

A BULLETIN FOR RESEARCH ON THE PROBLEM OF SURVIVAL AFTER BODILY DEATH
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PSYCHICAL PHENOMENA AS INTERDISCIPLINARY PROBLEM AREAS

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Psychical phenomena have been studied seriously for almost a hundred years. During this period, they have become institutionalized as the data of a separate discipline through the creation of professional or lay organizations whose sole functions are to acquire and disseminate information about psychical occurrences and through the constant usage of the terms psychical research (or parapsychology) and psychical researcher (or parapsychologist). The outcome is a fixed boundary line separating the phenomena and the people who study them from other phenomena and their researchers.

As a result, many have come to view psychical research as a separate, internally consistent and cohesive "field" which collects its own data in its own way to answer its own questions about them. Such a view is not supported by the phenomena themselves.

Psychical phenomena tend to be behavioral phenomena, in that they are revealed in the perceptions and activities of the individuals involved. As is therefore to be expected, examples of ESP, PK and related phenomena can be drawn from psychiatry, clinical psychology, cultural anthropology, animal behavior (ethology), and so on.

How many disciplines become involved when we start asking questions about psi? Physics appears to enter in any description of the properties of the ESP source that enables it to emit a signal, the nature of that signal, and the channel by which it is transmitted through space (and time, if precognition is valid). Should signal-channel-receiver models be inappropriate,

physics at a level more advanced than it is now will probably provide alternatives. For the survival question, we find ourselves asking about the physical aspects of whatever information reservoir survives (or comes into being) after bodily death.

As soon as a living organism becomes involved, either as source or receiver, several biological disciplines come into play, ranging from biophysics through neurophysiology, psychophysiology and experimental psychology. Developments in these areas are needed to describe how psi information interacts with the brain in the process of becoming manifest, either as overt response or as experience.

Psychiatry and clinical psychology enter when we find that the content of the message interacts with the receiver's personality, becoming altered or distorted, and affecting the motivation to acquire additional information. For the survival problem, questions arise about the personality structures and dynamics of possible survivors and those who view themselves as in contact with survivors.

It would seem from the above that psychical research is a cooperative problem area rather than a separate discipline. When we make advances in understanding psi phenomena, we also make advances in physics, in biology, in psychiatry, in anthropology, etc. Because of this interdisciplinary involvement, discoveries about psychic phenomena may produce an increasing awareness by scientists and laymen alike that the boundaries we have erected around all our disciplines are more apparent than real. This does not prevent psychical research from emerging as a

new area either with its own constructs or with restatements of constructs developed by some other theoretical system. What does seem clear, however, is that psychical research cannot be regarded as an encapsulated self-sufficient field of research.

Two books from Great Britain provide examples of the application of an interdisciplinary approach. One is a collection edited by J. R. Smythies, *Science and ESP*.¹ Thirteen essays are presented by authors from philosophy, psychology, zoology, physics, psychiatry and anthropology. Each brings viewpoints from his own field to the problems of psychical phenomena. The result is a goldmine of ideas for further research. Anyone who gives serious thought to these papers will find himself less inclined to accept the fetters of his own discipline as he goes about his research.

Sir Alister Hardy, the British zoologist, maintains that psi may serve both as a form of communication among animals and also as a means by which a psychic pool of experience could be shared by all the members of a species. This would act as an information-carrying system parallel to that existing in the DNA structure of the genes, and would be a part of the evolutionary process.

To the psychologist, Sir Cyril Burt, modern quantum mechanics lessens the improbability of psi phenomena. But it does not adequately explain any mental phenomena, let alone psi. Henry Margenau, the Yale physicist, agrees that modern physics is not yet ready to deal with psi phenomena. He feels that parapsychologists should strike out on their own, developing their own constructs and methodologies within the limits of good scientific common sense.

