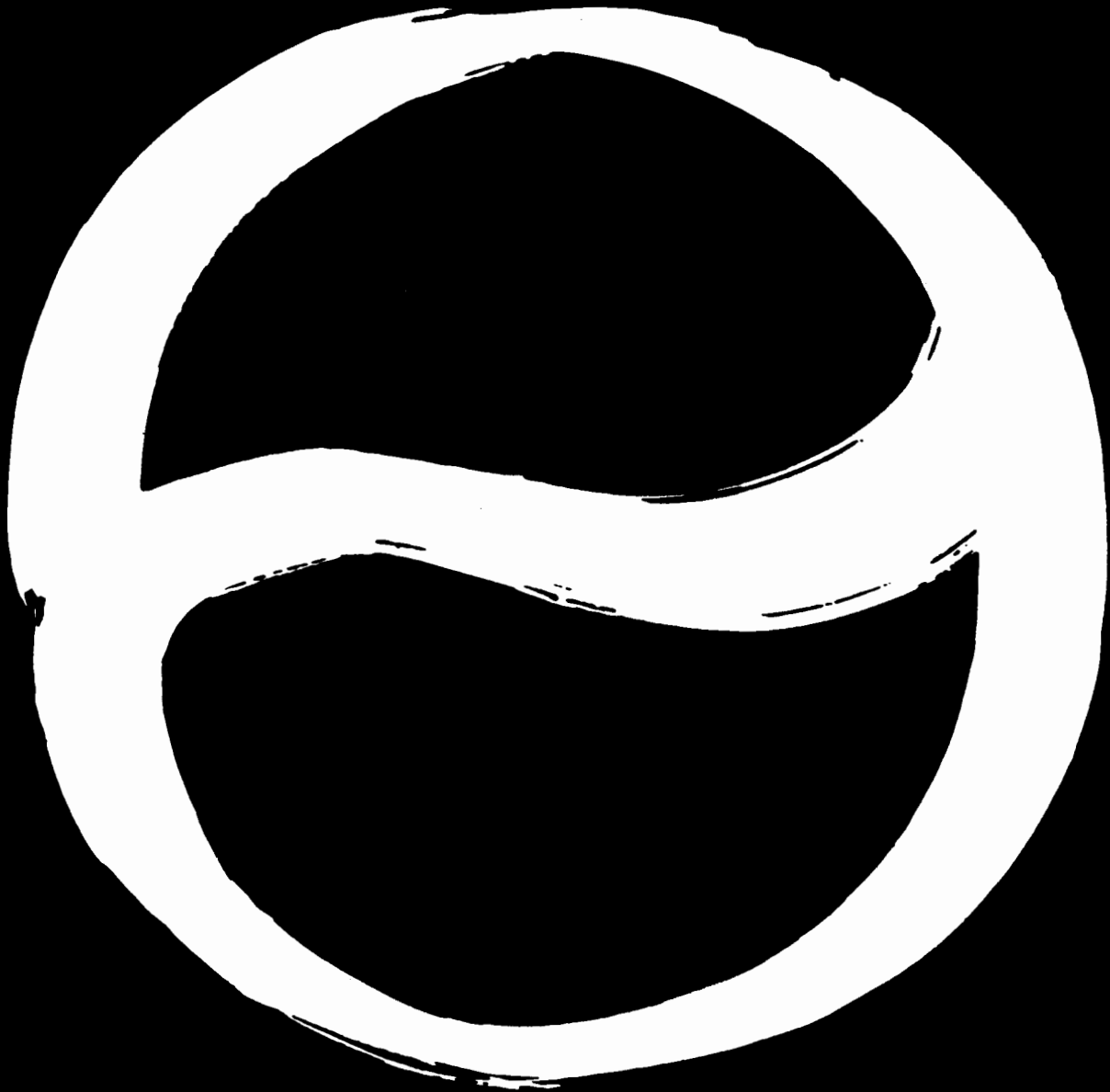


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### FRONT COVER:

The Theta design by William G. Roll represents the first letter of thanatos (death) and theos (God), extinction and immortality. The symbol also reflects the yin-yang, passive-active, and ESP-PK aspects of human nature.

