

Supplemental web material for  
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The Relation of Supernormal Phenomena to Time;—Precognition.”  
*Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*, 11 (1895).  
F. W. H. Myers.  
<http://books.google.com>

I went home on leave in September, and did not return to the regiment until just before the battle of Missionary Ridge.

Davis did die and the troops did go to Memphis on transports.—Yours truly,

E. H. BALL.

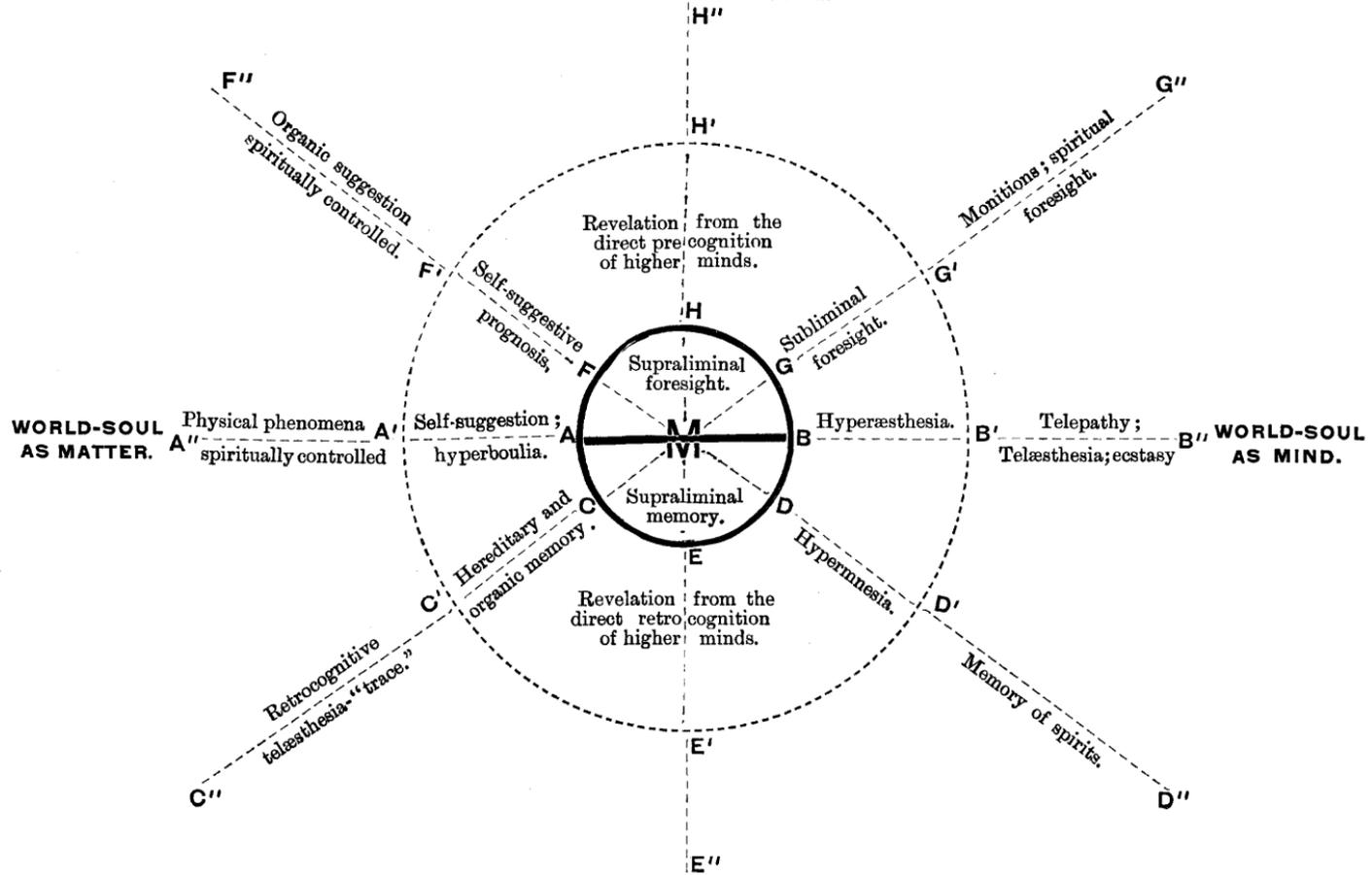
It will be observed that this soldier's prediction comes nearer than any case with which we have yet dealt to the ancient conception of *prophecy*,—a revelation not petty nor personal, but of great issues, and for some lofty end. Such prophecies are apt to be difficult to prove as such,—to distinguish from the sage's foresight as to the trend and stream of things. And, on the other hand, so far as these grave communications claim a divine inspiration, this is hardly to be distinguished from the subliminal messages of which we have so often spoken. It is among two religious bodies widely divergent in dogmatic teaching that such celestial promptings have seemed to have most of cogency,—in the Catholic Church of the Middle Ages, and among the earliest members of the Society of Friends. It is much to be desired that the scattered indications of monition and premonition which records of this type contain should be collected by some critical though sympathetic hand. The early Friends especially presented a character which cannot be alien to the best humanity of any age. Their combination of sober common-sense with inward openness to illumination,—the steady expectancy of their calm untroubled souls,—this is the temper which our inquiry needs, and which other men may surely attain in the future as fully as these men in the past.

