

Supplemental web material for
“Empirical Challenges to Theory Construction,”
Edward F. Kelly, Chapter 1, *Beyond Physicalism*,
Edward F. Kelly, Adam Crabtree, and Paul Marshall (Eds.).
Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.
<http://www.esalen.org/ctr-archive/bp>

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A SELECT ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON PRECOGNITION

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Introduction

Precognition—the appearance or acquisition of non-inferential information or impressions of the future—holds a special place among psi phenomena. Confounding as it does commonsense notions of time and causality, it is perhaps the most metaphysically offensive of rogue phenomena. In the past 130 years, a number of thoughtful investigators—none of them either naïve or foolish—have studied a growing collection incidents, all carefully vetted (excepting Rhine’s popularly solicited cases [below]). With the exception of the first author, Eleanor Sidgwick, who drew on a scant six years of evidence and found it tantalizing but insufficient, these investigators have repeatedly come to the generally reluctant conclusion that true precognition (or something identical to it with a different name) exists.

Brief descriptions of these cases cannot do them justice. One needs the details of the case and the words of the experiencers, witnesses, and investigators. I have therefore given several of them at much greater length than I would if this account were restricted by the exigencies of print. Many were originally printed in the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*; fortunately for the curious, all but three of the first 32 volumes of the *Proceedings* are [available online](#).

In the words of one of our authors (Saltmarsh [below], *Foreknowledge*, p. 67), “Many people overcome the difficulties involved in the problem by the simple expedient of ignoring the whole thing: they refuse to listen to the evidence and behave as though it did not exist,” an attitude he quite rightly calls “grossly unscientific.” Are these cases to be dismissed as “anecdotes”? No characterization could be further from the truth.¹ The strong cases are better attested than much of what we accept as fact. As William James (1892/1986) observed, “Were I asked to point to a scientific journal where hard-headedness and never-sleeping suspicion of sources of error might be seen in their full bloom, I think I should have to fall back on the *Proceedings* of the ‘Society for Psychical Research’” (pp. 89–90). Given the meticulous care of the investigators, these cases deserve to be treated as evidential.

Can we simply dismiss precognition as impossible? The philosopher C. D. Broad (1976), after praising the work of Saltmarsh, Osty, and Richet (all below), wrote,

I shall assume that the quantity and quality of the evidence are such as would make the hypothesis that veridical supernormal precognition occurs worth serious consideration unless there be some logical or metaphysical impossibility in it. No amount of empirical

¹ Ian Stevenson, in his 1968 Presidential Address to the Parapsychological Association (1968, pp. 91–128), discussed the importance and evidential solidity of spontaneous cases with his usual thoroughness and clarity—that is, as well as anyone ever has.

evidence would give the slightest probability to the hypothesis that there are squares whose diagonals are commensurate with their sides, because this supposition is known to be logically impossible. Now a great many people feel that the hypothesis of veridical supernormal precognition is in this position. (p. 200)

Broad did not casually choose geometry for his example. Logical surety can only hold in a system like geometry, which begins and ends in logic. The everyday world at its most precise still only approximates the world of geometry. In the reverse way, we find precognition in the everyday world, and empirical fact must take precedence over logic, which after all can never be better than its assumptions. To declare precognition *a priori* impossible—when matched against the evidence—is not just precarious, it is wrong.

There have been many attempts in the last eighty years to bring precognition into the laboratory, beginning with J. B. Rhine's work (1938) in the 1930s. It is notoriously difficult, though, to ensure that the results of such experimental work are not the consequence of some other paranormal process, such as psychokinesis (Morris, 1982). The more recent, extensive work of Radin and others on presentiment (Radin, 2006, pp. 161–180) is extraordinary and important, but there remains a qualitative chasm between even the best such laboratory explorations and the cases discussed here.

As is true of other psi phenomena, normative statements concerning precognition—anything with “ought” in it—must be avoided. As several of these investigators point out, we understand almost nothing about precognition from which we might theorize. Moreover, what little understanding we have tends to the psychological, and the barriers to acceptance for precognition stem from its insult to our common experience of time in the physical world. Psychological insight is interesting and may finally prove useful, but first we must find a new perspective on time. To borrow an analogy from the history of astronomy, these cases are Tycho Brahe's careful data, awaiting a Kepler to deduce ellipses from them.

Sidgwick, Eleanor [Mrs. Henry] [↑](#)

“On the Evidence for Premonitions.” *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 5 (1888–89): 288–354. [Available online.](#)

Since the 1882 founding of the Society for Psychical Research, cases of precognition have been received and investigated. In 1888, with the society a mere six years old, Eleanor Sidgwick combed through the best cases they had collected. Like the authors of *Phantasms of the Living* (Gurney, Myers & Podmore, 1886), published two years before, she carefully laid out the interpretive pitfalls facing the investigator and the theorist before presenting and analyzing the cases themselves, and like those authors she dismissed many cases that might seem strong to a less critical intellect. She opened with this statement (pp. 288–289).

I ought to say at once that the evidence at present collected by this society, and of which I am about to give what appears to me to be the cream, does not seem to me sufficient to warrant a conclusion in favor of the reality of premonitions. Some of the cases are certainly very striking, but on the whole, both in quantity and in quality, the evidence falls far short of that for telepathy. There are comparatively few cases which attain an evidential standard which would have entitled them to a place in *Phantasms of the Living*, and of these cases the larger number are dreams—a branch of evidence which, in discussing telepathy, was considered to be in itself inconclusive. And while less evidence is apparently forthcoming for premonitions than for telepathy,^{*} decidedly more is, I think, required owing to the still greater remoteness from the analogy of our established sciences which the intuitive knowledge of detailed future events involves. This will be seen at once, if we consider that the acceptance of the possibility of clairvoyance,—i.e., knowledge of present or past facts not obtained through sense or by inference from other knowledge or transferred from some other mind in relation with the knower's—would carry us considerably beyond the admission of telepathy; while, again, a clairvoyant knowledge of the future involves all the difficulties attaching to clairvoyant knowledge of the present and past, together with new and vast difficulties peculiar to itself.

^{*} The following figures make this evident. In *Phantasms of the Living*, excluding the Supplement, there are 359 cases of spontaneous telepathy, of which about 18 per cent. are dreams. These 359 cases are all at first-hand, and are selected from a much larger number as the best of their various classes. I have selected for this paper some 38 first-hand cases of premonitions, of which 24 are dreams. But as I do not wish to lay stress on my own selection, let us take the whole of the first-hand cases, good, bad, and indifferent. These amount to some 240, or about two-thirds only of the number of *selected* cases of spontaneous telepathy, and of these 240 about 66 per cent. are dreams.

She then describes a range of cases, each attested independently with more or less strength. A few examples:

I was going to spend the day with my sister at Roehampton, and the night previous, just as I was going to sleep, I was startled by a vision before me of the carriage, which was to meet me at Mortlake Station, being upset in the road close by her house. This quite woke me up, and I tried to forget it, but on going off to sleep again the same vision returned, exactly as at the first, and I then began to feel very nervous about my visit of the next day; but eventually I went to sleep, and it did not come back to my mind. When I woke in the morning it was as a dream, quite gone.

I went by train to Mortlake, and had to wait at the station for a few minutes. Then the groom drove up quickly with a pony carriage, and apologised for the carriage not being there, but the order had not been given in time to get it ready.

Everything went on smoothly till we were driving up the lane to my sister's house, when the horse became very restive, the groom got down, but could find nothing wrong, so we went on; this happened a second and a third time, but when he was examining the horse for the third time my vision of the night before suddenly came back to me, and I

told the groom I would get out and walk to the house; he tried to dissuade me, but I felt nervous and insisted upon walking, so he drove off by himself, and had only got a very short distance from me when the horse became quite unmanageable. I hurried on some men in the road to help him, but before they reached him the carriage, horse and groom were all in a confused broken heap in the hedge, just as I had seen it the night before, though not exactly in the same spot. The groom managed to extricate himself, but when I got up to him he said he was so thankful I insisted upon getting out, for he could not possibly have saved me from a dreadful accident.

I had no fear of horses. I should certainly not have left the carriage but for the forewarning of the previous night. (pp. 313–314)



In a night early in August 1886, I was witness, in a dream, to the outbreak of a rapidly spreading conflagration, which through its terrifying grandeur had a paralysing effect on me. When I woke I remained so much under the influence of what I had dreamed, that the reality of such a misfortune could not have distressed me more. Strange to say, soon after waking the thought pressed upon me, that our securities, which the brewery-proprietor B. kept in his fire-proof safe, were in danger. Although I cannot remember having dreamed of any danger to the bonds, and though there was no external reason for connecting the papers with the fire, to my astonishment despite all the reasons with which I endeavoured to talk myself out of this apparently motiveless feeling, the idea increased to such a point, that I at once told those around me about my dream. As though my misgiving was to be confirmed as correct, three days later I had exactly the same dream, only with still greater distinctness. The unaccountable uneasiness increased still more, and I had the sensation as though an internal voice called to me, to put the bonds in safety. As the loss of them would have meant a great misfortune for us, I tried (following the warning) to induce my husband to put the papers in some other place.

