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► **To cite this version:**

Renaud Evrard. René Sudre (1880-1968): The metapsychist's quill.. Journal of the Society for Psychical Research, 2009, October 2009. halshs-02137288

**HAL Id: halshs-02137288**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-02137288>**

Submitted on 22 May 2019

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# RENÉ SUDRE (1880–1968): THE METAPSYCHIST'S QUILL

By RENAUD EVRARD

## ABSTRACT

René Sudre was an active metapsychist (parapsychologist) since the very beginning of the Institut Métapsychique International (IMI) of Paris. He was well-known for his various chronicles on paranormal phenomena, especially his obsession to separate metapsychic research from spiritism. A brief biographical sketch is given that also describes his careers as a journalist and populariser of science. For forty years Sudre pursued a naturalist agenda: examining the scientific enigmas of the 20th century that were the subject matter of parapsychology. At first he played a key role in the IMI (1921-1926), but had to leave this metapsychic research foundation after a clash. He went on to have a distinguished international career while remaining one of the most prominent French psychists. In 1956, he published his *Traité de Parapsychologie* translated into several languages which still is an impressive textbook. He made valuable contributions to parapsychology on both experimental and theoretical issues, for instance with his model of prosopopesis-metagnomy which helped him to counter spiritualist interpretations of the phenomena. This article tries to recall a forgotten pioneer of parapsychology, and some of his central ideas.

## HISTORY OF A METAPSYCHIST

It is difficult to trace René Sudre's life. When he died in 1968, the Institut Métapsychique International (IMI),<sup>1</sup> at that time in the middle of a reorganization, did not acknowledge his passing and had no obituary of him in their journal *Revue Métapsychique*. Most of his old friends, such as René Warcollier,<sup>2</sup> died before him. Although he was one of the major actors of metapsychics in 1920s, his fate was separated from IMI after 1926. But if it is difficult to reconstruct a portrait of Sudre, this is due in part to his modesty. He was a complex character, who pursued many careers that enabled him to interact with some of the greatest minds of his time, including scientists such as Nobel laureates Louis de Broglie and Charles Richet<sup>3</sup>, explorers Paul-Emile Victor and Jean-Baptiste Charcot, philosophers Gaston Bachelard and Teilhard de Chardin, and artists Maurice Maeterlinck, Georges Duhamel, Robert Doisneau, Georges Delot, André Favre. Approximately 80% of the books in his library had been signed by their authors! But Sudre seems to have disappeared into the wings of history; his works are too often neglected when their originality could fertilize research on dissociation and the naturalization of psi. To redress this, in this paper I will first try to trace the route of René Sudre before discussing his ideas and different relationships with researchers.

## WHO WAS RENÉ SUDRE?

René Sudre was born on 19 April 1880 in Angoulême. When he was 18 years old he left his parents' modest home to study at the Académie de Poitiers (Bachelor of arts and sciences), then a Licence of sciences at the University of Paris-Sorbonne. He was an only son, and evidently felt very close to his parents, especially his mother, as seen in the touching correspondence he began at this time. He then worked in Paris as a journalist (supervised by journalist and politician Hugues Le Roux), and published articles in *Le Matin* and *Gil Blas*. He gradually managed to carve a niche, even supporting such innovations as the National Union of Journalists (1918) and journalism on the radio

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1 The IMI is a public interest foundation founded in 1919 and dedicated to 'metapsychics' (french word for psychical research coined by Richet in 1905). IMI still exists despite no official funding. For the history of its first years, see Lachappelle, 2005; Brower, 2005.

2 René Warcollier (1881-1962) was an ingeniour-chimist well-known for his experiments on telepathy, who will later become President of IMI.

3 Charles Robert Richet (1850-1935) was a prestigious physiologist who won the Nobel Prize of Physiology or Medicine in 1913 for his discovery of anaphylaxia. He dedicate much time to institutionalize psychical research.

— which he described as an “eighth art” (Sudre, 1945). We will come back on his career outside parapsychology. In 1915 he married Suzanne Samuel-Rousseau, with whom he had two children: a boy, Jean-Pierre (27 September, 1921 - 1997), who later gained a reputation as a nature photographer, and a girl, Huguette, about whom we know nothing.

#### HOW SUDRE BECAME A METAPSYCHIST

René Sudre (1924d, p. 426) attributed his interest in psychical research to a curious episode: before the First World War, he attended a conference where the ‘mysteries of spiritualism’ were ‘debunked’ using some rather simplistic tricks. The absurdity of the explanations made Sudre think: “Of two things, one is certain, I told myself: people who believe in these phenomena are stupid, or this man is a charlatan who takes us for fools” (Sudre, 1946, p. 16).<sup>4</sup> And this curiosity prompted him to open some books.