Two of the authors who strike out in this way are J. R. Smythies, a psychiatrist, and Adrian Dobbs, a mathematician. To explain precognition, Smythies proposes a multidimensional universe and Dobbs a gas of particles of mathematically imaginary mass, capable of interacting with the brain in such a way as to provide infor-

mation transfer.

The Italian psychoanalyst, Emilio Servadio, surveys the interactions of psychoanalysis with ESP. In his opinion, there is often ESP in the therapeutic situation. Telepathy is likely to occur when the patient is frustrated by lack of attention from the analyst because the analyst is more concerned with problems of his own, especially when they resemble the patient's problems. Aniela Jaffé, the Swiss psychoanalyst, presents Jung's use of the concept of synchronicity, his "acausal connecting principle," as a way to explain telepathy and other psi phenomena.

Francis Huxley, the British anthropologist, shows the relevance of his field to ESP. He discusses psi phenomena in "primitive" cultures and develops a thesis that symbols within a culture will emerge to represent various aspects of human awareness. A sharing of symbols between two or more people may be responsible for ESP interactions between them.

Burt feels that the evidence for survival is good, but not conclusive. The "super-psi" alternative, which explains communications from the dead in terms of the psi abilities of the mediums, however, is not a reasonable one.

H. H. Price shares Burt's general opinion about survival. Investigators of trance mediums have not been able to rule out the possibility that the apparent communicators are only dissociative elements of the medium's personality. Jaffé says that as a result of Jung's studies of the personalities manifested by a trance medium, he concluded that trance personalities may be important to the psychodynamics of the medium by complementing the waking personality.

Jung also felt that there was a "trans-psychic reality" where time and space become relative. Post-mortem phenomena may be valid to the extent that they reflect an existence in an "extra-space-time continuum."

In *Science, Philosophy and ESP*,² Charles McCreery poses a problem that is

¹New York: Humanities Press, 1968, 306 pp., \$7.50.
²Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1968, 199 pp., \$5.00.

central to systematic investigations of ESP: "When does it occur?" Are there specific times when conditions, internal or external, are optimal? Personal statements by gifted people lead McCreery to postulate that there are internal states conducive to ESP. Limiting himself to the waking state, McCreery says that ESP appears to occur at times of "unconflictedness," or "relaxed awareness." He likens it to William James' "passive or involuntary attention," as opposed to "active or voluntary attention." Such a state, he notes, is like that often described in electroencephalograph experiments in which the individual is showing an abundance of the "alpha" rhythm, and at the same time feels relaxed and yet alert.

The traditional meditational literature and research on chemically-induced changes of consciousness also suggest that there is an internal state, characterized by abundance of the alpha rhythm plus an increase in the frequency (in cycles per second) of alpha, which appears to be conducive to the manifestation of psi.

Neither book contains any new research results, but both illustrate, one in a general and the other in a specific way, the application of the interdisciplinary approach to psychic phenomena. As more disciplines are brought to bear it appears inevitable that not only will there be an increase in our understanding of the psychical properties of ourselves and the world around but of all areas that are of importance to us.

PSYCHICAL RESEARCH WEEK

A week of lectures on psychical research was held at Duke University, April 12-19, 1971, to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the birth of William MacDougall (1871-1938). As first Chairman of the Psychology Department, MacDougall paved the way for the development of parapsychology at Duke. Thereby, he was also the precursor of the Foundation for Research on the Nature of Man and the Psychical Research Foundation which now continue work in parapsychology in Durham independently of the University.

The introductory lecture "Criticisms of Parapsychology," was by Dr. Michael J. Scriven, Professor of Philosophy at the University of California, Berkeley. Scientists often balk at the findings of parapsychology because they believe that the present system of information about the universe is complete. If non-conforming events, such as psi phenomena, are genuine, present views must be revised. Scriven noted that in the history of science, the assimilation of atypical data has been an important ingredient for progress.