As the majority of persons in his place would probably have done, he looked upon my fears as groundless and could not attribute any importance to a dream. At first he flatly refused to grant my request. But in the meanwhile the inexplicable feeling of anxiety so thoroughly took possession of me, that I made him continually more urgent representations. At last, after about 10 days, he gave in, less on account of the dream than for the sake of my comfort. From the moment that I knew that the bonds had been placed in security, in the Munich Mortgage and Exchange Bank, my equanimity was restored. Soon afterwards I went into the country, to the Tyrol, and should hardly have thought more of this occurrence, had I not suddenly, during the night of the 14th–15th of September, again been the dreaming witness of a tremendous fire. But instead of, as before, being frightened by the exciting scene, there came over me a feeling of relief as of being saved from a great calamity, by the timely saving of the papers. On the morning of the 15th I made known my dream experience to those around me. Sadly enough the warning was fulfilled; for already, the following day, I received written information that

the brewery, in which was the above mentioned safe, had been reduced to ashes by a destructive fire, which had broken out on the 14th of September. As I afterwards heard, the building was burnt to the ground; the fire-proof safe was exposed to flames and heat for 36 hours, so that the proprietor's papers which were preserved in it were completely charred. These dreams therefore (as has happened to me before) saved me from a great misfortune. (pp. 335–336)



I took my family, consisting of my daughter, my daughter-in-law, the four young children of the latter, and a servant, into Dorsetshire five weeks ago. Four days before we left London, I awoke from a sleep, or doze, with an image vividly depicted on my mind. I was sitting on a bank reading. My daughter-in-law started up suddenly and ran to a spot grown over with weeds, briars, and dank grass. Then I saw her catch up one of the little children, who was running to the same spot. She looked at the place and called out to me that there was a deep well there. I felt a sense of relief that the child was safe, but was so impressed with the dream, or vision, that I described it at once to her, and it was mentioned afterwards to others.

When we arrived at the railway station we were met by the landlord of our lodgings, who was to drive us in a waggonette to the village. On the way I asked him if he had a well on his ground, as we had little children with us. He replied that there was a well in the house, but it was covered and had a pump over it. Three or four days after our arrival, we were sitting reading on a green ridge in a field belonging to our landlord. The children were playing a little way from us and their mother was beside me. All at once she started up and ran to a spot at a little distance where rough coarse grass and weeds hid what was directly behind. The youngest child, a baby of two years old, was running to this place, and as he approached it his mother caught him up, turning round to me and exclaiming, 'Oh! here is a deep well.' We then remembered my dream and our intended precautions.

But the dream was really of no use as a warning for we had quite forgotten it, having been made easy by our landlord's assurance that all was safe. (pp. 339–340)

It is both astonishing and disheartening to see how varied her sample of cases is and how familiar the objections raised. In one case, for example, a subject related a precognitive dream and its subsequent realization to a medically trained friend, who quickly assured him that

Medical men ... would tell me at once that it was a case, by no means rare, of double consciousness, in which all that is happening to a person appears to him or her to have occurred before, but has not really done so, the cause not being quite understood, but supposed to arise probably from some more or less independent action of the two lobes of the brain, acting separately from each other; but however that might be and however real the circumstances might appear to myself, as a matter of fact, he supposed the dream did not occur at all, but only seemed to me to have done so, at the time when the real events took place.

This, as I pointed out to him, might have been a very good explanation, but for the fact that while dressing I had told the dream to my wife, and also had told to Mr. H. the circumstances with reference to Mr. S., before they took place.

This, my friend admitted, made a difficulty, and he asked me to let him know what my wife remembered of the matter, which I afterwards told him. I also was anxious to ascertain this, and, on reaching home, I asked her at once if she remembered any conversation we had while I was dressing in the morning before I left home, and she replied at once, "What, about the strange dream you had as to getting up and dressing yourself, and going to the railway station, and your having met Mr. H. and Mr. S., before you really got out of bed? I remember that quite well." And she then repeated what I had told her, and was very much surprised to learn what had afterwards occurred.

The friend to whom I have above referred, upon learning this, said, "Well, I must give it up; the theory I gave will not do in this case, and I am quite unable to offer any explanation." (p. 350)

In her analysis, Sidgwick brings up a number of themes that recur in subsequent discussions. One of the most interesting is the personal inconsequentiality of so many premonitory experiences. To be sure, there are previsions of death—the perceiver's and others'—and various disasters, but there are also trivial episodes foreseen, involving minor incidents, people barely known, or events otherwise not personally significant. Of one trivial but clear instance, she wrote,

I told this story to a lady a little while ago, who remarked, "But then the question is of what use was it?" meaning that if it was of no use it cannot have been a premonition. Now this consideration seems to me irrelevant. I do not deny that the coincidence I have just related may have been purely accidental, with nothing supernatural about it at all, but the fact that it was of no use does not make it more probable that it was so. For we have no sufficient reason to suppose that premonitions, if they exist, are a species of petty private miracles intended to help us in conducting our affairs—temporal or spiritual. We must regard them as peculiar manifestations of unknown or imperfectly known laws. I do not think, therefore, that the triviality of a foreseen event detracts from the evidential value of a case, provided the event is sufficiently definite and unlikely. (p. 344)

She concludes by saying,

We cannot, I think, demand that the possibility of supernatural prevision should be accepted even as a "working hypothesis" by the scientific world, as I myself consider that telepathy ought to be accepted. Still there is enough evidence to make us think about it; and one advantage of having a society like ours is to bring home to people the importance of observing and recording at once facts bearing on such subjects, and to supply a centre where such records can be kept.

It may, however, be said by a reader disinclined to suspense of judgment, “what can be the use of collecting more cases? If these do not lead you to a conclusion why should any more of the same kind produce the effect? Will you not always go on publishing striking narratives to gratify marvel-loving readers, and then stating that they are inconclusive to appease the scientific world?” (p. 353)

Her answer: More cases with better evidence, particularly from people who had “tolerably frequent premonitions” and who could “make a point of recording before fulfilment all dreams or other experiences which appear to them to be premonitory.” (p. 354)

Myers, Frederic W. H. [↑](#)

“The Subliminal Self, Chapter VIII: The Relation of Supernormal Phenomena to Time;—Retrocognition,” *PSPR* 11 (1894–1895): 334–407. [Available online.](#)

“The Subliminal Self, Chapter IX: The Relation of Supernormal Phenomena to Time;—Precognition,” *PSPR* 11 (1894–1895): 408–593. [Available online.](#)

Mrs. Sidgwick’s discussion has been effective in the direction desired; and at least double the amount of evidence of this type which our society had amassed during the six years which preceded that paper has been sent to us, or printed elsewhere, during the seven years which have followed it. On this ground alone the time has plainly come for another stock-taking;—which in consequence of other engagements of Mrs. Sidgwick’s it devolves upon me to attempt.

The evidence, I say, has grown in the way which was to be expected if precognition were—and hardly unless it were—a true fact in nature. (p. 335)

Myers had about twice as much evidence to work with, and he found it strong. Anyone who has actually looked at Myers’s work is compelled to give his opinions serious weight. He went on to say,

As we get some further glimpse into the laws which underlie our varied phenomena, we see more clearly that retrocognition and precognition ... cannot safely be set aside as isolated problems.... Their relation to time is as unknown to us a priori as is their relation to space or to physical causation. (p. 336)

That is, we don’t know what’s going on—but we need to look at this carefully. Can we have free will in a world where the future can be known? First and foremost, precognition calls into question our commonsense notions of time.

But we can hardly conceive the Past revived, save in some mind which has directly observed it. And to imagine the Future as known, except by inference and contingently, to any mind whatever is to induce at once that iron collision between Free Will, and “Fixed Fate, Foreknowledge absolute,” from which no sparks of light have ever yet been struck. Still more unwelcome is the further view that the so-called Future actually already

exists; and that apparent time-progression is a subjective human sensation, and not inherent in the universe as that exists in an Infinite Mind. (pp. 336–337)

For Myers,

I imagine that the Continuity of the Universe is complete; and that therefore the hierarchy of intelligences between our minds and the World-Soul is infinite; and that somewhere in that ascent a point is reached where our conception of time loses its accustomed meaning. (p. 340)

Myers tackles a question that recurs with every investigation, namely, whether it is possible to avoid a foreseen event by intentional action.

All this must be conceived as possible; yet I do not think that our evidence thus far collected does in fact make for this view of predetermined earthly fates. Rather we have seen that in many cases monitions have averted incidents which would doubtless have occurred had the percipient received no warning. And where dangers have been foreshewn and yet not averted, this seems often to have been because no adequate effort was made to avert them. The problem which our narratives more urgently suggest is how to reconcile so much foreknowledge with so much freedom. (p. 592)

He then relates a case—one also cited by several of the following investigators—to make the point that the future seems changeable.

On the second occasion my warning in dream did probably prevent a rather serious accident. We were living in about 188—, in Hertford-street, Mayfair. One day I determined that on the morrow I would drive to Woolwich in our brougham, taking my little child and nurse, to spend the day with a relation. During the night I had a painfully clear dream in vision of the brougham turning up one of the streets north of Piccadilly; and then of myself standing on the pavement [*sic*] and holding my child, our old coachman falling on his head on the road,—his hat smashed in. This so much discomposed me that when in the morning I sent for the coachman to give him his orders, I almost hoped that some obstacle to the drive might arise, so that I might have an excuse for going by train. The coachman was an old and valued servant. I asked him if he would have the carriage ready to drive to Woolwich at ten. He was not given to making difficulties; but he hesitated, and when I suggested eleven instead, he said that he would prefer that hour. He gave no reason for his hesitation and said that the horse was quite well. I told him almost eagerly that I could quite well go by train; but he said that all was right.

We went to Woolwich and spent the day. All went well until we reached Piccadilly on the return journey. Then I saw that other coachmen were looking at us; and looking through the glass front of the brougham I saw that the coachman was leaning back in his seat, as though the horse were pulling violently, of which, however, I felt no sign. We turned up Down-street. He retained his attitude. My dream flashed back upon me. I called

to him to stop, jumped out, caught hold of my child, and called to a policeman to catch the coachman. Just as he did so the coachman swayed and fell off the box. If I had been in the least less prompt, he would have fallen just as I saw him in my dream. I found afterwards that the poor man had been suffering from a serious attack of diarrhoea on the previous day, and had gradually fainted from exhaustion during the drive home. He was absolutely sober; and his only mistake had been in thinking that he was strong enough to undertake the long drive. In this case my premonitory dream differed from the reality in two points. In my dream we approached Down-street from the west; in reality we came from the east. In my dream the coachman actually fell on his head; the crushing of his hat on the road being the most vivid point of the dream. In reality this was just averted by the prompt action which my anxious memory of the dream inspired. (p. 497)

We shall discuss the question of intervention at some length near the end of this article (under Rhine).