Having studied at the laboratories of the Sorbonne, and having received lessons in psychiatry at Saint-Anne, Sudre had no inclination to accept stories of mediums or ghosts (Sudre, 1924c, p. 337), and books by respected authors such as jurist, physician and psychist, Joseph Maxwell (1903, prefaced by Richet) perturbed him for only a moment. But things changed after Sudre worked on an article for *L’Avenir* (December 22, 1920) that described the investigation of a boxer, Coulon, who claimed that nobody could lift him if he touched the wrist and the carotid of the person who tried.<sup>5</sup> The IMI had examined the phenomenon, so Sudre met with IMI’s director, the physician Gustave Geley,<sup>6</sup> to discuss the case. Their interaction — and the opportunities it led to for Sudre to make experimental observations of his own — helped to convince him of the legitimacy of metapsychics.

#### SUDRE’S IMI PERIOD (1921-1926)

The intellectual liveliness of Sudre was such that IMI immediately conferred on him some responsibilities; he became the closest collaborator of Geley until the latter’s tragic death in 1924. Under Geley’s direction, Sudre was editor for the *Revue Métapsychique*, particularly he was in charge of book reviews and of a chronicle about metapsychic developments in France and abroad (January 1921-October 1926). He wrote numerous articles and, in his presence, the journal probably knew its best years. Sudre had a gift for foreign languages: he translated books from English and German, read Italian, Spanish, taught Russian, and corresponded with Greek, Hindu and Egyptian people! And so he was also responsible for relations with scientists from other countries, something that helped him to build an excellent network that would prove to be useful. Geley also took him to the first two International congresses of psychical sciences in Copenhagen (1921) and Warsaw (1923).

Sudre was a passionate and tireless worker, and he quickly began an extensive review of the literature that brought him an encyclopaedic knowledge. IMI’s second Director, the physician Eugène Osty (1874-1938), said in 1925 (Osty, 1925b, p. 418) that Sudre had spent three years reading books and studies, including those from abroad, that enabled him to include 333 references in his first book, the *Introduction à la métapsychique humaine* (Sudre, 1926a). His prolific pen was much appreciated, and was also his livelihood. Founder and director of a collection entitled “Bibliothèque internationale de science psychique” [International Library of Psychic Science] at Payot, Sudre dedicated himself to translate seven English and German works in psychical research, and to writing their forewords. In later years he produced more translations of popular scientific works.

IMI gave him the burden of responding to the press campaign against metapsychic following the failure of experiments at the Sorbonne in 1922-1923 (Sudre, 1924a). The writer Marcel Prévost (1862-1941), member of the Académie Française, commissioned from him a series of articles on ‘the metapsychic issue’ for his *Revue de France* in 1923.<sup>7</sup> Very anxious not to compromise with his

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4 All quotations in the article are my translation from French.

5 For a mechanical explanation, see Tocquet (1972, pp. 210-213).

6 Gustave Geley (1868-1924) was an advocate of a form of spiritualism which needs to emerge through experimental demonstrations. See later in this article.

7 Prévost had followed the anti-metapsychic campaign of the journalist Paul Heuzé, but he

audience, Prevost had designated an opponent for Sudre — the alienist Achille-Delmas, a virulent skeptic. Becoming known in this controversy, Sudre obtained in 1925 the right to modify the ‘occult science’ chronicle of the *Mercure de France* into a ‘metapsychic’ one. He wrote columns until 1928, just beside the scientific column of another sceptical physicist, Marcel Boll. He produced similar scientific and metapsychist chronicles for the *Journal des débats* (1935-1940), the Radiodiffusion Française (1926-1940), for the French Ministry of Information and Foreign Ministry (1945-1956) and in the *Revue des deux mondes* (1949-1968) – by the time of his death he was author of some 187 articles in this last journal alone!).

#### THE ‘EXIT’ FROM IMI

The *Introduction à la métapsychique humaine* would mark the peak of Sudre’s IMI period and precipitated his departure. This book is dedicated to the Belgian Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949), who won a Nobel Prize for literature and was a close friend of metapsychical circles. Maeterlinck was impressed, and wrote to Sudre, commenting: “you have ordered a terrible chaos”. Indeed, the bulk of the book tries to order psychical research in a coherent and rigorous way, using a careful writing that did not reproduce the lyricism of writers such as Frederic Myers (1903). Nevertheless, Marcel Prévost complimented him by praising “his very classic clarity and elegance”, and André Breton (1933) stated that the book would inspire his surrealism, like those of Myers, Richet, and Swiss psychologist Theodore Flournoy. On the side of metapsychists, the reception by Eugène Osty was extremely positive: “Everyone will agree that the *Introduction à la métapsychique humaine* is the book our science was lacking, and that it is made by probably the most skilled man able to overcome the difficulties of such a large enterprise” (Osty, 1925b, p. 418). Implicitly, Osty just meant that the *Introduction* provided a welcome alternative to Richet’s (1922) *Traité de Métapsychique*, being more didactic and more comprehensive, yet with half the pages.

