

Hornell Hart, Ph.D.

Remembered in parapsychology primarily for his collection and study of apparitions and for coining the term “Super-ESP,” Hornell Norris Hart was a professor of sociology at Duke University from 1938 until 1957. His 1959 book, *The Enigma of Survival*, is something of a classic in the field. He was a charter member of the Parapsychological Association, a member of the Society for Psychical Research, and the American Society for Psychical Research.



Born in St. Paul, Minnesota on August 2, 1888, Hart received his B.A. from Oberlin College in 1910, his M.A. in sociology from the University of Wisconsin in 1914, and his Ph.D. from the State University of Iowa in 1921. Before joining the faculty at Duke University, he taught at Bryn Mawr College (1924-33) and Hartford Theological Seminary (1933-38), and after Duke at Centre College of Kentucky (1957-60) and Florida Southern College (1960-67). In 1948, he won the Edward J. Bernays Award for the Best Action-Related Study on the Social Effects of Atomic Energy, and he was an outspoken opponent of McCarthyism.

In 1933, Hart and his wife, Ella Brockhauser, published a long paper entitled “Visions and Apparitions Collectively and Reciprocally Perceived,” in which they concluded that apparitions of the dead are evidence for survival. His focus later turned to apparitions of the living, or out-of-body experiences, also referred to as astral projections at the time. “The question of having a body after death may well be approached by way of intermediate psychological and psychic phenom-

ena,” Hart wrote in his 1959 book. “Take first those rare but unquestionable experiences in which a dreamer becomes fully aware that he is occupying a body which is visible, intangible, solid, and capable of voluntary movement. One is aware that this is not one’s physical body – that body is back in the bedroom, lying in the bed. Moreover, this dream world body can rise into the air, untrammelled by gravity.”¹

Hart called this “dream body” the vehicle of consciousness, stating that one seems to be located in it just as, in the waking life, one is located in the physical body, and that one’s sense of personal identity is vivid, while memories are available and values keen.

A talk given by Hart on the subject of apparitions at an international conference at the University of Utrecht in 1953 gave rise to a further investigation of the subject, involving 48 collaborators from 12 countries. The study examined 165 cases, including apparitions of persons who had been dead for days, weeks, or years, apparitions of persons near death, and apparitions of persons still living.

Among Hart’s conclusions was that apparitions of the dead and dying are essentially similar to conscious apparitions of the living. “With respect to the 45 traits most frequently mentioned in the 165 evidential apparitional cases, apparitions of the dead and the dying are so closely similar to the 25 conscious apparitions of living persons that the two types must be regarded as belonging to the same basic kind of phenomena,” he wrote, adding that such similarities go far beyond chance. He put it at once in 10 to the 150th power.²

Hart’s findings also suggested that apparitions of the living often involve purposive consciousness. Of 61 cases of apparitions of living persons analyzed, 25 were classified as “with fairly good memory afterward,” while 25 of the re-

maining 36 were found to have been directing special attention towards the percipient.

“Pause for a moment to realize the momentous meaning of the similarities between the apparitions of the living and the crisis apparitions of the dead,” Hart ended his discussion of the subject. “In our analysis of the evidence we were driven to the conclusion that apparitions of the living often serve as vehicles for the consciousness of the persons represented – that they can be active, purposeful instruments of conscious, living selves. If this is true also of apparitions of the dead, then survival beyond the grave has been demonstrated.”³

In *The Enigma of Survival*, subtitled “The Case for and Against an After Life,” Hart discussed some of the best cases of mediumship, including those of Leonora Piper, Gladys Osborne Leonard, and Eileen Garrett. After summarizing the best evidence, he sets forth the arguments against the evidence, then weighed the pros and cons in each case.

In his discussion of mediumship, he gives special attention to the research of Charles Drayton Thomas, who studied Mrs. Leonard for some three decades. “Communication through Mrs. Leonard – or through other genuine mediums – is not to be thought of as having the simplicity of a conversation on the telephone,” he explained. “According to the findings of the psychic investigations of Drayton Thomas and others, those who have survived bodily death live in a state so different from earthly embodiment that an intermediate state must be created to serve as a communication centre. The creation and use of this intermediate state involves major difficulties, some of which may be explained in terms of 1) fluctuations in the mediumistic power; and 2) the abnormal mental condition which the communicators must enter.”⁴

Although Mrs. Leonard was primarily a trance voice medium, she also produced some direct-voice phenomena. In the trance voice, Feda, Mrs. Leonard’s spirit control, would take over her body and relay messages from communicating

spirits through Mrs. Leonard’s vocal cords and mouth, but in the direct voice, words could be heard independent of Mrs. Leonard’s body, usually from over her head or a few feet from her. When Feda hesitated or didn’t understand what the communicating spirit wanted her to say, the direct voice often supplied the required words or corrected her mistakes. Hart saw this as especially evidential. “The direct-voice phenomena appear to be consistent with [Thomas’s] realistic interpretation of the séances,” Hart concluded. “His analysis of the predictive messages offers a body of evidence which appears to show independent purpose and superhuman knowledge on the part of the communicators.”⁵

Hart saw such communication as being in opposition to the telepathy and super telepathy theories or hypotheses often advanced by researchers, referring to the latter as “Super-ESP,” previously called teloteropathy and telaesthesia by other researchers. “Those who dismiss survival deny that spirits really possess any medium or speak by direct voice, and they deny that genuine telepathic messages from the dead are ever received,” Hart explained the hypothesis. “They insist that all apparently communicating spirit personalities are mere dramatized constructs created by ESP interaction between the unconscious minds of the medium, the sitter, other physically embodied persons, and existing or perhaps future physical facts. They regard apparitions as hallucinations, generated by the unconscious mind of the percipient, with no assistance or participation from surviving personalities of the dead. They hold that any veridical information which may be transmitted in mediumistic sittings or by apparitions is derived by super-ESP, from the living, not from the dead.”⁶

Referring to Mrs. Leonard, Hart saw three possibilities: 1) actual possession by a discarnate called Feda who relayed messages from discarnates unable to communicate directly; 2) telepathy, involving mere constructs dramatized out of the medium’s unconscious mind (but these constructs provide channels for telepathic communi-

cation from the departed); and 3) Super-ESP. He concluded that “no one of these hypotheses is wholly true to, to the exclusion of the others, but that the soundest theory presently available is a creative combination of all three.”⁷ In effect, Hart theorized that discarnates were, in fact, communicating but that a “persona” was built up in the medium’s unconscious which made the communicator more (or less) than the actual spirit, and this accounted for much of the distortion and inaccuracies in the communication.

“My own conclusion is this,” Hart ended his book. “Human personality *does* survive bodily

death. That is the outcome which I find emerging when the strongest anti-survivalist arguments and the strongest rebuttals are considered thoroughly, with dispassionate open-mindedness.”⁸

Hart also authored *Toward a New Philosophical Basis for Parapsychological Phenomena*, published in 1965.

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¹ Hart, Hornell, *The Enigma of Survival*, Rider and Company, London, 1959, p. 225.

² _____ p. 185.

³ _____ p. 186.

⁴ _____ p, 87.

⁵ _____ p. 106.

⁶ _____ p. 190.

⁷ _____ p. 190.

⁸ _____ p. 263.