Here is another representative case, interesting for both its detail and the relatively long interval before its realization, involving an official of the British consulate in Austria.

A few months ago I had an extraordinarily vivid dream, and waking up repeated it to my wife at once. All I dreamt actually occurred about six weeks afterwards, the details of my dream falling out exactly as dreamt.

There seems to have been no purpose whatsoever in the dream; and one cannot help thinking, what was the good of it. I dreamt that I was asked to dinner by the German Consul General, and accepting, was ushered into a large room with trophies of East African arms on shields against the walls. (N.B.—I have myself been a great deal in East Africa.)

After dinner I went to inspect the arms, and amongst them saw a beautifully gold-mounted sword which I pointed out to the French Vice-Consul—who at that moment joined me—as having probably been a present from the Sultan of Zanzibar to my host the German Consul General.

At that moment the Russian Consul came up too. He pointed out how small was the hilt of the sword and how impossible in consequence it would be for a European to use the weapon, and whilst talking he waved his arm in an excited manner over his head as if he was wielding the sword, and to illustrate what he was saying.

At that moment I woke up and marvelled so at the vividness of the dream that I woke my wife up too and told it to her. About six weeks afterwards my wife and myself were asked to dine with the German Consul General; but the dream had long been forgotten by us both.

We were shown into a large withdrawing room which I had never been in before, but which somehow seemed familiar to me. Against the walls were some beautiful trophies of East African arms, amongst which was a gold-hilted sword, a gift to my host from the Sultan of Zanzibar.

To make a long story short, everything happened exactly as I had dreamt—but I never remembered the dream until the Russian Consul began to wave his arm over his head, when it came back to me like a flash.

Without saying a word to the Russian Consul and French Vice-Consul (whom I left standing before the trophy) I walked quickly across to my wife, who was standing at the entrance of a boudoir opening out of the withdrawing room, and said to her;—“Do you remember my dream about the Zanzibar arms?” She remembered everything perfectly, and was a witness to its realization. On the spot we informed all the persons concerned of the dream, which naturally much interested them. (pp. 491–492)

This was attested by letters from the dreamer’s wife and the German and Russian consular officials.

This next case has the feeling of Oroboros—the mythical snake devouring its own tail—in that the event would not have occurred had the central actor not had the precognitive dream. Such starkly self-referential cases are rare, as Myers notes.

The next case which I shall quote is, I think, almost unique in our collection in this respect,—that the premonition seems to work its own fulfilment, by suggesting the one course of action which, as it happened, would bring about the dreaded experience. It is, of course, possible that the coincidence may have been accidental. Mrs. C. says that she is rather a frequent dreamer, although few of her dreams make so strong an impression as the one which I quote, and another with similar coincidence, which I omit for want of space....

Mrs. C. writes in a letter dated February 29th, 1888, from Holland-road, Kensington:—

I have an intense horror of monkeys—I seldom look at one if I can help it—they are objects of such antipathy to me; and I dreamed that I was persistently followed by one such as I had never seen before, but which terrified me extremely, and from which I could not escape.

Thinking I should be better able to throw off the impression of my dream if I told it, I mentioned it to my family, and my husband recommended a short walk. In consequence, and quite contrary to my custom, I arranged to take my children for a short walk, without their nurse accompanying me, and as their favourite walk was up Nightingale-lane, (Holland-lane), past another lane enclosed by the high walls of Argyll Lodge, the residence of the Duke of Argyll, I agreed to take them there, and when we arrived at Argyll Lodge, what was my horror to see on the roof of the coach-house the very monkey of my dreams! In my surprise and terror, I clasped my hands and exclaimed, much to the amazement of a coachman waiting outside, “My dream! My dream!”

This I suppose attracted the attention of the monkey and he began to come after us, he on the top of the wall, we beneath, every minute I expecting he would jump upon me, and having precisely the same terror I experienced in my dream. One of my children

being very young we could not go fast, which added to my distress, but we succeeded in escaping it, and on my return home I sent a servant to enquire if a monkey had been seen there, for my state of nervousness was extreme. She was informed that that morning a rare and very valuable monkey belonging to the Duchess had got loose, and so the incident was explained. But my dreaming of it previously remains unexplained. [Signed by Mrs. C.]

In a subsequent letter dated March 2nd, 1888, Mrs. C. writes:—

The “monkey dream” was told to at least six persons before I went for my walk, and my children still remember my terror and the “peculiar monkey” which followed us. (pp. 488–489)

And, finally, a detailed, visual, second-person prevision—the woman who clearly foresaw the tableau was not the person who actually saw it as described.

A fortnight before the death of the late Earl of L—, in 1882, I called upon the Duke of Hamilton, in Hill Street, to see him professionally. After I had finished seeing him we went into the drawing-room, where the Duchess was, and the Duke said to me, “Oh, Cooper; how is the Earl?”

The Duchess said, “What Earl?” and on my answering “Lord L—,” she replied “That is very odd. I have had a most extraordinary vision. I went to bed, but after being in bed a short time, I was not exactly asleep, but thought I saw a scene as if from a play before me. The actors in it were Lord L—, in a chair, as if in a fit, with a man standing over him with a red beard. He was by the side of a bath, over which bath a red lamp was distinctly shown.”

I then said, “I am attending Lord L— at present; there is very little the matter with him; he is not going to die; he will be all right very soon.”

Well, he got better for a week and was nearly well, but at the end of six or seven days after this I was called to see him suddenly. He had inflammation of both lungs.

I called in Sir William Jenner, but in six days he was a dead man. There were two male nurses attending on him; one had been taken ill. But when I saw the other the dream of the Duchess was exactly represented. He was standing near a bath over the Earl and, strange to say, his beard was red. There was the bath with the red lamp over it. It is rather rare to find a bath with a red lamp over it, and this brought the story to my mind.

The vision seen by the Duchess was told two weeks before the death of Lord L—. It is a most remarkable thing. (pp. 505–506)

Yes, it is indeed.

Richet, Charles 

Thirty Years of Psychical Research. [Traité de Métapsychique.] Trans. S. De Brath. New York: Macmillan. 1923. Available online [almost complete](#) or [for a fee](#).

L'Avenir et la Prémonition. Paris: Éditions Montaigne. 1931. [Available online](#).

Charles Richet, former president of the SPR and recipient of the 1913 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine, pursued a lifelong interest in psychical research. He was also a staunch mechanist regarding the workings of the physical world, classically Laplacian in his convictions. He begins his chapter on premonitions in *Thirty Years* with this avowal.

If we knew the totality of things in the present we should know the totality of things to come. Our ignorance of the future is the result of our ignorance of the present.

Laplace, in his *Analytical Essay on Probabilities*, has said this in precise terms: “An intelligence knowing all the forces of Nature and the respective positions of all beings in it, having also the power of analyzing all the data, would comprehend under one formula the movements of vast masses and of the smallest atoms. Nothing would be uncertain, and the future would be as open to it as the present.”

Every future event of whatever kind is the consequence, perhaps the inevitable consequence, of the actual state of things. The present is pregnant of the future, for the future is dependent upon the present. (p. 345)

Richet refused to allow ideology or metaphysics to trump reality, and equally he refused to let a lack of theory lead him to deny stubborn facts. Having presented summaries of case after case, Richet concludes the chapter with a flat statement that precognition exists, and that the puzzles associated with it remain to be solved.

A definite inference arises from these facts, whether they be important or trivial; an inference that no criticism of details can invalidate. It is that premonition is a demonstrated fact.

In certain circumstances not as yet definable, certain individuals (mostly, though not exclusively, hypnotizable persons or mediums) can announce events to come, and give precise details on these events that are not as yet existent; details so exact that no perspicuity, no coincidence, and no chance can account for the prediction.

We are therefore driven to infer that the special, mysterious faculty that we have called cryptesthesia, whose nature and modes of action are unknown, is not only manifested for past and present facts, but also for future ones.

After all, the metapsychic cognition of existing distant facts is so marvellous that cognition of the future is not so very much more extraordinary. A. knows that B., six hundred miles away, is drowned. How can A. know this? We have not the least idea. A. announces that B. will be drowned tomorrow. It is only a little more marvellous. In the whole domain of metapsychic lucidity, so profound is the mystery and so impenetrable the obscurity that a little more or less mystery should not appal us.

Are we then to conclude that time is only a notion of our defective mental constitution, that the future is irrevocably fated, that free will is an illusion, and that there is no moral responsibility? Long discussions might be raised on that text. I shall not enter on arguments that pertain more to metaphysics than to metapsychics, nor allow myself to be led into vain speculation. I shall abide in the domain of strict facts. There are indisputable and verified facts of premonition. Their explanation may or may not come later; meanwhile the facts are there—authenticated and undeniable. There are premonitions.

Are these due solely to human intelligence, or to other intelligent forces acting on our minds? It is impossible to decide. We must be content with exact observation of the facts.

And it would be inexcusably rash to affirm, as I have boldly done, that there are premonitions, if abundant and formal proof had not been advanced. This abundant and formal proof has, I think, been given. (pp. 395–396)

Richet, like a few other investigators,² finds precognition hardly more extraordinary than other aspects of “metapsychic lucidity.” For him it is the exercise of that lucidity in the present that allows individuals to infer future events (for others, the various expressions of psi shade into each other).

Eight years after the first book, in *L’Avenir*—a monograph devoted solely to the question of precognition—he reiterates these points and expands on them considerably. He reviews more than a hundred cases: three experiences of his own, another eight of people he knows personally, and the rest from diverse sources. Many are from SPR publications and Osty’s work, but others are less well attested, such as some of those collected by the Italian writer Ernesto Bozzano (1913).