Established in 1960, the Psychical Research Foundation is dedicated to the exploration of the possible continuation after death of personality and consciousness. PRF research and educational activities include studies of expanded states of consciousness, out-of-body experiences, mediumship, meditation, and poltergeist and haunting disturbances.

## Contents

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Cahagnet's Contributions to Psychical Research  
by Rodger I. Anderson ..... 74

Skepticism and Dogmatism: Review Article on  
Recent Critical Books  
by K. Ramkrishna Rao ..... 83

### Reviews

R. I. Anderson reviews *The Shadow and the Light* ..... 91

F. Gordon Greene reviews *A Collection of  
Near-Death Research Readings* ..... 94

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# Cahagnet's Contribution to Psychical Research

Rodger I. Anderson

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## INTRODUCTION

"Of all the revelators to whom French Spiritualists are indebted for indubitable proof of supermundane intercourse," Emma Hardinge Britten wrote, "none stands more prominent in truthfulness and worth, than M. Cahagnet" (1884, pp. 42-43). Hudson Tuttle praised Cahagnet for "his candor, his honesty of purpose, untiring zeal, and general accuracy," adding that the French savant had almost single-handedly "solved the great problem of spiritual existence, and the possibility of intercourse with spirits" (1871, pp. 66-67). Should these statements be thought to merely mirror the prejudices of their authors, both prominent spiritualists, there is the opinion of Frank Podmore, arguably the most astute opponent spiritualism has ever encountered. In the estimate of that redoubtable critic, Cahagnet "seems more nearly to approach the evidential standard which the investigators of the S.P.R., after long years of work, have elaborated for their own guidance, than any previous worker in these obscure regions" (Podmore, 1898, p. 60). Later, Podmore amended this assessment to make it even more positive: "In the whole literature of Spiritualism I know of no records of the kind which reach a higher evidential standard, nor any in which the writer's good faith and intelligence are alike so conspicuous" (1902, vol. 1, p. 84).

Cahagnet's position in psychical research would seem assured with such a heterogeneous assortment of witnesses testifying on his behalf, but a review of the relevant literature proves this expectation unfounded. Excepting Slater Brown, whose popular *Heyday of Spiritualism* (1970) contains a perceptive chapter on Cahagnet, most modern writers seem unaware of his very existence. The scholarly histories of B. G. Brown (1973), Isaacs (1975), and Moore (1977), for example, take no notice of Cahagnet or mention him only in passing, though all devote considerable space to delineating figures of far less

historic or intrinsic interest. Psychical researchers, for the most part, seem equally unfamiliar with the work of the French savant, what few discussions there are being principally derived from Podmore (e.g., Myers, 1903; Sidgwick, 1915). For this reason there appears more than a little room in the contemporary literature for a review of Cahagnet's work, particularly as it relates to subsequent studies of mediumship and survival. Cahagnet is also of considerable historic significance in that he stands at the very dawn of modern spiritualism, the first volume of his major work appearing scant weeks before the outbreak of the Hydesville knockings in March of 1848. He thus affords the reader an invaluable glimpse of spiritualism as it existed before the flood of spectral communiques began in earnest.