I have now given specimens of all the classes of evidence known to me which bear on the relation of supernormal phenomena to time, and have endeavoured to throw such light as was possible on each in turn. The result is to me at least in one way of much interest. For these phenomena of retrocognition and precognition, covering a wide range, and regarded now in a new light, are found to have a close connection with my whole group of previously accepted generalisations,—to lend confirmation to them, and to receive confirmation from them in turn.

I may be able to make all this clearer—I hope that I shall not seem to make it more dogmatic—by a diagrammatic scheme which will at least offer to criticism definite points of attack. But if, instead of a plane surface and a few black lines, I could exhibit a transparent globe, varying in density, colour, and luminosity, we should still have an absurdly inadequate symbol of that *n*-dimensional infinitude of living faculty some few of whose properties we dimly discern. Nay, scant as it is, the diagram is itself misleading. The opposite direction of its lines implies no ultimate divergence; all alike must be assumed to meet at infinity.

SCHEME OF HUMAN FACULTY IN ITS RELATION TO TIME.

WORLD-SOUL AS FUTURE.



A short description will indicate what I have tried to express by this diagram.

1. The dark and the dotted circle represent sections of concentric spheres; of which the upper hemispheres represent the Future, and the lower the Past. The vertical diameter divides material phenomena on the left from mental on the right. The thick line AB represents what I have elsewhere called "the spectrum of ordinary consciousness"; extending from the *red* end at A, where our voluntary control over the body and our ordinary perceptions of its processes cease, to the *violet* end at B, where the range of our higher senses and of our intellect finds its term.

2. The small thick circle of which AB is a diameter represents that area of time past and future which is within the grasp of the empirical or supraliminal self,—by recollection of the past or reasoned inference as to the future. This is a kind of "circle of perpetual apparition"; a small circle of the cosmic sphere, within which (save in sleep, &c.) the stars never set.

3. The dotted circle indicates the realm of the subliminal Self; emerging into separate consciousness from the World-Soul in which it is immersed, much as the dark circle rises into separate consciousness out of the dotted circle of the larger Self.

The metaphor of a *threshold of emergence*, however, which the words supraliminal and subliminal imply, is not expressed by the position of lines as higher or lower in the plane of my diagram. Rather the small circle, the supraliminal area, must be conceived as subjectively central to the larger circle, or area of subliminal perception and control.

4. The line A'B' represents the spectrum of man's subliminal consciousness at any given moment. It runs along the upper side of the thick line AB, because in this diagram Future is above and Past is below; and the subliminal consciousness, even if assumed to be acting through the mediacy of the senses, must needs be always slightly ahead of the empirical or organic; since an appreciable time is consumed in the act of sensation itself, and in the passage from sensation to perception. The consequences of this fact were indicated when the phenomena of *promnesia*, or apparent memory of the present moment, were above discussed.

5. Conformably with what has been said above, and following the thick line in the direction of A, the line AA' will represent the extension of subliminal *control over the organism*, beyond the limit of empirical or voluntary control. This extended power of modifying the organism, which we may term *hyperboulia*, has already met us in various phenomena of hypnotism or of hysteria;—for instance, in the re-establishment of suppressed secretions.