Richet considers and refutes objections from common sense (“So when we say that premonition is contrary to common sense, it is simply because we do not understand it”³ [*L’Avenir*, p. 203]), chance coincidence, paramnesia, and bad faith. He notes the triviality of many premonitions, but—echoing Sidgwick—asks why that is relevant and calls on what he sees as the true spirit of scientific investigation: “When we establish a new truth, this new truth is always important in itself, because it is a truth. The scientist should never worry about the immediate, tangible, practical consequences of what he has discovered. All truth may carry with it consequences the number and extent of which it is impossible to measure”⁴ (*L’Avenir*, p. 200). And he notes (*L’Avenir*, p. 211) the “profound” wisdom of William Crookes (1874, p. 22n), who said of the

² See Rhine, below.

³ “Donc, quand on dit que la prémonition est contraire au bon sens, c’est simplement parce qu’on ne la connaît pas.”

⁴ “Quand on a établi une vérité nouvelle, cette vérité nouvelle est toujours importante en soi, parce que c’est une vérité. Le savant ne doit jamais se préoccuper des résultats immédiats, tangibles, pratiques, de ce qu’il vient de découvrir. Toute vérité entraîne peut-être avec elle des conséquences dont il est impossible de mesurer le nombre et l’étendue.”

phenomena surrounding the physical medium Daniel Home, “I never said it was possible, I only said it was true.”

And yet, for Richet, the future can be glimpsed but not known, in the same way that we might catch a glimpse of a play performed on a distant, darkened stage illuminated by a lightning flash. We can see a moment of the spectacle, but we can hardly be said to “know” the play. Richet makes a virtue of necessity: “It is quite fortunate ... that we can know nothing of the future. Because, truly, not knowing the future is one of the reasons for living”⁵ (*L’Avenir*, p. 194). The future is indeed determined, as Laplace would have it, but we must continue to act as though our experience of free will is valid.

Finally, though, having tried to make sense of precognition and an unknowable future, he acknowledges the limits of his own understanding: “Still, who knows if some day this almost depressing conclusion may not be found invalid, either by the development of psychic science, or by the growth (possible after all) of human intelligence!”⁶ (*L’Avenir*, p. 227).

Osty, Eugene [↑](#)

Supernormal Faculties in Man: An Experimental Study. [*La Connaissance Supranormale.*]
Trans. S. De Brath. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. 1923.

Osty was a French physician, a generation younger than Richet but cited often in Richet’s *L’Avenir et la Prémonition*. At the time he wrote *Supernormal Faculties* he had been working with a group of sensitives for twelve years, in much the same way the SPR worked with the medium Mrs. Piper. There were many instances of precognition, and he drew some interesting conclusions. He observed an interplay between the seer and the subject. He had many people come to the sensitives repeatedly and he found that over time the percipient’s view of a person’s life moved along, and things that had been unclear in the future became more detailed. Osty had the sense of the future as a distant landscape that the percipient was approaching.

At the same time, it was not a simple, veridical landscape. One of his percipients might tell a visitor that he’s seeing the wintertime, it’s very cold, something is happening to someone on skis. The visitor’s son likes to ski, and when she hears the prediction her parental fears focus the statement on him. The next time she comes in, she hears more about the accident that’s going to happen to her son in the wintertime. The time after that it sounds worse. But when winter comes and she and her son are skiing, *she* breaks *her* leg. Osty observed that sort of projection when a visitor misinterpreted a statement early on and the percipient—the seer—picked up that misinterpretation and followed it in subsequent sessions.

⁵ “Il est fort heureux ... que nous ne puissions rien connaître de l’avenir. Car vraiment l’inconnaissance de l’avenir est une des raisons de vivre.”

⁶ “Pourtant, qui sait si quelque jour cette conclusion presque desolante ne se trouvera pas infirmée, soit par le développement de la science metapsychique, soit par le croît (possible après tout) de l’intelligence humaine!”

One of the most interesting aspects of Osty's work concerned the way his sensitives perceived time in their precognitions. Because their conscious minds had to interpret subliminal information that was often presented vaguely or symbolically, they often muddled it. Two of his sensitives, however, were exceptions in this regard.

Errors of time are ... common; for except in the few cases in which mental representation or automatic expression of a date and a number of days or years arises spontaneously, the sensitive has to estimate time, both as to its mode and extent, by interpreting the artifices of the imagination, variable in different sensitives and always of doubtful import.

M. de Fleuriere, for instance, derives his ideas of time by vision on a semicircular screen on which the events of a life are symbolically projected. The events pertaining to the present are in the middle, straight before the eye, those of the past to the left, and those of the future to the right; and the distances from the centre indicate their approximate position in the life.

Mme Morel ... knows that an event is in the past when her informative hallucinations are, as it were, behind her; a present event is at her side and a future one in front, all in a perspective corresponding to some sort of spacing in time. This symbolism, however, suffices so well to her conscious interpretation that during twelve years I have never known her place an event in the wrong mode of time.

But the imaginative processes of other sensitives are less reliable. Not infrequently they state past or future events as present. I have mentioned ... how Mme L.-F——, in May, 1912, thinking to give the nature of my professional employment at the moment, described what took place in the war between August, 1914, and July, 1916.

In the bulk of cases, however, errors in the modality of time are exceptional; but errors as to its duration are the rule. In twelve years I have had from percipients a good number of events placed in the past with reference to the ages of a person, but only twice, precognition of events giving an exact date turned out to be correct.

On the other hand, I have just experienced, during the winter of 1921–22, an event concerning myself which Mme Morel announced in December, 1910, as "so near that it ought not to be more than a month distant." (p. 224)

In one particularly fascinating incident (pp. 104–109), only peripherally related to precognition but equally confounding regarding time, a sensitive was asked to find an old man who had wandered from his son's house and had been missing in the woods of a large estate for more than two weeks. Osty requested that the client bring in some article of clothing belonging to that man and was given a scarf taken from the man's wardrobe. The sensitive handled the scarf and saw that the man had died on the ground. She gave numerous particulars about the dead man and his surroundings, but the topography of the estate was so regular that the searchers required two more sittings, during which they received increasingly precise instructions for the search. When they finally found him, using information from the third sitting, his position and location were as the sensitive had described.

What is most interesting about this case is the connection between the sensitive and the subject. Psychometry—the use of an object as a link to information about its owner or creator—is often conceived as a reading of information somehow imprinted on and carried by the object. Yet here the sensitive related in detail the old man’s wandering and death after she handled a scarf that had been stored in a wardrobe while the man was wandering and dying. Osty’s overarching conclusion, from this and many other similar cases, was that in some way we embody our entire lives, past and future both, and that sensitives can become aware of that aspect of our selves. (He also found, to his surprise, that sensitives are not particularly adept at seeing their own futures.)

Dunne, J. W. [↑](#)

An Experiment with Time. 1927. (3rd ed.) Repr. Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads. 2001.

Looking back from 1954, Louisa Rhine (“Frequency,” below) said,

It was not until 1927, however, that any great public interest in the question was aroused. In that year Dunne’s *An Experiment with Time* appeared and created a more lively interest in the possibility of precognition than had previously existed. (p. 94)

This book, unlike most writing on the subject, made quite a public splash. The author, an aeronautical engineer, began in his mid-twenties to have dreams that included details of events that happened soon afterward. After spending some time recording his dreams, he observed that they contained information about the future in roughly the same proportion as about the past.

These dreams were not *percepts* (impressions) of distant or future events. They were the usual commonplace dreams composed of distorted *images* of waking experience, built together in the usual half-senseless fashion peculiar to dreams. That is to say, *if they had happened on the nights after the corresponding events*, they would have exhibited nothing in the smallest degree unusual, and would have yielded just as much true, and just as much false, information regarding the waking experiences which had given rise to them as does any ordinary dream — which is very little.

They were the ordinary, appropriate, expectable dreams; but they were occurring on the *wrong nights*. (p. 26, emphasis in original)

He persuaded a number of friends and acquaintances to record their dreams and found that a few of them had similar experiences. He gave the reader specific instructions about recording dreams and reviewing them later for previsions. He also constructed a theory of multidimensional time to account for premonitions. There was considerable discussion of his theoretical ideas, although they were generally finally seen as an infinite regress of dimensions and observers, recondite for lay readers and rejected by philosophers and other academics. Nevertheless, his simple, clear descriptions of his precognitive dreams led many readers to carry on their own experiments.

Dunne's dreams often reflected what he would later read or hear about an event, not necessarily the facts of the event itself. In 1902, in one of his most powerful premonitory dreams, he saw an island exploding, killing 4,000 people. When he finally saw a newspaper describing the destruction of Martinique by the violent eruption of Mt. Pelée, the headline actually said, "Probable loss of over 40,000 lives." He wrote,

There is one remark to be made here.

The number of people declared to be killed was not, as I had maintained throughout the dream, 4,000, but 40,000. I was out by a nought. But, when I read the paper, I read, in my haste, that number as 4,000; and, in telling the story subsequently, I always spoke of that printed figure as having been 4,000; and I did not know it was really 40,000 until I copied out the paragraph fifteen years later.

Now, when the next batch of papers arrived, these gave more exact estimates of what the actual loss of life had been; and I discovered that the true figure had nothing in common with the arrangement of fours and noughts I had both dreamed of, and gathered from the first report. So my wonderful "clairvoyant" vision had been wrong in its most insistent particular! But it was clear that its wrongness was likely to prove a matter just as important as its rightness. For whence, in the dream, had I got that idea of 4,000? Clearly it must have come into my mind *because of the newspaper paragraph*. (pp. 22–23, emphasis in original)

The breadth of Dunne's cultural impact may be seen in the popularity of his book, which went through three editions, and in explicit and implicit references in the work of numerous authors and thinkers, from H. G. Wells and J. R. R. Tolkien to Jorge Luis Borges and Robert Heinlein. J. B. Priestley would draw directly and heavily on Dunne's ideas in a series of "time plays" in the 1930s and 1940s, and Dunne figured largely in Priestley's popular *Man and Time* (1964), in which he collected stories of precognitive events from the public and tried to sort them into coherent categories ("J. W. Dunne"; Stewart, 2008). The year after *Experiment's* publication, Dunne received a note from physicist Arthur Eddington, which Dunne included in later editions. Edith Lyttelton (below, pp. 10–11) noted that Dunne "has placed the whole question [of precognition] in a different position by drawing attention to the existence of precognitive dreams." And in one of MacKenzie's cases (below, p. 89), two military officers involved in a precognitive-dream situation in 1946 had independently read Dunne's book.