But Sudre attracted criticisms from Spiritualists, particularly Bozzano (1926), an Italian psychist who joined IMI’s board of directors in 1922. In a book edited by the spiritualist founder of IMI, Jean Meyer,<sup>8</sup> Bozzano tried to refute Sudre’s humanist orientation with some ostensible facts suggesting action by the deceased. Bozzano showed what everyone knew: Sudre was a fierce critic of spiritualism, and his partisan ideas seemed to alter his scientific judgment. Obsessed by the idea of breaking the link between spiritualism and metapsychics, Sudre took every opportunity to defend his own opinions, “fighting until the last breath — so to speak — ideas upon which IMI was founded” (De Vesme, 1928).

The spiritualist camp was angry, so was the metapsychist camp because it didn’t want to be associated with this theoretical intolerance. Some striking formulations used by Sudre were rhetorical assaults similar to those used by sceptics to discredit metapsychics. Charles Quartier, substitute for Sudre in writing the international news chronicle for the *Revue métapsychique*, added to Bozzano’s criticisms, arguing that the theoretical model proposed by Sudre was premature, and that his position against Spiritualists’ working hypothesis was the antithesis of the agnosticism that metapsychists hoped for (Quartier, 1927). Sudre may not have explicitly claimed a primacy for scientific understanding over all others, but he could not help loudly promoting, against all agnostics, what he believed to be scientific truths.

Someone found a pretext to dismiss him; probably that Sudre had ‘conspired’ against IMI. He wrote to Warcollier on October 23rd, 1923, about establishing a French association of metapsychics that was independent of the IMI, with Richet as president, Maxwell as vice-president, and Sudre, Warcollier and Osty on the executive committee. In May 1924, Sudre distributed the statutes of the

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went further than him by going see for himself the phenomena. He will attend many experiences of propaganda carried out at IMI, including some fraudulents with Pasquale Erto. It will be a signatory of the "Manifesto of the 34" published in *Le Matin*, 7 June 1923, claiming that the phenomena produced by the medium Guzik were genuine.

<sup>8</sup> Jean Meyer (1855-1931) was a rich industrialist in Béziers who founded simultaneously one spiritualist institute and the IMI, thinking their complementary can make spiritualist truths progress, both through science and moral.

future association, but this project was not developed, since events seemed to make it unnecessary; Geley was killed in a plane crash on July 15, 1924, and Osty was chosen to replace him as Director of IMI, allowing him to pursue his own research programme there, independent from survivalist issues, in a manner that might bring back 'unity' between metapsychists.

However, Sudre received in September 1926 a letter from Osty saying his contribution to the *Revue Métapsychique* was not desired anymore. His dismissal was not justified, and Sudre thought this was a matter of spiritualist politics which would compromise the Institute from a scientific point of view. Sudre contacted his friends at the IMI, persuaded that his dismissal took place without consulting Richet nor the scientists forming the board of directors (Sudre, 1926b, quoted by Lachappelle, 2005, p. 11). The IMI president Rocco Santoliquido<sup>9</sup> adjudged that the decision was in the province of the director (Osty), because Sudre was his 'subordinate', and consequently the board of directors need not be involved in the matter. In fact, although Sudre continued to work for the *Revue*, Osty didn't take him as his secretary as Geley had done. In spite of his numerous contributions, Sudre had not risen in the hierarchy of the IMI, and with Geley's passing lost his best support.

The scandal grew: Sudre complained of the spiritualist influence on IMI in France and abroad, leading to the resignation of a prestigious member of the IMI, Daniel Berthelot. Santoliquido blamed Sudre for these "sad intrigues" (Santoliquido, 1926, quoted by Lachappelle, 2005, p. 11). Soon, Sudre's dismissal was justified by its consequences and not by the false pretext of the 'conspiracy' invoked first. Osty assured that the patron Meyer gave him a complete scientific independence and did not influence his decision (Osty in Meyer, 1927, footnote 1 p. 318). But, in reality, in the contract for the founding of IMI, Meyer forced the director to give "a nudge" in the spiritist direction. Geley had implored Meyer to destroy this contract that assured his means of existence, fearing the unfortunate scandal that this document could one day throw on his work (Santoliquido, 1929, quoted by Lachappelle, 2005, p. 11). Osty might have not been aware of that, receiving guarantees from Richet about the honest intentions of Meyer, and certainly didn't want to break prematurely this financial support (but it was broken when Meyer died — cf. Lachappelle, 2005, p. 12). These problems brought the separation between Sudre and the IMI, but also marked the beginning of his rise to international recognition for his metapsychist work.

#### AFTER IMI

Sudre's activities became more varied after his IMI period. He received some prizes for his activities as a journalist and populariser of science (Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, 1921; Officer of the Legion of Honour, 1932; Laureate, Académie Française, 1943, for the book *Nouvelles énigmes de l'univers*; Laureate, Académie des Sciences, for the book *Almanach des Sciences*, 1948-52). He became professor, perhaps in journalism, at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris (1931-40).

