, Myers has relevance for present-day concerns. He still inspires us to pay attention to the possibility of having a psychology based on optimal functioning. Furthermore, Myers's subliminal and his wide conception of human nature reminds us that our materialistic assumptions can always be questioned. In his system the mind (and the spirit) were clearly independent of the body. Myers saw the brain as a mechanism through which a more subtle principle had to go through in order to communicate. However, in doing so there were limitations in that communication could be distorted due to the set patterns of the brain: that is, both the pathological and the supernormal depended on the same pathways of expression, on the available resources in the brain.

Although written in a style different from ours, the concepts expressed by Myers in *Human Personality* have resonance in the ideas of those that have speculated later on the use the mind makes of the nervous system. Myers did not expect that the mind could produce complete modifications in the brain and felt that body control was

increased in trances and similar states because “the supraliminal processes are inhibited, and the lower organic centres are retained more directly under the spirit’s control” (Vol. 1, p. 217).

There are few discussions in the modern academic literature about consciousness of the possibility that mind can act on the brain as a separate causal agent (for an exception see Popper & Eccles, 1977). Even those that oppose simple reductionism do not come close to Myers’s ultimate hopes. As stated by Roger Sperry (1993), in the new cognitive revolution mental states are not seen as the product of simple brain function:

Reductive microdeterministic views of personhood and the physical world are replaced in favor of a more holistic, top-down view in which the higher more evolved entities throughout nature . . . gain their due recognition along with physics and chemistry. . . . The new position is mentalistic [but] does not mean that it is dualistic. In the new synthesis, mental states, as dynamic emergent properties of brain activity, become inseparably interfused with and tied to the brain activity of which they are an emergent property. Consciousness in this view cannot exist apart from the functioning brain. (p. 879)

In parapsychology, thinkers such as J.B. Rhine (1947), Robert Thouless and B.P. Wiesner (1947), Charles T. Tart (1979) and John Beloff (1990) have upheld the independence of the mind from the nervous system. But there have been almost no attempts to directly test such an assumption, no doubt due to the complexity of the problem (for an exception see Honorton, 1979).

Myers’s idea that psychic phenomena are not shaped by biological evolution because of their spiritual nature may seem incongruent at first sight with modern parapsychological thinking (e.g., Taylor, 2003).¹⁴ Nonetheless Myers accepted that evolution could affect the aspects related to its manifestation as opposed to the actual phenomena themselves. Both evolution (and heredity) could have an influence on the permeable barrier between the subliminal and the supraliminal by producing individuals with more permeable barriers than others. This idea may be compatible with the more recent discussions of evolution in parapsychology (Taylor, 2003), as well as heredity (Cohn, 1999).

In addition, it is possible to relate some relatively recent findings to Myers's ideas. Some recent theoretical concepts rely on the idea that some individuals have more permeable cognitive barriers than others, thus allowing the first to have more emotional, creative, dream, imagery, parapsychological, and other experiences than the second. This is the case of boundary thinness (Hartman, 1991) and transliminality (Thalbourne & Delin, 1994). Both constructs can be conceptualized through Myers's view of a permeable threshold allowing more access to the subconscious in different situations or in some persons more than others. The same may be said of the relationship of ESP and subliminal perception (Roney-Dougal, 1986).

Other findings consistent with this idea include a variety of studies that have related lower perceptual thresholds or fewer defenses to creativity (Shaw & Conway, 1990), magical ideation (Parker, 1999) and ESP (Watt & Morris, 1995). Perhaps ideas to explain schizophrenia based on hypothetical cognitive deficits that allow the experience of normal thought processes that are usually below the level of awareness (Frith, 1979) are related to the same general concept of threshold mentioned by Myers. Research has shown that high schizotypal individuals have more access to preconscious activation to the point that Evans (1997, p. 93) has referred to the "leaking" of material from these regions to explain hallucinations and other intrusive experiences. While it could be argued that these ideas may be interpreted following Myers's subliminal, we need to keep in mind that there are ways to explain this other than through the subliminal self (such as cognitive interference).

The same may be said of a variety of research findings in which positive interrelationships have been found between different variables. This includes hypnotic suggestibility and intrusive thoughts (Bryant & Idey, 2001); dissociation and dream variables such as vividness, lucidity, and dream recall (Alvarado & Zingrone, 1997); absorption and magical ideation (Parker, 1999); fantasy experiences in relation to dissociation and absorption (Merckelbach & Maastricht, 2001); dream recall in relation to absorption, fantasy, and openness to experience (Watson, 2003); and synesthesia and eidetic imagery (Glicksohn, Salinger & Roychman, 1992).