Lyttelton, Edith [↑](#)

Some Cases of Prediction. London: G. Bell & Sons. 1937.

Edith Lyttelton, a British diplomat, was president of the SPR in 1933 and 1934. In February 1934, as Herbert Saltmarsh (below) was publishing his "Report" of all precognitive cases found in 50 years of the SPR's *Journal* and *Proceedings*, Lyttelton (1934) delivered a brief broadcast lecture on precognition, during which she asked listeners to send in instances from their own

lives. She investigated a number of them, printing “none which are not corroborated by one person, and sometimes by two or three, who heard of the prediction before fulfilment” and including most of the corroborating statements. Her book is the first significant collection of carefully vetted original cases after Myers and Osty. Three years earlier, J. B. Rhine (1934) had published *Extra-Sensory Perception*, his public report of the laboratory work at Duke University, and Lyttelton felt—with perhaps more optimism than foresight—that

in view ... of the possibility of some form of laboratory investigation of such faculty as precognition, if enough interest and enough money for more research were forthcoming, it has seemed an opportune moment to publish a few well attested cases. These may conceivably stimulate some people to offer their work in the inquiry, or, if they cannot do that, give money towards the many expenses involved in any long drawn out experimentation. These cases of prediction are, therefore, not printed merely as strange and perhaps impressive stories, but with the definite purpose of stimulating an interest in that scientific investigation of supernormal faculties of the mind, which is already beginning to show results pregnant with future discovery. (p. 13)

Lyttelton sorted her cases into four categories: those that might be coincidence; those that might be telepathy but cannot be coincidence; those that might be telepathy if that capacity were somehow able to “collect, combine and present the content of other minds for the definite purpose of prediction”; and, finally, those that “can only be classed as precognitive, for these display knowledge of the future event which is not in the content, or in any combinations of contents, of the human mind” (p. 15). She published a number of illustrative examples in each category, including 16 in the last.

One particularly interesting case involved a woman who had a habit of dreaming about houses that she and her husband, a schoolmaster who often moved, would occupy. In one instance she described a house in some detail, including a stream that ran through the garden in which the water appeared clear but inky black. The other half of the house was occupied, and the owners had a barrel outside as a doghouse for their black retriever. When the couple actually went house-hunting, they found and moved into the house she had described, which had a stream on the property that was dyed nearly black from an indigo works upstream. There was, however, neither barrel nor dog next door—until new tenants moved into that half of the house about a year later, with their black Lab and barrel doghouse. (pp. 106–111)

The following case is noteworthy for its combination of specificity, triviality, and lapse of time between prevision and occurrence.

While still living in Brunswick Square I had a strange experience. I slept in a very small bedroom, if I stretched out my arm in bed I could just touch a chest of drawers. I woke one morning, lying facing this chest of drawers. I was wide awake: suddenly the room changed: I was facing a large fireplace in front of which stood two men, both dark. They

kept turning in my direction and I noticed what beautiful teeth one of them had. They were talking but I could hear no sounds. Then a fair man, whose face I could not see, walked across between them and me. I was so anxious to see him that I jumped out of bed, knocked my head on the chest of drawers and everything disappeared. I told everyone at breakfast, and my family when I went home. Years after I went back to the station in Central India where I had lived as a child. The evening after I arrived I went to the Club. As I went in, the same two dark men were standing at the same fireplace just in the same positions—then the fair man walked across. I started forward to see him and knocked into a man who laughingly asked why I was so eager! I found out afterwards that the two men had been boys at Eton at the time of my vision and the Club house not built. It was all absolutely unimportant which makes it all the more strange that it should have occurred. I wrote home at once and told my family. (pp. 121–122)

Lyttelton's cautious conclusion? "It cannot yet be said that Precognition is admitted as an established fact even to the degree that such a statement can be made about Telepathy: but the evidence for it which requires investigation and study is growing more and more weighty" (p. 157). At the same time, "That some predictions are cases of definite precognition I personally have no doubt at all" (p. 11).

Saltmarsh, H. F. [↑](#)

"Report on cases of apparent precognition." *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 42 (1934): 49–103.

Foreknowledge. London: G. Bell & Sons. 1938. Repr. in *The Future and Beyond*.

Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads. 2004. [Available online](#).

(All page citations are from *Foreknowledge*.)

Saltmarsh, an active member of the SPR for two decades, took it upon himself to update Sidgwick and Myers by examining 50 years of the SPR's *Journal* and *Proceedings* for cases of precognition. He published his report in the *Proceedings* and then, four years later, refined that report (with the addition of Lyttelton's material) as *Foreknowledge*. His thoughtful, even-handed analysis of the material has not been superseded, and this brief book is still perhaps the best available introduction to the subject.

Like Lyttelton, he classified the cases. He called them Good, Ordinary, Vague, and non-precognitive.

A 'Good case' is one in which the precognition is particularly definite and full of detail, and where the evidence is satisfactory. An 'Ordinary' case is one which, although it may not attain to the standard of the Good cases, is sufficiently evidential of precognition to be significant when it is taken along with a mass of other evidence. (p. 9)

Of 349 SPR cases, he rejected 68 as Vague or non-precognitive; of the remainder, 134 rose to Good, and the rest were Ordinary. Like his careful predecessors, he erred on the side of skepticism.

In making all these selections I have stretched the various [non-precognitive] hypotheses as far as they could reasonably stand it, on the principle that explanation by an independently known cause was to be preferred to postulating anything so antecedently unbelievable as non-inferential knowledge of the future. However, if subsequent investigation should provide grounds for accepting supernormal precognition as actually happening at all frequently, it may be that the stretching in which I have indulged will have to be considered as having been too liberal, and that some of the cases assigned to the alternative categories could more plausibly be reckoned as instances of true precognition. (p. 42)

His second point is important to keep in mind, as it is when considering any psi phenomenon. People do exaggerate, and memory can be faulty, and coincidences do occur, but once the reality—or even strong likelihood—of a class of occurrences has been admitted, it is unreasonable to approach every new case as though there were no evidence and it had to stand or fall as an independent episode. The common elements of such evidentially imperfect cases can flesh out elements of the body of strong cases, and the uncommon elements can provoke thought in new directions.

When Saltmarsh applied his skepticism to the Ordinary class, he was left with 183 cases of clear precognition. “This,” he wrote, “is a sufficiently formidable array of evidence to challenge us to find an explanation—we cannot lightly set it aside” (p. 43). He also referred the reader to Lyttelton, Richet, and Osty.

A number of his cases were given in greater detail by Myers (and all can be found fully described in the SPR publications), including this rather striking one from 1888.

Lady Q, living with her uncle, who was like a father to her, dreamed that she was sitting in the drawing room of his house with her sister. It was a brilliant spring day and there were many flowers showing in the garden, over which, however, there was a thin coating of snow. In her dream she knew that her uncle had been found dead by the side of a certain bridle path about three miles from the house and that he was wearing a dark homespun suit; his horse was standing by him. She also knew that the body was being brought home in a two-horse farm waggon with hay in the bottom. They were waiting for the waggon with the body to arrive at the house. Then, in the dream, she saw the waggon come to the door and two men, well known to the dreamer, carry the body upstairs with considerable difficulty as the uncle was a very tall and heavy man. During this proceeding the body’s left hand hung down and struck against the banisters as the men ascended the stairs. This detail gave her unreasonable horror and she woke.

In the morning, feeling much upset, she told her uncle and begged him to promise that he would never ride that particular road alone. He promised that he would always make an excuse to have a groom with him when he rode that way in the future.

Gradually the memory of the dream grew fainter until, two years later, it was repeated in every detail. Lady Q taxed her uncle with having broken his promise, and he admitted that he had occasionally done so. Four years after this, Lady Q, having married and left her uncle's house, was living in London and was expecting her first baby. On the night before she was taken ill⁷ she dreamed the dream again with the variation that she seemed to be in her bedroom in London and not in her uncle's drawing room as previously. She was, however, able to perceive the whole scene as in the former dreams. Then came another fresh point; a gentleman, dressed all in black, whose face she could not see, stood beside her bed and told her that her uncle was dead. She awoke in great distress but, being then so ill, ceased to dwell on the dream.

After a few days she was allowed to write a few lines in pencil to her uncle. This note reached him two days before his death.

During her convalescence, she wondered at not hearing from him, until, one morning, she was told that her step-father wished to see her. He entered the room dressed in black and stood beside her bed. Lady Q cried out, 'The Colonel is dead. I know all about it. I have dreamed it often.'

Subsequent inquiries showed that the dream was fulfilled in every detail, including that of the left hand striking against the banisters. The men who carried the body upstairs were those seen in the dream. The only detail which was not correct was that of the flowers and snow, but Lady Q discovered that dreams of flowers and snow are considered as symbolic of death by members of her family.

I have summarized this case rather fully as it seems to me it is a particularly interesting one. Not only are the details of the precognition very full and numerous, but the fact of recurrence makes it especially impressive. Also it is an example of long-distance precognition, the first dream having occurred six years before the event. (pp. 47–49)

He briefly described a simple, unambiguous case given in considerably more detail in Myers and the *Proceedings*.

The next case is that of Mrs. Atlay, *Proc.*, XI, 487. She dreamed that her husband, the Bishop of Hereford, was away from home and that she read morning prayers in the hall of the palace. After doing so, on entering the dining room, she saw an enormous pig standing between the dining table and the sideboard. This dream amused her and she told it to the governess, who confirms the account, and to her children, before reading prayers. After prayers, she opened the dining-room door and saw the pig standing between the dining table and the sideboard in the exact spot in which she had seen it in the dream.