Immediately after his 'exit' from IMI, Sudre found solace in the friendship of Professor Arsène D'Arsonval (1851-1940), physician, physicist and inventor, a member of the French Académie de Médecine and Académie des Sciences. He presided over the Institut Général Psychologique, which had made extensive studies of the medium Eusapia Palladino (Brower, 2005; Courtier, 1908). The institute still had its laboratory and library, but no resources to pay for experiments with costly subjects. Sudre became its secretary. Sudre and D'Arsonval shared beliefs about metapsychical phenomena, rejecting spiritualist interpretations. In this context, he gave a lecture in 1926 in an amphitheatre at the Collège de France on "metapsychics and scientific opinion" (Sudre, 1926). Sudre used the word "opinion" in part because most claims of scientists were not empirically grounded; and in part because the newspaper where attacks of metapsychics began was *L'Opinion* with the sceptical journalist Paul Heuzé.

Sudre also benefited from friendships abroad, including with Harry Price, conjurer and founder of

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9 Rocco Santoliquido (1854-1930) was a famous hygienist and politician in Italia. His interest in spiritualism came from his own experiences with table tilting, and grew after reading one book of Geley. He helped to found IMI as a foundation of official public interest.

the National Laboratory of Psychical Research of London, of which Sudre became a corresponding member in 1925. As he was also a corresponding member of the Society for Psychical Research, he was invited several times to give lectures in English in London. When Price's institute came under the control of the University of London, Sudre was even celebrated at a banquet attended by 90 people, including a dozen professors, on October 18, 1933.

It was still the issue of the bridge between psychical research and established science that occupied him (Sudre, 1933a). This issue would become an even greater preoccupation, as Sudre went on to devote ten years to bring together biology, physics and metapsychics. He believed that such a reconciliation would create the framework to accommodate all phenomena studied by science. The result of this effort was *Les nouvelles énigmes de l'univers* (Sudre, 1943; whose 1951 edition is further enhanced). In the manner of Myers' systematic and progressive presentation of normal and supernormal psychologies (Myers, 1903), Sudre reviewed all the scientific knowledge of his time. His encyclopaedic scientific survey led the reader to a conclusion: in every discipline some enigmas remain which are entry points for the metapsychic hypothesis. Sudre discussed the physical paradoxes around time and space, the finality in the theory of evolution, the mind-body relationship, and, in the last chapter, all the phenomena of experimental metapsychics. In his view all of this pointed towards a new understanding of nature. Through this book—which has been sadly neglected by parapsychologists—Sudre expressed his more mature thoughts. Virtually self-taught, Sudre had contact with the best scientists of his time to verify his claims. His efforts were acknowledged by the Académie Française who recognised Sudre as a specialist in scientific popularisation. Sudre was then invited to lead the *Almanach des Sciences* (whose goal is to provide a complete inventory of the organization of scientific disciplines in France) from 1948 to 1952, with the support of Louis de Broglie, which brought him another prize, awarded by the Academy of Sciences.

In parallel, Harry Price helped Sudre to publish his articles in the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*. Almost all the issues from 1925 to 1931 included a study by Sudre as the first article. A wide variety of topics were discussed: Joan of Arc (1927b), ideoplasty (1927a), the Freudian unconscious (1929), quantum physics (1930), 'magic' drugs (1926c), divination in antiquity (1927d), possession (1927c), human radiations (1927e, 1928b), among others. The public could read a collection of some of his columns in the book *Personnages d'au-delà* (Sudre, 1946), on which he had worked to "forget the anguish of the Second World War" (Sudre, 1946, p. 20). In this book Sudre elaborated his model of prosopopesis-metagnomy (see below) intended to account for all metapsychical phenomena.

Through his publications in English, Sudre was regarded worldwide as "the principal psychist in France" (Price, 1939, p. 314), but, like the proverbial prophet, was less well thought of by parapsychologists in his own country. At the third International Congress of psychical research held in Paris in 1927, his lecture on 'The experimental method in metapsychics' (Sudre, 1928c) was almost hushed up by the audience, as he recalled (Sudre, 1946, p. 18). Again Sudre described spiritualism as a religion and metapsychics as a science with well-established facts that just needed to be put in order. He showed his bitterness by noting that the congress was held in the Sorbonne but the Sorbonne was not there, and asked again for the discipline to be released from its spiritualist yoke. This call was followed by measures taken in the executive committee of the congress. At longer term, the influence or the anticipation Sudre was realized. During the first congress of parapsychology in Utrecht in 1953, the word 'spiritualism' was not pronounced (Sudre, 1953b).

#### FROM METAPSYCHICS TO PARAPSYCHOLOGY

After Sudre had pursued his various careers, he announced to his old friend René Warcollier his "return to metapsychics" at the age of 72 (Sudre, 1953a). This was achieved by participating in the organizing committee of the First International Congress of Parapsychological Studies in Utrecht. Sudre had already shown his preference for Max Dessoir's term 'parapsychology' over Richet's 'metapsychics', since the former didn't imply something "beyond" science (Sudre, 1933b). But to be invited to the Congress he would need the support of several foreign researchers because there had never been a reconciliation between Sudre and IMI. Leaders of the Italian Society of Metapsychics, William Mackenzie and Emilio Servadio, put pressure on IMI's president René Warcollier to invite

Sudre to the Congress (Mackenzie, 1952a, 1952b; Servadio, 1952), and he presented there a paper on “Parapsychology in nature” (Sudre, 1955).