## THE INVESTIGATOR AND HIS WORK

Few investigators of the paranormal have exhibited greater dedication and singleness of purpose than Louis Alphonse Cahagnet (1809-1885), by trade a journeyman cabinet-maker and restorer of antique furniture. Though enjoying some small reputation in his chosen profession, Cahagnet seemed destined for an honorable obscurity until he chanced upon a copy of Emanuel Swedenborg's *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell* (1758/1894). A confirmed atheist and materialist until then, Cahagnet found in the visions and revelations of the Swedish seer a strangely satisfying philosophy of life that answered many of his deepest questions about the nature and meaning of human existence. This, however, was not for Cahagnet an adequate reason for embracing the new philosophy. Believing with the French philosophers that a revelation without means of public validation was worse than no revelation at all, Cahagnet set about finding some means whereby Swedenborg's assertions could be tested. Replication seemed the most obvious solu-

tion, but how to go about contacting a supersensible realm that the Seer himself had declared off-limits to human curiosity? One possible approach was by way of chemical stimulation, which prompted Cahagnet to undertake a series of experiments on himself with a wide variety of hallucinogenic drugs, most notably hashish. Having little success with this method he next attempted conjuration, but this combined with the effects of the drugs to produce a mental breakdown that apparently took the form of persecution by spirits. This unfortunate experience, which persisted for some three years, led Cahagnet to remove to Paris, where he hoped that the more enlightened atmosphere would have a salubrious effect upon his investigations.

While in Paris, Cahagnet undertook the experiments with clairvoyants that were to form the bulk of his major work and make his reputation as perhaps the first psychical researcher of repute before the formation of the Society for Psychical Research in 1882. Setting himself up as an amateur practitioner of therapeutic magnetism, Cahagnet soon discovered a number of subjects who in trance seemed to be describing the same numinous world explored by Swedenborg. Intrigued by this, Cahagnet was even more amazed when some of his subjects began exhibiting flashes of knowledge inexplicable by any hypothesis of normal province. By concentrating upon the most remarkable of their number, Adele Maginot Theodule, Cahagnet hoped to develop an instrument of paranormal communication whose successes were only accountable on the model of communion with the dead. A careful reading of Cahagnet's experiments reveals that he very nearly succeeded.

Cahagnet's purpose in these experiments was twofold: first, to explore by psychic means the purported world of spirits, comparing and contrasting the various accounts to extract any common elements that might be indicative of truth; second, to secure evidence that these various revelations came from their reputed sources and not the mind of the sensitive. In the first volume of reports, composed mainly of sittings held in 1846, Cahagnet was primarily concerned with providing a record of clairvoyant excursions into the spirit world, but he soon realized that this was not adequate to command the attention of the learned world. He consequently resolved in his second report to secure personal messages from deceased friends and relatives of persons admitted to witness the manifestations. At the end of each meeting, Cahagnet would draw up a statement of the communications received which he then submitted to the sitters for annotation, instruct-

ing them to note mistakes as well as successes. These signed attestations he retained for the benefit of those desiring to satisfy themselves of the genuineness of the published accounts. While not a complete transcript of everything said or of all sittings held, Cahagnet claimed that his record "omitted no error of my clairvoyante nor any of her truths" ([1848-1849/1850], vol. 2, p. 80).<sup>1</sup>

Adele Maginot Theodule (1812-1886), the subject most studied by Cahagnet, was on all accounts an extraordinary sensitive. From childhood "sorely afflicted with somnambulatory fits, compelling her to get up at night to terminate or continue her day's labors" (vol. 1, p. 49), she was permanently cured of her sleepwalking after being mesmerized by Cahagnet. He also found that she was an excellent clairvoyant in the mesmeric state, especially for the diagnosis of disease. Under Cahagnet's tutelage her repertoire was expanded to include travelling clairvoyance, telepathy, and extrasensory communication with the dead. In all of this and more, she was conspicuously successful, so much so that after several years of experiments Cahagnet found himself unable to cite even one sitting which was an unequivocal failure. Though not subjected to the kind of exhaustive investigation accorded mediums of a later era, she was, in the judgment of no less careful an investigator than Dingwall, "one of the most remarkable mediums of the time" (1967, vol. 1, p. 230).