The pig had escaped from its sty while prayers were being read. (p. 56)

⁷ I.e., went into labor—it's Victorian England.

Referring to many of the cases in general, and to Lyttelton's case of the foreseen house with the black retriever and the barrel doghouse in particular, Saltmarsh commented, "Why these queer details should be given is most puzzling; I cannot help feeling that if we could understand them, and be able to account for the trivialities which we so often find, we should be a long way towards solving the problem of precognition itself" (p. 66).

Saltmarsh spends some time (as do many of the others cited here) discussing "normal" explanations—coincidence, faulty memory, fraud—and "metaphysical" ones—"spirits" of one sort or another, Dunne's ideas, two-dimensional time, the issue of backwards causation, the extended specious present. After discussing four theories of precognition—including one of his own—and finding them all unsatisfactory, he declares himself theoretically agnostic.

I do not say, dogmatically, that no adequate theory can be found, but I cannot conceive on what lines it can run.

What we can say, with some confidence, is that our ordinary idea of the nature of time is clearly inaccurate, and that the odd and bizarre phenomenon of precognition must make us prepared to accept radical, and possibly fantastic-seeming, modifications of it. (p. 101)

Or, as he says simply a few pages later (p. 114), "It seems to me that the occurrence of precognitions indicates that there is something amiss with our ordinary ideas of time." Moreover, he does not think that the novel understandings of space-time afforded by relativity theory are of any help. And although he recognizes that precognition has often been rejected as metaphysically impossible, he cautions that any metaphysics rests on axioms that must be accepted as given, and that philosophers hardly agree on one set of axioms. He updates Crookes: "The prohibition of belief in precognition," he writes, "may be neglected. I think the following principle may be laid down. While it is absurd to affirm the existence of the impossible, it is idle to deny the possibility of the actual." With typical frankness, he adds: "It does not, however, help us very much" (p. 102).

Saltmarsh notes that the cases seem to fall into two categories.

Glancing over the whole mass of evidence,... there seem to be two distinct types of precognition. In one type what we get is foreknowledge of a future event, and this knowledge may come in a large variety of ways, and be couched in many different forms of symbolism. Many warning cases show this very well, also precognitions of the approaching death, either of the subject or someone else. Where the precognition occurs in a dream, the scene dreamed of may not represent at all accurately the fulfilling event, but conveys knowledge of that event symbolically, or else the dreamer simply knows that so-and-so is going to happen....

In cases of precognitive impressions, this absence of sensory imagery is usually well marked....

The other general type is of those cases where the precognition appears, on the surface, to be an actual glimpse of the future. It is as though a rent suddenly appeared in the veil which covers the future, and then closed again after permitting the subject to take a fleeting glimpse at what lies ahead.

Precognitions of trivial events, which, as I've noted, form quite a large proportion of the whole, are very often of this type; there is, as a rule, no mark of futurity about them, they are recognized as having been precognitive only after the fulfilling event has been experienced. (pp. 104–105)

Saltmarsh tackles the question precognition raises regarding determinism and free will. He does not think that precognition of *some* events necessitates determinism of *all* events, and sees free will as a source of nondetermined acts (pp. 109–112). But he does not push his philosophical credentials. In fact, he considers himself a rank philosophical amateur, and hopes only that professionals will be “stimulated to action by witnessing the blunders of the layman” (p. 112). However, he writes,

As regards the facts themselves, I by no means adopt this humble, I might almost say cringing, attitude in the face of the professional philosopher. The evidence was collected and examined by experts in that line of business, my part has been only to select suitable parts thereof. Unless human testimony be rejected altogether as incapable of establishing matters of fact, that evidence cannot, in scientific honesty, be ignored, however inconvenient it may be to those whose philosophic systems it upsets. (p. 113)

Rhine, L. E. [↑](#)

“Frequency of Types of Experience in Spontaneous Precognition.” *Journal of Parapsychology* 18 (1954): 93–123.

“Precognition and Intervention.” *Journal of Parapsychology* 19 (1955): 1–34.

In this pair of papers Rhine works primarily with a collection of 1,324 precognitive cases, culled from a total of 3,290 spontaneous cases exhibiting psi that she had collected up to that time at the Parapsychology Laboratory at Duke University. The cases were not vetted; as she wrote earlier (1951, p. 166), “Of these cases, however, it can only be said, ‘These things people report,’ but not, ‘These things happen.’” Nevertheless, it is good to keep in mind Saltmarsh’s reminder about strong cases making weaker ones more valuable.

Rhine’s analysis is rough, but patterns emerge. Her principal question in “Frequency” is whether precognition is “simply ESP of the future” or if it has a “distinctive feature” because it deals with the future (p. 98). She also looks at psychological aspects: whether the person was awake or asleep; whether the precognition was an intuition, hallucination, unrealistic dream, or realistic dream; and whether the experience carried conviction of its futurity when it occurred or was only

recognized as precognitive after the event. She concludes—as did Saltmarsh⁸—that it does not have any particularly distinctive feature, and that “precognition is to be distinguished from contemporaneous types of ESP only in the temporal aspect of the target” (p. 114). She finds, however, that contemporaneous psi is far more often intuitive, whereas precognition occurs far more often in a dream, and that contemporaneous psi experiences carry conviction far more often than precognitive ones.

Her second paper is the most thorough investigation ever published on the question of “intervention,” and it has been an important reference in all subsequent discussions of precognitive cases. She expands her collection of 1,324 precognitive cases with cases from the *Proceedings*, and distills from that a group of nine that she feels powerfully demonstrate an individual’s capacity to alter a precognized future. Of those nine, she writes, three “seem to me to be more suggestive of the occurrence of true intervention than any others in my list” (p. 31).

They are strong cases. Even before she gets to the last nine, they present situations only averted because of what seems to have been a precognitive experience.

At one time my husband kept in running condition a race car. He had two drivers, one a smart quick-thinking boy named Dick, the other a good sort but slower in reaction named Robert. We were going to Salisbury to a race one afternoon. I had never seen the track there, when a picture flashed in my mind of a racer going through the fence. The top plank broke and went through the driver’s head. Robert was to drive that afternoon. I told my husband not to let him drive, but to let Dick, that something was going to happen and Dick could think faster. The picture was so plain and real I was very much upset and would not tell my husband all of it. He went to Dick and told him what I said, and Dick drove. The racer did go through the fence in the very place where I had seen it and broke the top plank. Dick jerked his head aside and kept from being killed. (p. 18)



When I was about 18 years old we had a house in the suburban district of Oslo and during the summer vacation rented one about 2½ hours away by train. Once my mother asked me to go to town to take care of some business. I was to leave in the morning and stay in Oslo through the day, spend the night at our home and return the next morning. The night before I left I had a horrible dream. I dreamed that I woke up in my mother’s room at the house in town where I used to sleep when I was there. I saw a man bending over me and I started screaming but nobody heard me. Then he put his hands around my throat and started choking me and I woke up shaking all over. I could still feel his hands around my neck. The next morning I left anyway, but I could not get the dream out of my mind. Half way to Oslo I left the train and took the first one back again. My mother was more surprised than pleased to see me. I told her about my dream and she sighed, “Well, you’re

⁸ *Foreknowledge*, p. 104.

always seeing and hearing things.” The next day we got a call from the police in Oslo saying that our house had been robbed that night. When my mother got the message she looked at me and fainted. Later we heard that a neighbor leaving for work in the morning had seen a curtain blow through a wide open window in our house, and knowing we were not at home had notified the police. The window was the one in my mother’s room.

In the above case, the possibility exists that the individual’s experience was based upon a telepathic impression from the robber who may already at the time of the experience have had in mind the house he meant to enter, again embroidered as by a vivid imagination. If so, of course, the case would not bear on the question of intervention. (p. 21)



Over 20 years ago I was working as an investigator for an investment insurance company. As our company insured cars and trucks I made enemies in the underworld. In consequence I usually had a good firearm within reach. One morning I was awakened at 4:00 A.M. by a policeman who was a close personal friend. The guy looked like he had seen a ghost. He asked me to loan him my pet pistol, a 44 calibre Smith & Wesson special. He handed me his own gun, a 38 Colt police, saying, “For God’s sake don’t carry this gun. I can’t tell you why. You would think I am crazy.”

About 10:00 A.M. that same morning I received a call to the Memorial Hospital. My policeman friend had stumbled into a hold up. He had killed two hoodlums and wounded a third with five shots from my 44 before suffering a minor chest wound himself.

He asked me to take his 38 to a pistol range and fire it. I did. It fired two shots. On the third the main spring let go, rendering the gun useless. I went back and told my friend “I thought so,” he said. “I dreamed I was in a gun fight and the gun failed on the third shot. That dream was so real that I just knew I had to have a good gun before I went on duty. I was even scared to drive to your place, two and one-half blocks with that Colt.” Modern guns of the superb quality of Colts, and Smith & Wesson seldom fail. Just why this cop had the nightmare, I don’t know. All I know is that he was as anxious to obtain my 44 as a drowning man is to grab a life-preserver, and that in my hands his gun fired only two shots.

In the above case, even though the policeman’s experience seemed to be based on the still future hold-up, the possibility exists that it might have been caused instead by a clairvoyant awareness of a defect in the gun converted by dream embroidery into a hold-up in which the gun failed. If such had been true, then the experience would not have been a genuinely precognitive one, and would have no bearing on the theoretical aspects of this study. (pp. 20–21)

The final nine include Myers’s case, detailed above, in which a woman’s dream of her coachman’s tumble to the pavement allowed her to intervene, calling a policeman in time to prevent the coachman’s actually hitting the street.

Others are equally intriguing.

I was working as a street car operator for the Los Angeles Railway Company. I dreamed that I was operating a “one man” car on the “W” line going south on F... Street. I pulled up at an intersection, Avenue 26, loaded passengers and waited for the signal to change. All things in the dream were as they *actually* were; I mean the street, stores, traffic conditions, everything was in the dream just as they were in real life.

When the signal said “Go” I proceeded and crossed the intersection.