Sudre felt that it was necessary to connect the researches of the beginning of the century with the incomplete statistical parapsychology developed by J. B. Rhine (even though he had translated one of Rhine’s work). That is why he rewrote his thirty-year-old *Introduction to human metapsychics*, then out-of-print, deleting and adding new material while keeping the outline and the scientific orientation of the original book. This became the five hundred pages of the *Traité de parapsychologie* (1956; *Parapsychology*, 1960 for the English translation). The original subtitle well described the programme: “Essay of scientific interpretation of so-called marvellous human phenomena, their interpretation, their integration in the general biology and philosophy of evolution.” The *Traité* is a comprehensive book presenting history, “intellectual” (ESP) and “physical” (PK) phenomena, and theories of psychical research. In the foreword, he defended observations about ectoplasm, referring to the lack of confidence Anglo-Saxons showed in these phenomena. Sudre saw the development of parapsychology as follows:

If it is to become integrated into the scheme of scientific knowledge, we would suggest that parapsychology should retrace its steps and turn back to first principles. One sees material in the whole of nature, animal and vegetable, where, the marvellous, in the form of organs and of instincts, is to be found at every step. It is doubtful if we were understood by minds so unprepared for an approach which omitted all reference to statistical calculations....

However it seems to us that at a time when psychical research has abandoned all ambitions but that of proving its existence to the incredulous, this is the only approach which can be recommended to gain scientific franchise. To find its points of contact with other sciences, to multiply and enlarge them is our most urgent need, and it is with this suggestion that we shall close this book. Some authors have said that quantitative parapsychology was going to bring us out of the prescientific stage into the scientific. Perhaps for those who worship numerical quantities. But as soon as one wishes to penetrate further, science is primarily concerned with qualities... Professor Price of Oxford declared at Utrecht that parapsychology still needed a framework in which its strange phenomena could be arranged so as to appear less astonishing, and he was pleased to say that it was the philosophers’ business to find one. We can reply to him that this framework already exists. Instead of seeking it in books of abstract speculation or all too human metaphysics, we have only to open the book of nature — for parapsychology is simply a natural science.

(Sudre, 1962, pp. 11-12)

Although greeted not very enthusiastically by his old friend Warcollier (1957) in the *Revue Métapsychique*, Sudre’s book is a real textbook which was to inspire others, particularly in translation: Bertrand Méheust (2007), John Palmer (2006), Carlos Alvarado (2006) and Nancy Zingrone (2006) all read Sudre at the beginning of their careers as parapsychologists. Yet, Sudre died in 1968 in an almost general indifference, with his work rarely cited by parapsychologists. Only the new generation of French parapsychologists of the Group of Studies and Researches in Parapsychology, in a movement that demarcated itself from the old IMI, regarded him as an important figure (Evrard, in press). For example, the theoretician François Favre placed him alongside Hans Bender as a scientific role model: “René Sudre (1880-1968) was unmistakably the most penetrating parapsychologist whom France never knew. Of an encyclopaedic scientific culture, he embodied the prototype of a type of mind, open and pugnacious, indispensable to anyone wanting to get involved with parapsychology, the science of elusive facts” (Favre, 1978, p. 243).

#### SOME CONTRIBUTIONS

We have seen that Sudre played a key role in the propagation of a metapsychist approach in France and abroad. In general, he presented the work of others—what I have called his ‘modesty’. But he did make original contributions, for example to the concepts of telergy, human radiations, experimenter effects, and collective psychism, among others. It’s not the goal of this article to summarise all his views, but I would like to resurrect a few topics in order to encourage future

researches, focusing on experimental contributions, contributions to the super-psi/survivalist issues, and theoretical contributions.

#### *Experimental and methodological contributions*

Since his encounter with Geley, Sudre attended all experimental demonstrations held at IMI. They were often open to the public so that members of the intellectual and scientific elites could be convinced through their own observations. Sudre did not conduct experiments alone but helped sometimes (for example, with the thought photography of Erto; Sudre, 1924b). He also helped trap false mediums (e.g., Albertine, with Osty, Warcollier and Garçon; Osty, 1925a). As stated in the research reports, he participated in the controls during many of the experiments with Eva C. (i.e. Marthe Béraud), Franek Kluski, Jan Guzik (25 sittings), and Stephan Ossowiecki, for example.