Similar to the above-mentioned psychological work showing positive relationships between different phenomena, we find in the last two decades much questionnaire work relating self-reported parapsychological experiences such as ESP, apparitions, and out-of-body experiences to other parapsychological experiences (e.g., Palmer, 1979) as well as to hypnotic susceptibility (Pekala, Kumar &

Cummings, 1992), dissociative experiences (Richards, 1991), openness to experience (Alvarado, Zingrone & Dalton, 1998-1999), dream recall (Palmer, 1979), and hypnagogic and hypnopompic imagery (Sherwood, 1999). All of these relationships make sense from the point of view of Myers's system. For example, he expected that the same person would experience various subliminal phenomena, some of which "are to be referred to hyperaesthesia and some to telaesthesia, or to telepathy from the living or from the dead" (Vol. 2, p. 270). Because all these phenomena came from the subliminal mind, perhaps a tendency to manifest one would be associated with a tendency to manifest others. This does not mean the subliminal is the only important variable, nor that all the above-mentioned interrelationships are to be explained in this way, but it suggests areas in which we could further systematically explore Myers's heritage.

Phenomena such as dissociative identity disorder (DID) may be profitably studied following Myers's suggestion that some alterations may represent an improvement, as opposed to simple pathology (Vol. 1, p. 62). But with the exception of writings outside of the psychological and psychiatric tradition (e.g., Temple, 2002), this is not the current trend in the DID literature. Another possibility is to study dissociation in terms of abilities, as argued by Stephen Braude (2000) in a recent article. Myers believed that the subliminal could express creatively arranged subconscious stories that did not have to be veridical, a point discussed also by Flournoy (1900). Both Flournoy and Myers influenced later students of the subconscious into considering how a variety of secondary personalities and romances could come through mediums. As Charles Richet (1922/1923) wrote referring to all kinds of subliminal romances produced by mediums: "The talents of the unconscious show even more variety than those of consciousness" (p. 44). This seems to have been a common interest as well as common knowledge among those writing relatively soon after the publication of *Human Personality*, including psychiatrists and psychologists (e.g., Grasset, 1904; Jastrow, 1906) as well as psychical researchers who studied "interplanetary" mediumistic communications (Hyslop, 1918) and who classified and theorized about personation phenomena in mediums (Sudre, 1926). Unfortunately the empirical study of these phenomena is not only ignored by the majority of current students of dissociation, but also by most present-day parapsychologists. The few that study mediums currently are concerned only with veridical mediumistic productions and do not pay attention to the wide range of mediumistic phenomena emphasized by Myers.

We could follow up Myers's initiative in his analysis of sensory automatisms such as intuitions and all kinds of imagery-based psi-mediating vehicles. Some work has been conducted on the problems of ESP reception (L.E. Rhine, 1962a, 1962b; Sidgwick, 1923) and of specific forms of manifestation such as veridical impressions (Stevenson, 1970). Another line of research that could be explored further is the experimental attempt to induce ESP by using ambiguous stimuli, techniques that may elicit sensory automatisms. Some pioneering efforts were reported by Dale, Taves and Murphy (1944) and more recently by Braud, Shafer and Mulgrew (1983). Perhaps the ganzfeld may be seen as a technique to induce sensory automatisms, to judge from the rich mentation reports some researchers have collected (Parker, Persson & Haller, 2000).

There is also much to explore regarding the use of motor automatisms as an expression of ESP. Certainly there have been many studies in psychical research of the automatic writing of mediums (Stevenson, 1978). Furthermore, many special individuals express ESP through automatic speaking. This was the case of medium Gladys Osborne Leonard (Thomas, 1922) and psychic Pascal Forthuny. The latter showed what Eugène Osty (1926/n.d.) referred to as impulsive talking, or "the use of the centers of spoken language by an intelligence different from that we know as conscious" (p. 214). With a few exceptions (e.g., Braud, 1980; Braud & Jackson, 1982; Edge, 1982; Palmer, 2001), not much has been done in recent times to study ESP in the laboratory using motor automatisms. Perhaps the use of physiological responses, as seen in the early work of Charles T. Tart (1963) and more recently by Dean Radin (1997), may be seen as a motor automatism in which the motor response is not clearly visible without instrumental amplification. This is consistent with Myers's statement that the subliminal can manifest as "deep organic modifications — of changes in the vaso-motor, the circulatory, the respiratory systems" (Vol. 2, p. 103).

In addition, there are other topics that connect Myers with modern parapsychology. These include studies showing relationships between ESP and creativity (Schlitz & Honorton, 1992) and altered states of consciousness (for an overview see Alvarado, 1998).