F... Street, on which I was traveling south, runs north and south, Avenue 26, crosses it. A short block south of Avenue 26 there is an exit which is for automobile traffic only. The exit gives onto F... Street, and it is a one-way exit, but it is possible, and too often done, to make an illegal lefthand turn and go south on F... Street. In order to do this the auto has to cross both north and south bound street car tracks.

Now back to the dream: As I crossed the intersection I saw a northbound “5” car approaching. I waved to the motorman and went on. As the cars passed my car was at the point of this exit. Suddenly, without warning, a big truck, painted a solid bright red, cut in front of me coming from the exit. The north bound car had obstructed my view of the exit, and the truck, making the illegal turn, could not see my car because of the other street car. There was a terrific crash. People were thrown from their seats on the street car and the truck was overturned. There had been three people in the truck—two men and a woman. The two men were sprawled on the street, dead, and the woman was screaming in pain. I walked over to the woman and she looked at me with the largest bluest eyes I had ever seen. She repeatedly shouted at me, “You could have avoided this, you could have avoided this.”

I awoke with a start, my pajamas soaked with perspiration. It was nearly time for me to get up anyway, so I stayed up, quite shaken by the dream.

I reported for work and for one reason or another I do not remember, I was given a run on the “W” line. I had recovered my composure by then and had put the dream out of my mind. I made one trip south. On my second trip I pulled up to Avenue 26 just as in the dream and loaded passengers. I was waiting for the signal to change, still not thinking of the dream, when I suddenly became sick at my stomach. I was actually nauseated. I felt provoked at myself and hoped it would go away. As I left the intersection on the signal change, I saw, just as in my dream, a No. 5 car, northbound. Now I was definitely sick. Everything seemed to have happened before and my mind seemed to be shouting at me about something. When I waved to the motorman on the “5” car the dream came to me. I immediately shut off the power and applied the brakes, stopping the car. A truck, not a big truck completely red as in my dream, but a panel delivery truck with space for advertising on the side painted over with bright red, shot directly in my path. Had I been moving at all, I would have hit it as surely as I did in my dreams.

There were three people in the truck, two men and a woman.

As the truck passed in front of me, the woman leaned out of the window and looked up at me with the same startled, large blue eyes I had seen in my dream, and without realizing what it meant to me, I'm sure, she waved her arm hand [*sic*], thumb and forefinger circled in the familiar "okay" gesture.

I was so upset I had to be relieved. (pp. 28–29)



In June 1951 off and on for over two weeks I had the same recurrent dream. I was in a white house, untenanted, in a very small kitchen. My father and my husband were with me. They were building something. Things weren't going right. They started wrangling. Dad was losing his patience. He was a good carpenter and precise. My husband was getting more angry. I stepped in and told them I had had enough. Dad slammed down his tools, said nothing and walked out. My husband looked at me and quit. The carpentering was left unfinished in the dream, always the same dream.

At this time we had been living with my folks for 11 years. Housing problems, no hopes. But suddenly out of nowhere the last of June my brother-in-law called and told us of a little white house that would be for rent. We applied and rented it. That same week my dad and my husband and I were in the little white house, the same little kitchen. I was washing the built-in cabinets and sink. Everything was identical as in the dream, but no argument. I thought I was again just imagining. However, by the end of five or six days, the argument developed. My dad grew impatient, my husband more angry. There I sat as in my dream, watching. Suddenly I sat bolt upright. I realized the situation here and in the dream were identical. I also remembered the bad ending of the dream. I immediately made up my mind this would not end like the dream, so I asked Dad if he could eat some ice cream and drink some tea. He was pleased so I left and was gone about 20 minutes. The situation was still tense when I returned. The scene remained. To this day I don't know why I did it, but I began to laugh, I guess I became almost hysterical. I know I thought the dream was winning and I was silly for thinking so. Both men got so cross at me they forgot the tenseness of the argument. After we were settled in the house Dad said one day, "For a while I thought I was going to walk out and let your husband finish it, but you fixed that." Then later my husband said that he was about ready to tell him to get out, he had caused enough arguments. (p. 27)

These are detailed and persuasive. But there are anomalies in the details. In the case of Myers's coachman, for example, the carriage was traveling in the direction opposite to that in the dream. In the case of the streetcar operator, the truck was not solid red. Those are small things, but why should they be wrong if precognition is taken to be veridical? So much of the rest was accurate.

The problem here is that, unlike other psi phenomena, there is an unspoken and undue burden on precognition. It is generally, unreasonably expected to be film-like in its literal representation of the future. After years of observation and consideration, it is widely accepted by psychical

researchers that apparitions or telepathic intuitions are the result of subliminal processes at work in the concerned parties. In his brilliant work on apparitions, G. N. M. Tyrrell (1953) illustrated this idea with a theatrical metaphor.

It becomes a matter of great interest to ask who constructs these apparitional dramas, and how. We have already caught a glimpse of the machinery employed to express them; but the creation of the drama is a different process. There is evidently a long step between the drama as expressed and the agent's initiating idea. The agent at a moment of crisis certainly does not think of the percipient except in general terms. Probably he does no more than wish to be with him or wish that he could know what is happening to him. His part is only to give direction and impetus to the drama and to supply in very general terms the *motif*. The work of constructing the drama is done in certain regions of the personality which lie below the conscious level; and there the agent's general and simple idea is worked out in complex detail. Simplicity of *motif* and complexity of expression seem to be characteristic of ideas in general. When we have the idea of performing some action, our idea is simple; we do not think of all the complicated movements required to carry it out. These are supplied by some sub-conscious element of our personality. And I rather think that in perception the converse is true, the multiplex detail with which the sense-organs have to deal being unified and integrated into a perceptual idea of sufficient simplicity to be practically useful; although, of course, we can attend to detail if we wish to do so.

Perhaps it would be useful here to introduce a metaphor and to compare the consciousness of the agent to the author of a play, and that 'something' within him which works out the idea in dramatic form to the 'producer'. Further, the 'something else' within him which expresses this drama in the sensory form of an apparition may be compared to the 'executor' or 'stage-carpenter' of the play. These are anthropomorphic terms, but possibly helpful. The author of a telepathic apparition does much less than authors usually have to do. He supplies the most general theme only, leaving a great deal to the originality of the producer. And note that the producer does not exist in his personality alone. The apparitional drama is quite clearly in most cases a joint effort in which the producers of both agent and percipient take part. We know this because not only are there items in the apparition which the agent cannot have known; there are also often items which the percipient cannot have known, such as a wound in a particular part of the body which the agent has received and which the apparition shows, or a coffin or other symbol indicating the agent's death, or perhaps circumstances connected with the agent's accident, such as the appearance of the figure wet and dripping, indicating that the agent has been drowned. Thus the 'producers' or 'producer-levels' of the agent and percipient must get together to work out apparitions; and in cases of collective percipience the 'producer-levels' of the additional percipients must also take part. For it is not merely a feat of multiple perception which is performed in such cases; it is a feat of correlation in which each percipient sees exactly the aspect of the moving apparition

which he would see from his particular standpoint in space if the apparition were material. In non-telepathic and non-collective cases only one producer is concerned....

It is difficult to picture to oneself the process of construction of such a drama, not only because it takes place beneath the level of consciousness, but also because the processes involved must be very different from anything which takes place in the physical world and different from purely mental processes as well. There is something in it which suggests conscious planning. Yet I do not think that we can imagine that the agent's and percipient's 'producers' consciously hold a committee meeting of two and decide on the details of the drama. That is to endow them with too much consciousness. Nor do I think that we can go to the other extreme and suppose that the agent's idea expresses itself through a mechanical pattern which reduces the 'producers' to the level of idea-expressing machines. There is a good deal in the apparition which suggests consciousness and there is a good deal which suggests automatism. The truth is that we are dealing with something between the two extremes of consciousness and mechanism. (pp. 101–102)

Moreover, the psi experience is seamless—there is no demarcation for the percipient between information “received” and information “supplied.” In her paper on intervention, Rhine acknowledged this.

Even if it be granted that one part of the experience, the one that was fulfilled, had been precognized, it may not be necessary to assume that the averted part was; for it is possible that the origin of the total experience was more complicated, and that the two parts had different origins. Even if the non-averted part were truly precognitive, the other still could have been a rational inference derived from the precognitive impression. Since it is evident from the study of other psi cases that dreamers do often embroider extrasensorially received information, it is only reasonable to ask whether such mental action could be involved in cases like these.

Suppose, for instance, that a critical situation short of the ultimate calamity were precognitively apprehended..., might not the rest of the experience have been unconsciously added on by the dreaming mind? (p. 30)

But there is no need for elaboration to be a “rational inference.” To the contrary, it seems far more likely to be a nonrational—subconscious—inference. Osty's sensitives (above) illustrated that in their ability to incorporate sitters' internal impressions into precognitive material. The possibility and philosophical complexities of intervention recede when precognition is treated as are other psi intimations—as more or less accurate interpretive acts by the conscious mind, working with more or less precise or accurate subliminal information. Precognitions should not be afforded special status in this regard. They are not movies or photographs. As C. D. Broad (1957) observed, a precognitive experience

will seldom correspond accurately in all its details [to the event itself]. It will generally be supplemented, and often distorted, by features due to the experient's past experiences and acquired associations, his present situation and interests, and so on. (p. 179)

It is, in fact, hard to find a case where the "event" foreseen and forestalled is not amenable to this analysis and readily interpreted as the subject's projected anxiety or fear, a rational consequence of the sequence preceding it. Stevenson (below, p. 193) makes this point as well.

Stevenson, Ian [↑](#)

"Precognition of Disasters." *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 64 (1970): 187–210.