This rare opportunity to observe under controlled conditions the various phenomena of experimental metapsychics is the foundation of his work, and binds him intensely to the story of the beginning of the IMI. He could never put into question his personal observations, although he could discuss the value of their methodologies which were often insufficient to convince those who didn't attend (Sudre, 1951). Sudre reproached many scholars for their failure to create opportunities to make similar observations, so that they were instead forced to make their judgements on a limited base of evidence: "we have repeated for some time that there is no state of grace necessary for metapsychics; it is a science like all others, which calls for serious attention and time. Then we see that these 'peculiar' phenomena, so-called by Pierre Janet, have a certain consistency and are suitable to enter a natural order without involving the belief in the afterlife" (Sudre, 1951, pp. 532-533). He could not adopt a sceptical position, because he saw facts that he could not deny without denying himself.

Sudre was nevertheless not very distinguished as a researcher, but he was at the first rank to describe advantageously the work of the others. In the tradition transmitted by Geley (1919), he strived to defend all the physical phenomena of mediumship, even the more impressive as ectoplasmy and telergy (see below). His empirical base was the works of Barrett, Crawford, Price, Schrenk-Notzing, Bisson, Richet, and so on. He reported their work but also fought a lot against misinformation, analyzing all the suspicions against them, even taking the role of the polemist, what he called 'activist science'. His quill was his sword.

Many contemporaries deemed Sudre insufficiently critical (cf. Saleh, 1957; Salter, 1958) because he accepted the testimony of scientific authorities, because he did not succumb to the first suspicion of fraud reported, and because he defended the phenomena which even the current parapsychologists were sceptical of.<sup>10</sup> In fact, even if he didn't recognize this, his records were midway between the experimental report and the historical document. He excelled in convincing his readers with his rational analysis and the power of his pen, but the experiments in question still had the same faults: dark rooms, imperfect controls, changing protocols, suspicious mediums, and unpredictable success.

Metapsychics could be thought of as Sudre's first truly scientific activity, and so he may have been a little naive in terms of methodology. He recognized it himself: Rhine's quantitative methodology was much more convincing: "[Rhine and Thouless' works] confirm once again, by methods least questionable, data from metapsychics. These are for our previous methods just what the chemistry of Lavoisier was for the alchemy of the Middle Ages. They are scientific in the full sense of the word" (Sudre, 1951, p. 538). But we must then put this phrase in a context: the post-war new breath of parapsychology with several parapsychologists trying to show the need to be evaluate again because they claimed having passed the earlier pre-scientific metapsychical stage. Sudre himself said that praise of Rhine's school was 'tactical': "Seeking to objectify the parapsychological phenomenon by processes which are common to physicists, biologists, economists, they rise it at a level of familiarity where nobody can put it into question. Then, showing the intimate penetration of the psychic in man and nature is the duty of the philosopher who has interests in the sinking of transcendence and who simply wants to use the data of science." (Sudre, 1953b, p. 119) It was

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<sup>10</sup> These phenomena included telekinesis, physical or chemical phenomena such as light and thermal variations, and seemingly molecular effects such as some raps and materializations/dematerializations.

important to legitimise these methods if they were to legitimise the phenomena they produced.

It took a long time, however, before Sudre supported Rhine's work. He first published an article (Sudre, 1928a) warning against experiments on divination with cards using quantitative methodology. He implored investigators not to do cumulative experiments based on a mathematical comparison with chance! Statistics have no meaning here, he said; his arguments followed the Bergsonian vision of the superiority of the "well established complex fact" on the statistical mean of cumulative data. The single case suffices "from the moment when one grasps it with all that it involves" (Bergson, 1919). Sudre's desire was to confront the scientific world with an experiment so undeniably above chance that the most sceptical and antagonistic would pale unanimously at its unavoidable implications. Ina Jephson (1930) and B.A. Fisher (1930) replied to him, and an exchange of views followed. In their view, reproducible experiments that gave a persistent effect would be more scientifically persuasive than even the most compelling of unique events or testimonies.

Strangely, it is at this time that the wind turned. What this debate made clear was that American parapsychology based on quantitative statistics-divination cards with ungifted subjects would dominate over the more controversial metapsychical studies of gifted subjects.

Sudre's methodology would later be transformed: instead of trying to produce facts and running out to defend them, researchers should dip into "the book of nature", i.e. in other scientific disciplines, for eligible but quite unexplained facts. If the metapsychical hypothesis came to reflect a set of facts already admitted, Sudre hoped that it would finally find its place. But wasn't this a way to reverse the problem without solving it?

#### *Spiritualist issues*

Regardless of his debt to Geley, Sudre did not follow him in his theoretical ideas. In fact, Sudre asserted very early his opposition to spiritualist interpretations, because, as he argued repeatedly, survival was not demonstrated by the facts and was a topic outside the scope of science. He suggested that in order to stay within the limits of science researchers should credit phenomena to living individuals and not to spiritual entities (Sudre, 1956, pp. 350-379).