While all of the above-mentioned topics are connected to Myers's ideas as expressed in *Human Personality*, I have mentioned only the exploration of topics showing similarity. The usefulness of Myers today will be limited if we do not actively test his ideas, or at least explore them further empirically. Perhaps psychophysiological studies could test for the concept of telergic action. Myers suggested that our mind

affects our brain in the same way that we affect a distant mind. Maybe causing an effect on a distant brain is accompanied by a decrease in the control (or activity) of the agent's own brain. This may be supported by many of the veridical cases cited by Myers that took place when the presumed agent was ill, distracted, dying, or going through some alteration of consciousness. We could monitor brain activity of both agent and percipient and postulate a reduction or some other change of activity in the agent at times when a synchronized response is observed. Furthermore, and as suggested by Gauld (1968, p. 293), instead of a distant human brain we may try an effect on a fragment of cortical tissue detached from a brain (presumably an animal brain). Such a line of research is consistent with the distant mental influence work summarized by Braud (2003). Could we perform studies to explore the concept of psychorrhagic diathesis? This could be done by analyzing cases as P. Thomas Bret (1939) did with published accounts and as René Laurentin and P. Mahéo (1990) did with the bilocations of Mother Yvonne-Aimée. But we may also follow a more active approach in trying to induce experimental apparitions and in conducting further OBE detection studies, provided we find individuals showing the propensity in question. Closely related to this is the possibility of using hypnosis to actively induce "self projections." While Tart (1997) did not report success in producing veridical OBEs using hypnosis, some of the older, apparently successful, attempts to achieve veridical experiences suggest the issue should be explored further.¹⁵ Perhaps the success of the earlier studies was due to the fact that special participants were used. Consequently, we need to pay closer attention to the participant's level of hypnotic susceptibility or to work with the so-called hypnotic virtuosi. This line of research should be followed up considering there is evidence that even among individuals classified as highly suggestible there are degrees of hypnotic susceptibility so that the higher inside the highly suggestible have claimed more psychic experiences than the less high (Pekala, Kumar & Cummings, 1992).

How could we test Myers's ideas that there are preferred pathways in the manifestation of ESP? (See also Gurney, Myers & Podmore, 1886, Vol. 2, pp. 171-172.) One possibility is to postulate that perception and ESP share similar ways of processing information. We could follow the approach of Ed Kelly and colleagues, who reported finding similar mistakes both in visual and in ESP tests in a single-participant study (Kelly, Kanthamani, Child, & Young, 1975). Another is to explore whether our normal preferred mode of

thinking, say a visual or verbal style, is part of the ESP channel. We could follow up Harvey Irwin's (1979a) study of self-reported ESP experiences and cognitive coding preferences. Furthermore, we could explore whether those with a predisposition to visual hallucinations in daily life or to vivid dreams would also express ESP mainly as visual hallucinations and as vivid dreams. The prediction behind this work is that ESP uses some of the same mechanisms of perception or of information processing, thus providing empirical support for Myers's ideas of shared pathways in the normal and the supernatural.

Other interesting ideas that could be tested today include Myers's suggestion that we should explore crystal visions to see if they follow optical laws (Vol. 1, p. 239). Perhaps we may find psychophysiological correlates of crystal gazing. Following Schatzman's (1980) report of changes in evoked potential when there was interference in front of a hallucinatory figure, we may explore whether there is a physiological reaction when something is put between the gazer's eyes and the reflecting surface. Furthermore, we could also test for Myers's speculation on the possible existence of a "transition from hyperaesthesia to telaesthesia, so that when peripheral sensation is no longer possible, central perception may be still operating across obstacles otherwise insurmountable" (Vol 1, p. 276). The latter could be explored following the assumptions of those who have argued that, under certain conditions, both sensory-motor functioning and ESP may complement each other (Rao, 1993; Rush, 1964).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Considering current conceptual trends in parapsychology, and particularly in psychology, it is unlikely that the concepts presented by Myers in *Human Personality* will be generally accepted as Myers intended them. On the positive side, *Human Personality* helps us to keep open the possibility of a psychology in which the mind is seen as more of a causal agent than is generally assumed. Myers's system also defined the subject matter of parapsychology as one intimately related to psychology in terms of the workings of the subliminal mind. In addition, he questioned the medical model that assumed pathology in most of the unusual. As a hundred-year-old book, *Human Personality* can do much by reminding us of possibilities and providing us with ideas for further research. These ideas need to be followed up considering the variety of methodological and conceptual developments that have taken place since Myers's times. One hopes

that the challenge is taken, not only by parapsychologists, but also by those engaged in hypnosis, creativity, dream, and dissociative identity disorder studies, to name a few.