### SPIRIT TEACHINGS

Cahagnet's initial purpose in conducting these and related experiments was to explore what he called "that *imaginary* world, . . . a world appearing, amidst a cloud of tableaux more or less rational or ridiculous, as a real world, an organized and active world as objective as our material world" (1850/[1851], p. 128). Unlike his mentor Swedenborg, who could visit this realm at will, Cahagnet was dependent for his information upon imperfect instruments of communication who could, and sometimes did, alter the message if not agreeable with their own convictions (vol. 2, pp. 16-17; 1850/[1851], p. 63). Cahagnet, therefore, early decided upon a method of cross-reference, by which he tested the assertions of one sensitive by comparing them with another. In order for such a method to work, he realized, the investigator would be required to not only make a complete record of everything said by the sensitive, but also to keep the results from other subjects so as to prevent unconscious collaboration. It was also

<sup>1</sup>All subsequent references to *The Celestial Telegraph* are by volume and page number alone.

best if the sensitives had no prior acquaintance with either the literature or ideas of spiritualism, otherwise the results might be due to cultural rather than spiritual influences. If under such conditions certain ideas commonly recurred, then serious consideration must be given the view that these communications are indeed revelations of supernal life.

In all, Cahagnet used eight "ecstatics" or sensitives in his first series of experiments, though the bulk of his report consists mainly of sittings held with two: Adele and one Bruno Binet, a young man of "very limited intelligence in point of spiritualism, having read and heard but little of magnetism" (vol. 1, p. 1). With Bruno he held twenty-five sittings for spiritual communication, and with Adele over twice that number, but in neither case did the utterances of one sensitive conflict with those of the other on any matter of substance. According to both, during trance the sensitive's spirit temporarily vacates its body to make room for an attendant spirit or "guide," the original connection between body and spirit being maintained by means of "sympathetic threads." Regarding life in the spheres, the spirits speaking through Adele and Bruno agreed on many matters. The soul, they affirmed, bears the form of the body but is composed of a more ethereal substance; in the heavens they are grouped in societies based upon kindred affections; no one has seen God in any form save that of a brilliant sun; among themselves they communicate and move by the means and power of thought; each has an "affinity" or ideal mate who is not necessarily the person they loved on earth; their activities are similar to those of the living in all respects save that of sexual union; and they remember their earthly lives, but for a variety of reasons prefer not to speak of it. On two points only did Bruno and Adele disagree, but in neither case in a way that would make their statements mutually exclusive. For example, on the question of whether angels have wings, Adele answered that they do not, whereas Bruno affirmed that they do, though he spontaneously qualified this by remarking that the wings are only symbolic and that actually angels have none.

Besides explicit correlations such as these, Cahagnet's sensitives painted a general picture of the afterlife that is remarkably self-consistent. At death we are met by deceased relatives who aid in the transition between states. By our moral affinities we are attracted toward one of three heavens or "spheres" located some distance above the earth. Evil-minded persons find themselves still bound to the earth after death, where they continue in their accustomed ways by inflicting themselves upon the

living. Sometimes they cause disease or some other physical debility by congregating in some specific part of a person's body, but more commonly they attempt by persuasion to incite the living to acts of mischief and violence. Since evil is necessary in order to recognize good, however, such spirits are acting in accordance with the will of God, who finally redeems them by infusing their minds with pure and ennobling thoughts that enable them to advance to a more exalted station.<sup>2</sup> More elevated spirits enter immediately at death into one of the higher heavens, where they live much as they once did on earth, only free of all material wants and hindrances. In these higher climes are scenes of surpassing beauty created by the force of imagination or thought. "Angels" are those exalted souls who execute the divine will; other, less-advanced spirits are engaged in reading, meditation, edifying discourse, or some other worthwhile occupation. The purpose in all this activity is increased knowledge, for "To learn constitutes the happiness of spirits" (vol. 1, p. 162).