Stevenson, famous within the field for his meticulous, tireless work on cases of the reincarnation type, spent years looking at spontaneous psi. He wrote several papers on precognition and on the evidential strength of spontaneous cases,⁹ and here he reviews previous empirical and theoretical work. He finds unexpected and/or personally meaningful events to be most likely foreseen: "The themes of precognitive experiences (as of most other spontaneous ESP experiences) are mostly serious and shocking events such as deaths and accidents. Comparatively few of these experiences have as their themes a trivial or pleasant event" (p. 200). His examination of large-scale disasters (railway accidents collectively, the *Titanic*, and the Aberfan coal-tip avalanche in Wales) is actually quite brief, and although he does not present new cases, his concise discussion is typically thorough and worthwhile. After critical examination, he finds alternative explanations of strong cases of precognition inadequate, and says, "Thus true precognition may occur and may require some of the more recondite explanations that upset our habitual notions of causation and time" (p. 196).

MacKenzie, Andrew [↑](#)

Riddle of the Future: A modern study of precognition. London: Arthur Barker. 1974.

MacKenzie was another long-term member of the SPR. He served on the council and was familiar with the society's rich case history and evidential requirements. He presents several previously unpublished SPR cases in detail, such as this one concerning the death of William C. Bullitt, an American diplomat. It was corroborated by two other individuals. It is unusual in that the percipient could not remember where or when she had "learned" of the event.

I must say, first, that I have never had any reason to have been interested in Bullitt, and that as a matter of fact my knowledge of him and his life was extremely hazy. I am a librarian, and in the month of February 1967 prior to Friday the 11th his book on Woodrow Wilson was received at the library where I am employed. I said casually, on seeing the book in an incoming shipment, 'Here's the Bullitt book on Wilson. He died the

⁹ See n. 1 above (Stevenson, 1968).

other day, you know, in France.’ My co-worker said ‘Oh, where did you hear that?’ I replied ‘On the radio news, or TV, or maybe I read it in the paper. I’ve forgotten now. But he died suddenly in France, apparently.’ ‘Well, I hadn’t heard,’ she remarked and turned to other matters. On the following Friday, 11 February 1967, a fellow librarian from another city was visiting me here for the week-end, and, as usual, we discussed the new books. The Bullitt book came up and I said something to her to the effect that she could ‘close his dates’ on the catalogue cards because he had died recently in France. She too was surprised (but not terribly excited) by the news, only because she had missed the item.

On Sunday 13 February this friend returned to her own home. On Tuesday evening 15 February I turned on the TV to the evening news as usual. About midway through the broadcast Mr Huntley, the newscaster, announced that ex-Ambassador William Bullitt had died that day, suddenly, in France!

I decided that Huntley must have gotten hold of an old script by error and so listened to the CBS news following. Again it was announced that Bullitt had died suddenly that day in France, Still I was puzzled by the rehashing of this old news and worried about it until the morning papers arrived on 16 February. There, datelined France, was the news of Bullitt’s death on the day before....

I mentioned the discrepancy to my co-worker above mentioned and she said ‘You must have been having one of your ESP attacks.’ That evening my house guest of the previous week-end called me long distance to find out what was going on. ‘Bullitt died yesterday,’ she said, ‘not last week. You must have dreamed it.’

But I did not dream it. I either heard it on a news broadcast or read it in the paper over a week before it happened. The oddest thing about it is that it concerned a person in whom I had absolutely no interest, and who as far as I knew could well have been dead for years before that February 1967. How does one account for this? And why the persistent detail about France? And if it was intended as a warning message, why did it come to me? (pp. 125–126)

We have seen the point about triviality made before. As our investigators repeatedly note (Stevenson perhaps excepted), many precognitions are not momentous. They do not necessarily concern the destruction of Martinique or the sinking of the *Titanic*. They are glimpses of unimportant events seen though a rent opened for no apparent reason whatsoever. But although that may be important in itself, it seems irrelevant to the fundamental puzzle they represent.

Another of his cases almost defies classification. MacKenzie devotes the better part of an 18-page chapter to the 1935 experience of a military pilot in Scotland. Having barely escaped a near-fatal spiral in a fierce rainstorm, he pulled up and flew over an airfield which, to his astonishment, appeared to him briefly in clear sunlight nearly as it would some four or five years later—planes, hangars, workers, and all—and not at all as it existed at the time. When the pilot finally saw the rebuilt airfield in 1964, the hangars were substantially different from his vision,

but he didn't know whether they had ever existed in the condition he saw. As he wrote, "the vision might be entirely one of precognition of ideas. I may have seen intentions as they were later to be imagined by others, but certainly not as already imagined by anyone on earth when I had the vision" (p. 86).

MacKenzie admits the incomprehensibility of the phenomena.

If we accept ... that experiences involving precognition do occur it follow logically that we must abandon the concept of one-dimensional time..., i.e. time as represented by a straight line, with the past behind us, the present as the moment in which the eye and brain take in what is written here, and the future as all that stretches before us.... We are thus in the position of accepting, as I do on the evidence, that precognitive experiences take place but being unable to explain how. (pp. 146–147)

His conclusion:

I am surprised that the strength of the evidence for precognition in its various forms in daily life is not generally realized. (p. 13)

Eisenbud, Jule [↑](#)

Paranormal Foreknowledge: Problems and perplexities. New York: Human Sciences Press. 1982.

Eisenbud was a psychiatrist best known for his work with Ted Serios's "thoughtography" (1967), but he had an abiding interest in premonition. It wasn't prevalent in his professional practice—he cites some three dozen incidents in 40 years (p. 13)—but it was challenging, and it drove him to write this book. His cases are from his patients, and he elaborates them in a psychoanalytic framework. They are nuanced and summary-resistant, and he is a careful observer. He, too, dismisses the complexities inherent in "intervention" as a consequence of a naïvely literal interpretation of the foreseeing. The typically "catastrophic ending may be viewed as the kind of distortion typically seen in dreams. It is the kind of thing encountered day in and day out by those who listen to dreams for a living" (p. 204). And, as he says in another publication (1973),

it may yet turn out that as more and more instances are investigated, the unconscious will be seen as far less in awe of the sanctity of time than we are in our conscious waking lives, and that if it needs a tool to make a point in a dream, the "day after tomorrow's residues" are as good as any other "day's residues." (p. 108)

His theoretical approach, though, is an unusual one. He adopts a perspective called psychobolie (spelled various ways), which is most simply described as the idea that the precognizer is actually the subconscious cause or trigger of the event—no matter how large or apparently multicausal that event (Tanagras, 1934). The philosopher C. D. Broad, who took psi—and precognition in particular—seriously and wrote a considerable collection of papers regarding it,

called this idea “venturing still farther into the preposterous” (1957, p. 183). Nevertheless, in its milder form it is merely an extension of psychokinesis—as in poltergeist activity—or distant healing combined with what we know of the darker side of the human personality, and Eisenbud would have us consider it carefully.

Finally, though, after sifting through his experience, trying to eliminate true precognition, Eisenbud reluctantly throws up his hands.

I feel very much like the man who set out to find somewhere on earth a mate who would fulfill his unique requirements as to background, beauty, character, intelligence, and so forth. After some years he returned—alone. However, to his inquiring friends he at length admitted that he had actually found the woman who fit all his specifications. What, then, was the matter? “I didn’t like her,” he replied.

I too have no liking for the results of our search. (p. 231)

He is not alone in his dislike. Two philosophers, Steven Braude and David Ray Griffin—while recognizing the reality of psi—make strong arguments against precognition. Braude (1986), like Eisenbud, argues that we have no reasonable way to limit the reach of psychokinesis and can extend it to account for nearly all precognitions. (In the process, he makes a compelling case against any logical construction for backwards causation.) Griffin (1993), building on the metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead, has no place for precognition—in a Whiteheadian cosmos the arrow of time is fundamental, backwards causation is simply impossible, and the future does not exist to be foreseen. He lists 13 alternatives to true precognition, noting that “some of the alternate paranormal explanations do not seem very plausible to me, but I mention them because they seem at least possible, whereas backward causation does not” (p. 271). (For example: “A discarnate spirit learns the content of a person’s dream telepathically and then brings about an event corresponding to it” [p. 274].)

Conclusions

In the world of intellectual debate, what I have presented here is perhaps more tantalizing than persuasive.¹⁰ It may be that, in the absence of personal experience with psi, no written evidence can ever be truly persuasive. But the empirical evidence for precognition represented by these compilations and analyses of cases is at least undeniable. Unless we ignore it, pretend it does not exist, it demands our attention. Do we have any theoretical foothold? We don’t seem to. The authors’ discussions of the cases’ implications often strike intuitively resonant chords, and yet I believe that the authors’ primary frustration at the impasse erected by our refractory, commonsense notion of time is appropriate. To cite the familiar conclusion of yet another researcher (Thouless, 1972),

¹⁰ As medical doctors like to say, if a story doesn’t fit your way of thinking, it’s an anecdote; if it does, it’s a case history.

When there is such a conflict between ostensible facts and the expectations based on our ways of thinking, the conflict may be resolved by denying the reality of the ostensible facts. A better way would seem to be to accept such facts as are based on sound observations and to consider that our ways of thinking must be revised. This would seem to be the right way of dealing with the difficulty of precognition; if the facts of precognition are in conflict with our customary ways of thinking about time, then our ways of thinking about time need changing. (p. 140)

This review has left largely untouched the two great philosophical issues that bedevil precognition—causality and free will—although several of the authors discuss them at length. (They are also addressed briefly in a “Theoretical Interlude” in chapter 14 of *Beyond Physicalism* [Kelly, Crabtree & Marshall, 2015].) The causal conundrum arises from a sense that the future does not yet exist and therefore cannot possibly be the cause of any present perception or intuition; the problem of free will follows from the notion of a determined, precognized future. Both concerns are inextricably intertwined with each other and with our understanding of time. There seems to be ample evidence from near-death experiences and mystical states—as referenced, for example, in *Beyond Physicalism* (pp. 51ff)—and even from the altered states of Osty’s sensitives mentioned above, that the past, present, and future can be experienced (for want of a better word) together. If such nonordinary perceptions of time help us make sense of precognition, they may well help us understand the knotty mysteries that trail in its wake.

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