6. Carried on to a still further point, under the guidance of disembodied intelligences, the line A'A'' will indicate that extension of will-power beyond the periphery which I regard as the basis of such supernatural power over matter as I believe to have been manifested through the agency of some few persons. Produced to infinity this line may be supposed to indicate the mysterious connexion of Mind and Matter,—the *magnum corpus* with which the World-Soul is mingled in some identity beyond our ken.

7. Following now the thick line AB in the direction of B, the line BB' will represent the extension of subliminal *perception*, first hyperæsthetic, using the sense-organs with increasing delicacy; then telæsthetic, or depending no longer on sense-organs, but on that transcendental receptivity of which telepathy is the commonest type.

8. Passing on beyond the indefinite liminary circle of the subliminal self, we may take the line B'B'' as symbolizing the commerce of man's spirit with the world of unembodied mind, as in prayer or ecstasy. Produced to infinity, the line may indicate the Cosmos in its intellectual aspect,—the *Mens* which mingles with the *magnum corpus* of the material world.

9. And now for the relations to Time of the faculties thus indicated. The top of this diagram represents the Future, the bottom the Past. The oblique ordinates which start from M—the focus of man's consciousness—represent the pathways along which I think that we have actual evidence of man's access to past and future things. The rectangular ordinates, representing direct intuition of Past and Future, by our own or higher minds, belong to that speculative conception of a World-Soul involving both Future and Past of which I have already spoken.

10. Let us next follow the oblique ordinate which starts from M, and passes through C and C' to C''. This line represents the physical or organic aspect of memory. From M to C we have supraliminal organic memory;—such physical memories, that is to say, as can be summoned up at will. From C to C' we have subliminal organic memories, including the whole range from hypnotism to heredity. For heredity itself is in some sort a transmitted memory, and a record of all ancestors is implicit in the germ. Following the line from C' to C'', beyond the limits of the profounder organic personality, we meet the question whether any similar trace, or persistent record of past experiences, can inhere also and be discernible in inorganic things.

The luminescent pebble glows with the treasured light of long-set suns. And if this delicate and fugitive energy of light be thus persistent, who shall imit the influences which may have stored

themselves within the labyrinth of vibrations which constitute the pebble?—influences evocable, perhaps, and recognisable when the summons and the perception come.

It is conceivable, then, that the line  $C'C''$ , prolonged to infinity, might give us a complete history of every infinitely smallest particle in the universe, from infinitely remote time.

11. And next let us follow the ordinate  $MDD'D''$ —the line which represents intellectual, as distinguished from organic, memory; the synthetized and symbolical recollection which is what we consciously retain of the Past. From  $M$  to  $D$  the line thus represents the memory which we habitually employ; from  $D$  to  $D'$  it represents the hypermnesic, or fuller, but still synthetized and personal memory of our past experiences which we have found the subliminal self to possess. Passing out at  $D'$  from the sphere of the Self, we come to memories possessed by other spirits, from which memories it may be possible that knowledge passes to incarnate men. Each spirit's memory, like each human memory, will presumably be unified by a personal synthesis. It will be a subjective or impressionist record of a special segment of the past.

12. And now between these two types of memory—the memory implicate in Matter, living or dead, and the memory implicate in Mind, embodied or disembodied,—I draw a rectangular ordinate  $MEE'E''$  to represent direct retrocognition, by our own or by higher minds;—such persistence of the Past as an object of thought as may inhere neither in material traces nor in reminiscence of personal experience. What has been still may be; and not merely as trace recognisable in matter or as former impression revivable in mind. There may be a self-existent and imprescriptible Cosmorama; a conservation at once of all thought and of all phenomena; the World-Soul as the Past.