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NOTES

1. The longest and most detailed discussion of Myers's psychology and psychical research is Emily Cook's (1992) unpublished doctoral work. See also Cerullo (1982, pp. 46-50, 98-103), Cook (1994), Crabtree (1993, chapter 16; 2003), Gauld (1968, pp. 38-44, 89-114, 116-136, Chapters 12-13), Kelly (2001), Oppenheim (1985, pp. 153-155, 254-266), and Williams (1985). Beer (1998, chapter 4) discusses Myers's literary work and aspects of his personal life.

2. Gauld (1968, pp. 103-114, 125-133) discusses Myers's involvement with Spiritualism before the founding of the SPR. The influence of Spiritualism on the phenomena studied by psychical researchers and on the issue of survival of death is evident in studies such as Inglis's (1992; see also Alvarado, 2003).

3. There were many precedents to these ideas of projection (and variants of it) that Myers was probably aware of, although he does not provide citations. Some came from the pre-nineteenth-century religious and philosophical literatures (Poortman, 1954/1978). The concept was also present in the spiritualist literature as seen in the writings of Crowe (1848), Harrison (1879), Nehrer (1874) and Oxon (1874).

4. This is not to say that nineteenth-century spiritualists did not admit human agency to explain some psychic phenomena, something they saw as the powers of the incarnate spirit (Alvarado, 2003). Myers

referred to spiritualists such as Alfred Russel Wallace who emphasized discarnate agency more frequently than incarnate agency (Vol. 1, p. 6).

5. Gauld (1992, chapter 16) summarizes the history and main tenets of the Nancy school of hypnosis. Its main representative, Hyppolyte Bernheim (1884), explained hypnosis as “the influence of an idea suggested to and accepted by the brain” (p. 73; this, and other translations, are mine). This conception did not involve the subliminal self nor Myers’s (Vol. 1, pp. 206-209) positive views about the existence of a mesmeric effluence (animal magnetism) and telepathic hypnosis (for a short overview of the latter see Caratelli, 1996, chapter 7).

6. For this case see Myers (Vol. 2, pp. 132-144) as well as Flournoy (1900). Although this medium is better known for her motor automatism (automatic speaking, writing and drawing), she also produced sensory automatism, as seen in her hallucinations.

7. Myers’s concept of ectoplasmy is very similar to previous ideas recorded in the spiritualist literature (e.g., Aksakow, 1894-1895/1896; Cox, 1872).

8. Myers was not original in these speculations, as seen in previous commentaries by Kardec (1863, p. 281).

9. During the International Congress of Physiological Psychology held at Paris in 1889 Myers discussed SPR studies looking for evidence of a mesmeric influence in the context of a discussion about hypnosis in which figures such as Hyppolyte Bernheim, Joseph Delboeuf, August Forel, and Charles Richet participated (*De la sensibilité hypnotique*, 1890, pp. 61-62). In other discussions about hysteria, hypnosis, and hallucinations, Myers mentioned SPR work on thought-transference (*Discussion Remarks*, 1890, 138-139; *Statistique des hallucinations*, 1890, pp. 152-153). Myers presented papers in later congresses (Myers, 1892a, 1901) and was appointed vice-president of the second congress (*International Congress*, 1892, p. iii).

10. Another questionable evaluation is Spitz’s (1997, p. 77) statement that in his early papers on automatism Myers went astray by accepting that telepathy was part of subconscious processes. This opinion seems to be based on the belief that telepathy could not be real.

11. I will not discuss Myers’s influence on psychology except to point out that recent work is starting to give due credit to his contributions to the study of dissociation and the subconscious (Alvarado, 2002; Crabtree, 1993) and to his influence on figures such

as James (E. Taylor, 1996) and Janet (Crabtree, 2003). See also the earlier publications of Ellenberger (1970) and Powell (1979).

12. Other nineteenth-century theoreticians who linked supernormal phenomena and the subconscious included Edmund Gurney (Gurney, Myers & Podmore, 1886), E. Gyel (1899), Thomson Jay Hudson (1893), and Eduard von Hartmann (1885). The functioning of the subconscious was also used to reduce the apparent supernormal to nonveridical processes (e.g., Janet, 1889). Myers (1884, 1885) himself contributed to this literature.

13. There have been many conceptualizations of the subconscious different from Myers's in the history of psychology (e.g., Janet, 1889; Jastrow, 1906; Sidis, 1898; Von Hartmann, 1869/1877; for overviews see Ellenberger, 1970; Fuller, 1986; and Tallis, 2002).

14. Spiritualistic-oriented writers such as Ernesto Bozzano (1906) and Gustave Geley (1919/1920) also argued that psi phenomena did not follow biological evolution.

15. This includes the early "travelling clairvoyance" work of Haddock (1851) and the latter studies of Durville (1909) and Cornillier (1920/1921), among others.