But Geley (1919) defended an evolved version of the spiritualist doctrine, accepting the spiritualist dogma but modifying the vocabulary<sup>11</sup> and disputing that survival could be directly demonstrated by metapsychical facts (Sudre, 1924c, p. 345). Geley is described as a Cartesian idealist, having the conviction of the apostle in the 'rational philosophic synthesis' that he proposed, but failing to be truly empirical. He was not a mystic, but all his philosophy proceeded from a moral position. Sudre appreciated the scientific aspects of Geley, for example his works on ectoplasm, but rejected his and others' appeal to action of the spirits of the dead.

Sudre regarded his own position as the very first start for all. "The true metapsychist does not know the 'shudder of the occult' and he has no inclination to be concerned with invisible powers belonging to another world. He is always in the presence of man and of man only; but he discovers in him many more things than we have admitted up to dare ... There is no need to resort to the 'spirits' [esprits] for explanations: the mind [esprit] is enough" (1926a, p. 10). He wanted, according to the adage of Pascal, to separate the order of reason from that of the heart. Sudre stated that he didn't want to declare war with the spiritualists, who contributed immensely by proclaiming the reality of the facts, but it was a necessary act of emancipation for any experimental science (Sudre, 1924a, p. 65). According to him, the first condition before doing psychical research is "to give up caring for the future life" (1933b, p. 16).

But Sudre still felt antipathy for some of the spiritists he had encountered, and did not hesitate to express his views: "Those who seek consolation or think they have missions to complete should not come to us. They are bad workers for science. They no longer have the free spirit and always take their wishes for realities." (1933b, p. 16)

A lot of people questioned the motivation that drove Sudre's intolerance, but I have not found any particular emotional motivations concerning this, so my bet is that his rejection is based on the

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<sup>11</sup> So, 'soul' becomes 'being', 'reincarnation' becomes 'palingenesis', and 'spiritist' becomes 'spiritualist'.

reasons given: a true critical analysis of spiritualist claims. One convincing piece of evidence for this view is that Sudre did not ignore completely the possibility of survival, but rather referred to it in a manner reminiscent of William James: "I never said, as for me, that nothing of us would survive. And looking for what can survive, as Joad said, is precisely the most exciting issue of our study. The hypothesis of a cosmic reservoir is more compatible with the special experience of the clairvoyance, which does not imply the deceased, and with the rest of the laws of nature. The psychological analysis of the countless messages obtained with the great subjects, as Mrs Piper and Mrs Leonard, brings us to this view that is more coherent than the hypothesis of telepathy. I might surprise you by saying that I do not believe in telepathy: in fact, I do not believe in a personal communication from one individual to another by some invisible physical means, some waves or some rays. But I believe all men participate more or less in a common spiritual environment independent of space which meddles sometimes with their consciousness" (Sudre, 1933b, p. 17).

It might be argued that some of the alternatives Sudre offers to explain paranormal facts, 'collective psychism' for instance, are less opposed to the general conception of personal survival than some formulations of it, and might indeed be quite comfortably fitted into the structure of some other survivalist scheme (Salter, 1958, p. 88).

#### *Theoretical Issues: The Model of Prosopopesis-metagnomy*

If the style of his writing is irreproachable, Sudre's tendency to complicate terminology did not gain widespread acceptance. We can question the etymology of some of Sudre's terms, such as 'thorybism' (derived of Greek words meaning 'trouble', 'noise'), although in the meantime, there is no French equivalent to say the German 'Spuk' or 'Poltergeist'.

Despite that, some of his semantic inventions were valuable. Sudre thought that we faced two simple and independent processes which combine in all phenomena. Like Lavoisier split water into oxygen and hydrogen, Sudre reduced mental mediumship<sup>12</sup> to the joint work of two elementary processes: prosopopesis and metagnomy. Metagnomy is the metapsychic term coined by Boirac (1908) to collect under a single name all the phenomena of knowledge obtained by unexplained ways. Sudre developed his notion of prosopopesis in *Personnages d'au-delà* and in the *Traité* (Sudre, 1956, p.105-137) to indicate "any abrupt, spontaneous or provoked change, of the psychological personality" (Sudre, 1956, p. 105). The word is formed, like 'prosopopée', from greek prosopopoieo, or prosopon, which means theatre mask, or character (Sudre, 1956, p. 105). This includes the modern concept of 'altered states of consciousness', or Janet's 'dissociation', but without a strong pathological connotation, and comes to confirm "the relationship of the somnambulistic, hypnotic, hysteric and metapsychic states" (Sudre, 1956, p. 105). Sudre suggested a continuum from "ordinary disguises, more or less voluntary" in healthy subjects to unconscious duplications that are real diseases of the mind (Sudre, 1946, p. 24).

In the biological point of view, there is only one personality, identified with the body. This is not the same with the psychological personality whose elements are "intangible and essentially mobile" (Sudre, 1946, p. 26). Groups of elements can live in isolation, form sub-personalities that co-exist in a different degree of consciousness ('co-consciousness' as Prince coined it). More often, the elements follow one after the other. A new personality can make its appearance, with a new memory and a new character. The division of consciousness would be generated thanks to an idea or to a powerful emotional state of the subject. These secondary personalities could acquire much autonomy when they contained a sufficient number of characteristics. Auto-suggestions can stabilise them (Sudre, 1946, p. 31), as with an actor learning a role.