13. And now passing on to those ordinates which symbolise the future, let us begin with the oblique ordinate  $MFF'F''$ , whose position on the scheme shows it to indicate *organic precognition*. The ordinary or supraliminal segment of this line,  $MF$ , is represented by a physician's, or rather by the patient's own instinctive prognosis. Passing on into the wider circuit of subliminal faculty, the line  $FF'$  indicates suggestion, self-suggestion,—organic clairvoyance,—the profounder prognosis which corresponds to hyperboulia; since increased power over the organism implies increased knowledge, and increased knowledge implies increased foresight. All are now familiar with the process of setting (so to say) the organic clock to strike at a given hour. But not all psychologists have realised all that is implied in the supraliminal unconsciousness of the suggested subject; who bears within him the germ of a complex

thought or action which to him will seem spontaneous and free ; yet which will fulfil itself for him as irresistibly as the pang of hunger or the languor of sleep.

Beyond the circuit of the Self, the line  $F'F''$  denotes spirit-prognosis, spirit-suggestion ; the foretelling of predetermined organic changes, including bodily death ; and the recommendation of remedies which may modify or postpone such changes. There is some evidence (as yet, unfortunately, mainly of a private kind) that such advice can be given as from unseen intelligences,—which are not, however, able to foresee (any more than an earthly physician can foresee) the possible events from outside, or changes in the environment, which may make the prescriptions of no avail.

14. And now let us pass on from *organic prevision* to that great group of cases which I will provisionally class under the heading of *telæsthetic inference*, but which depend no doubt on causes far more varied and complex than we can at present fathom.

We have already seen that hyperæsthesia involves hypermnesia ; that is, when more is perceived more will be remembered. In the same manner hyperæsthesia involves what we might call hyper-promethia ; that is, when more is perceived, more will be foreseen. The line  $MG$  representing ordinary foresight, the line  $GG'$  represents the foresight of the subliminal self ; based, as I have said, on hyperæsthesia, and also on the telepathy and telæsthesia into which this hyperæsthesia inscrutably passes. Nor have we any theoretical limit to what the incarnate soul may thus foresee. In many of our cases there is absolutely no clue to the source of precognition ; and we may ascribe all these, if we will, to the subliminal self without extraneous aid.

Yet, on the other hand, there are many cases where the agency of unembodied spirits is asserted, and with evidence that cannot be ignored. The line  $G'G''$  represents the foresight of unembodied intelligences ; nor can we guess how high may be the communicating intelligence, how far-reaching its prefigurement of what for us has yet to be.

15. We are led thus to our last, our boldest conjecture. The line from  $M$  to  $H''$  represents the possibility of a knowledge which comes to man from no individuated, or at least from no human source ; which is no longer inference but the reflection of Reality itself ; of the World-Soul as the Future ; of a pre-existent Cosmorama of infinite fates.

It is to this last line of reflection that the few concluding paragraphs must be devoted. And first a few words as to the relation of our evidence to the problem of Free Will. Here I have a suggestion to make which even in this time-worn controversy is, I think, absolutely

novel. It is that we have now a possibility of making the question between liberty and determination a matter of actual experiment.

Let us put that old question in this specific form—"Is there evidence that any power can show me a picture involving my own (so-called) voluntary actions in the future, which picture I cannot by any effort in the smallest degree hinder from becoming actual fact?"

For mere ordinary prevision this would of course be impossible. But we have here certain foreshadowings which depend on no ordinary prevision, and which are more wholly outside ourselves than any information of equally definite character which we can otherwise receive. The scenes or statements thus given in complete detail seem sometimes to be fulfilled with equal completeness. But *must* they, or must any of them, inevitably be thus fulfilled? Here it is that a possibility of experiment comes in. The experiment indeed cannot be conclusive either way. But suppose that—as in some folk-lore story—we were to make vigorous effort to avert some incident, and were yet to find that incident fulfil itself, perhaps by dint of that very effort, exactly after the dreaded fashion,—should we not then have some reason to infer that earth-life was not really modifiable by anything which we feel as free-will?

Assuming such a result of our experiment, analogy would at once suggest a further possibility. For our life on earth would then be seen to resemble the experience of the hypnotised subject, fulfilling unwittingly in waking hours the suggestions previously made to him in the trance. We should ask whether in our own history some epoch may have existed in which a self-suggestion may have been given which could similarly dominate our earthly career. Our complex organism, the result of a long previous history, is felt to restrict our so-called voluntary action within narrow limits; and if we possess also a soul independent of the body, it is surely likely that the soul's previous history also—for *some* previous history any entity so highly specialised as a man's soul must have had—may exercise a determining influence, even more profound than the organism's influence, upon the thoughts and actions of this incarnation. There may, in short, be a kind of alternating personality, expressing itself first in an incorporeal and then in a corporeal state, in such a way that the incorporeal state is the deeper and the more permanent, and that suggestions thence derived influence corporeal life, although the empirical consciousness which governs that life may never know it.