Professor H. H. Price, Oxford University, PRF Vice-President, gave the fourth MacDougall Lecture, "Some Biblical Narratives of Paranormal Phenomena." Price recalled that in 1919, when he was an undergraduate at Oxford, MacDougall was Wilde Reader in Mental Philosophy and the only psychologist at Oxford. MacDougall, who was then also President of the London Society for Psychical Research, was himself interested in the relations between religion and psychical research.

Price used three biblical narratives in his lecture. In "The Walls of Jericho," story the Lord told Joshua that Jericho would be delivered to him and then detailed the strategy the Israelites should adopt. Price suggested that the revelation about the walls of Jericho being demolished was in fact a precognition by Joshua of an earthquake.

Price referred to the "Witch of Endor" story as one of the earliest accounts of a mediumistic seance. When King Saul was confronted by a formidable Philistine invasion and the ecclesiastical authorities were helpless, he asked a medium to "Bring me up Samuel." She saw a vision of an old man, covered with a mantle. Saul promptly assumed this was Samuel, questioned him and heard that he would suffer defeat. If the facts are as stated, the question comes up whether they can be explained in terms of an independent surviving entity (Samuel) or telepathy between Saul and the medium. Since Samuel's prediction echoed words once spoken by the living Samuel to Saul, Price leaned to the latter alternative.

Price next considered the post-resurrection appearances in the New Testament. In Acts 9, Paul and his companions, on the way to Damascus, saw a sudden blinding light. Paul was then addressed by the resurrected Jesus and a conversation ensued. But only he heard the voice. In Luke 4, two people saw, met and conversed with Jesus. In John 20, one person touched Him. The cases in the parapsychology literature where visual, auditory and tangible phenomena originated with living telepathic agents, suggested to Price that the biblical events also could be explained in terms of a non-survival hypothesis.

The resurrection narratives have details which Price thought are less easily accommodated in this way. For example,

there was the empty tomb where the body of Jesus dematerialized and then re-materialized. This and other cases which involved unusual effects on physical matter, lead Price to wonder whether they indicate a surviving entity, of which one characteristic was that it was "hyper-physical."

There were also panel discussions on current research at the FRNM and the PRF and on parapsychology and religion. Price predicted that as an outcome of the increased infiltration of the concepts of Eastern religions into the West, a technology of parapsychology might develop involving meditation practices and other methods to enhance psi.

C. D. BROAD

1887-1971

Professor C. D. Broad, British philosopher and psychical researcher died on March 11, 1971. Broad helped to elucidate the characteristics and implications of psi phenomena and clear the fuzzy thinking in the field. As a member of the PRF Advisory Committee he once examined a research program and found a statement to the effect that psi phenomena transcends physical principles. "Are 'physical principles' supposed to be something known once and for all," Broad asked, "or can the views of physicists change profoundly . . . as, I should have thought, they have done, at least twice (Relativity, Quantum Mechanics) in the present century."

Broad confessed to a prejudice against the survival hypothesis "because I am of a cowardly and unenterprising temperament, and am moved much more by fear of possible misfortune than by energy, curiosity, or hope." But he neither lacked energy nor curiosity in exploring the facts

and logic relating to this issue. He concluded that, with respect to the familiar facts of science, "there is nothing to suggest, and much to counter-suggest, the possibility of any kind of persistence of the psychical aspect of a human being after the death of his body. On the other hand, there are many quite well attested *paranormal* phenomena which strongly suggest such persistence, and a few which suggest the full-blown survival of a human personality. . . . I think I may say that for my part I should be slightly more annoyed than surprised if I should find myself in some sense persisting immediately after the death of my present body. One can only wait and see, or alternately (which is no less likely) wait and not see."¹

Broad died seated in his chair. One likes to think that he was aware and watching right up to the end and, then that he was indeed quite annoyed.

¹*Lectures on Psychical Research*, New York: The Humanities Press, 1962, 450 pp., pp. x and 430.

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