Sudre was convinced, with Janet, that we were wrong to consider these duplications of the personality as simulations. And, now in accordance with Myers, he accepted that this other

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12 Physical mediumship was reduced as well with the association of prosopopesis and telergy. Sudre redefined the term telergy previously used by Myers, to mean "the phenomena by which the psychic fluid accomplishes more or less visibly an exterior work on ordinary matter" (Sudre, 1926a, p. 226). The concept of the 'psychic fluid' was related to all kinds of effects on physical and organic matter and to materialization (see Alvarado, 2006a).

personality might have access to more resources than the conscious mind: more memories, more mind-body interactions, more hallucinations, more skills. Sudre spoke of plasticity, but also of psychic permeability between these different facets. The passage between the layers of the unconscious to the conscious, or between two layers of the unconscious, is such that the word or idea doesn't spread literally but takes a symbolic form, as in dreams.: "this is a common property with the mental phenomena of metapsychics" (Sudre, 1946, p. 35).

Metagnomy is perhaps the hardest part of the model for traditional scientists. But, if it is accepted as genuine, as for Sudre, it can effectively explain all anomalous cases by a combination of the two processes. Sometimes there is prosopopesis without metagnomy; sometimes metagnomy without prosopopesis; but most of the data of parapsychologists are a combination of both, i.e. when prosopopesis implies information from other living or dead people. "To say that a transitional figure emerges from the synergy of psychic elements borrowed from several spatially separated people, or that metagnomic information circulates, is, in many observations, the same thing from a different perspective" (Méheust, 1999, p. 93). The spiritualists usually gave this autonomy of the personalities as a sign of their outside origin. This seemed completely erroneous to Sudre, who thought that they presented the same proportion of independence and suggestibility as that shown by common individuals. And when these second personalities showed transcendent powers, Sudre, as Mrs Sidgwick (1915) thought regarding telepathy, preferred metagnomy as an explanation, as opposed to 'spirits'.

With prosopopesis, Sudre entered into the borderlands of psychological studies of metapsychics, integrating the works of Myers (1903), James (1924), Richet (1922), Flournoy (1911), Prince (1906/2005), Janet (1889), and others; works discussing psychological automatism and multiple personalities. He compared it against much empirical data, and others' theories such as Freud's psychoanalysis or cybernetics. His model probably doesn't say much more than Myers's (1903; Kelly *et al.*, 2007), but it was presented in a more concise way. Both have shown that the subliminal mind is not a problem for psychology but *the* problem of psychology. Both chose not to *reduce* the unknown to the already known, but instead *linked* the unknown to the already known in a continuous series (Kelly *et al.*, 2007, p. 72). Sudre probably did not acknowledge sufficiently Myers's legacy, perhaps because he found him too much of a survivalist and not enough of a psychologist. His own hero was Pierre Janet, although he regretted never having had a discussion with him (Sudre, 1946, p. 13) and criticised the way Janet denied certain facts while seeking to demotivate potential explorers of this field.

By introducing this theoretical option into his *Traité*, unlike Richet's incentives not to theorize prematurely, Sudre became the heir of Puységur, and represented, with Osty, "the enlightened tendency of metapsychics" (Méheust, 1999, p. 40). Prosopopesis reformulates the enigma of human individuality through a collection of strange facts. For Méheust (1999, p. 407), Sudre and Osty were the best theoreticians of metapsychics; they tried to exceed the idea of the unconscious by describing internal demonstrations of the multiplicity and the plasticity of the human being (Méheust, 1999, p. 113).

The model of the prosopopesis-metagnomy "tries to integrate the maximum of facts, while respecting the maximum of rational requirements (...). It allows us to revoke the spiritualist wanderings, but also to integrate the metagnomic facts that mediums produced, at the same time as the theories of the unconscious in their French version" (Méheust, 1999, p. 205). Nevertheless, it does not escape Méheust that this rationalisation pushed away the hypothesis of the communication with the spirits.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Controversies that concerned Sudre in his time remain with us today: the discussion with Bozzano on the spiritualist interpretation is not closed; the exchange of views with Jephson and Fisher on the interest of a purely quantitative method still divides the community; the debate between metapsychists and 'scientific opinion' has never ended. Therefore his writings are still topical. His vision of parapsychology could absolutely give guidelines for a contemporary research programme, particularly in attempting to integrate metapsychics with the data of established science. This means

going back to Myers to put the subliminal mind as *the* problem of psychology, but also show that “l’Esprit” is manifested in other enigmas that “the book of nature” provides us. It will not necessarily need to run behind a poorly funded and marginalized research: simply harvest the current scientific data that are anomalous and demonstrate how a psi interpretation enhances our understanding of what is happening.

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