This idea, of course, is not new to religion or to philosophy, in East or West, and it has long since been suggested that our earthly existence may be the inevitable sequel of our past eternity; a predestined pilgrimage on which our true soul looks with calm content;

since not one of earth's phantom sorrows can find her unwilling or strike her unaware. The soul foretaught, the body forewrought,—these will move onwards as they must and may ; but meanwhile the problem of Liberty and Necessity will no longer be one for earthly experience to discuss ; it will be lifted into a pre-natal region, among the secrets of the transcendental world.

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. I have thought sometimes that this problem of free human wills amid the predictable operations of unchanging law may resemble the problem of molecular motion amid molar calm. Clear and stable is for us the diamond ; the dewdrop is clear and still ; yet within their tranquil clarity a myriad molecules jostle in narrow orbits or speed on an uncomputed way. So to "the spectator of all Time and of all Existence" may the Cosmos be "as one entire and perfect chrysolite;" and yet man's petty hopes and passions may make endless turmoil among its minutest elements and in its infinitesimal grains. Those movements too must be ruled by unknown law ; yet on a wide view they will average out, and will admit of predictions fulfilled immutably, and overriding the small Wills of men.

Once more, and from a different standpoint. Few men have pondered long on these problems of Past and Future without wondering whether Past or Future be in very truth more than a name—whether we may not be apprehending as a stream of sequence that which is an ocean of co-existence, and slicing our subjective years and centuries from timeless and absolute things. The precognition dealt with in this chapter, indeed, hardly overpasses the life of the individual percipient. Let us keep to that small span, and let us imagine that a whole earth-life is in reality an absolutely instantaneous although an infinitely complex phenomenon. Let us suppose that my transcendental self discerns with equal directness and immediacy every element of this phenomenon ; but that my empirical self receives each element mediately and through media involving different rates of retardation ; just as I receive the lightning more quickly than the thunder. May not then seventy years intervene between my perceptions of birth and death as easily as seven seconds between my perceptions of the flash and peal ? And may not some inter-communication of consciousness

enable the wider self to call to the narrower, the more central to the more external, "At such an hour this shock will reach you! Listen for the nearing roar!"

And thinking thus of the Universe as no mere congeries of individual experiences, but as a plenum of infinite knowledge of which all souls form part, we come to count less and less upon having to deal exclusively with intelligences individualised like our own. Our limitations of personality may less and less apply to spirits drawing more directly upon the essential reality of things. The definite intelligences which have crystallised, so to say, out of the psychical vapour may even for us become again partly sublimated, may again be diffused for a moment amid such knowledge as our organisations cannot receive except in ecstasy and bewilderment, or retain except in vanishing symbol and obscure and earthly sign.

If then all these phenomena form part of one great effort by which man's soul is striving to know his spiritual environment, and his spiritual environment is striving to become known, how little can it matter what the special incident foretold or foreshadowed may be! What signifies it whether this or that earthly peril be averted, or earthly benefit secured,—whether through this or that petty channel shall flow some stream of mortal things? The prime need of man is to know more fully, that he may obey more unhesitatingly, the laws of the world unseen. And how can this great end be attained save by the unfoldment from within, in whatsoever fashion it may be possible, of man's transcendental faculty;—by his recognition of himself as a cosmic being and not a planetary, as not a body but a soul? Surely even that special premonition which is sometimes spoken of as a thing of terror,—the warning or the promise of earthly death,—should to the wise man sound as a friendly summons, and as a welcome home. Let him remember the Vision which came to Socrates in the prison-house;—then, and then only, showing in an angel's similitude the Providence which till that hour had been but as an impersonal and invisible Voice;—but now the "fair and white-robed woman", while friends offered escape from death, had already spoken of better hope than this, and had given to Achilles' words a more sacred meaning,—  
"On the third day hence thou comest to Phthia's fertile shore."