Cahagnet regarded the internal consistency of these spirit teachings an evidence of their genuineness, though he succeeded in persuading few contemporaries to share his views. To most it seemed more likely that the harmony between the statements of Cahagnet's subjects was due to the influence of the magnetist, who had unwittingly infected his subjects with his own preconceptions. This would indeed seem the most economical view to take of the matter were it not for the singular conformity of the revelations collected by Cahagnet to those recorded by investigators working with other subjects in sometimes different countries.<sup>3</sup> Some years before Cahagnet began his experiments, for example, his countryman Billot (1839) reported a number of spirit teachings he had received through mesmerized subjects that conform with the revelations gathered by Cahagnet. Still earlier, in Germany, the trance utterances of Frederica Hauffe, better known as the "Seeress of Prevorst," disclosed a world strikingly similar to that revealed by Cahagnet's subjects

<sup>2</sup>Later spirit writings (e.g., Edmonds & Dexter, 1853) join this notion of redemption by divine infusion with that of missionary spirits whose duty is to rescue lost souls once the desire for progress has been renewed.

<sup>3</sup>There are, to be sure, still real differences between the various communiques: The spirits speaking through Swedenborg, for example, denied universal salvation whereas Cahagnet's clairvoyants affirmed it; Cahagnet's communicators emphatically rejected reincarnation, whereas others have just as emphatically maintained the plurality of terrestrial existences (e.g., Kardec, 1857/n.d.). Even with such significant variations, however, the generic similarities between the various teachings far outweigh their particular differences.

(Kerner, 1829/1845), while in England the remarkable subject of Haddock (1851) presented a vision of spiritual things that is again not far from the picture vouchsafed Cahagnet.<sup>4</sup> It was also about this same time in America that there appeared Andrew Jackson Davis' *Principles of Nature* (1847), which together with these other works presents a view of the celestial landscape that makes it indeed appear that all are describing the same world.

Cahagnet, had he known of these other works, undoubtedly would have received them as an additional confirmation that his clairvoyants were actually in contact with a supersensible realm of existence. There are, however, a number of alternative explanations that have been proposed. For example, J.P.F. Deleuze, a leading magnetist of the period, urged the greatest caution before accepting mesmeric revelations of a transcendent nature as even possibly true, not only on account of the multiple sources of error to which they are prone, but also because they may derive less from celestial realms than from certain ideas "inherent in the human soul" (1825/1886, p. 248). Similarly, William James, in commenting on the remarkable unanimity existing between trance utterances, wondered if perhaps their similarity was not due to the fact that "all sub-conscious selves are peculiarly susceptible to a certain stratum of the *Zeitgeist*, and get their inspiration from it" (1890, vol. 1, p. 394). F.W.H. Myers was also inclined to regard these trance communications as possibly due to "subliminal tendencies setting steadily in certain obscure directions, and bearing as little relation to the individual characteristics of the person to the depths of whose being we have somehow penetrated as profound ocean-currents bear to waves and winds on the surface of the sea." Perhaps, he suggested, the strong family resemblance between the disclosures is a revelation not of spirit life but of a "pattern in the very fabric of our nature" (1903, vol. 2, pp. 119-120).

Myers also recognized a second, more prosaic reason for the widespread conformity of spirit teachings to a common pattern. That reason, briefly, is that all are derived from the teachings of Swedenborg. As the first person of prominence in the Western world to claim open communion with the dead,<sup>5</sup> Swedenborg exercised a profound influence upon the idea of many people concerning the afterlife. Discussed by Kant (1766/1900), lauded by Emerson (1850)<sup>6</sup> and other literary models, and supported by a host of such selfless disciples as the legendary Jonathan Chapman, better known as "Johnny Appleseed," Swedenborg's thought regard-

ing the hereafter has to a large extent revolutionized the traditional idea of immortality, reconstructing for countless multitudes their whole conception of the hereafter. This vast leavening has in the main gone on anonymously, since comparatively few people have actually read Swedenborg, yet that it has been accomplished is evident to anyone who troubles to compare the notion of the afterlife that prevailed before Swedenborg with that which came to obtain after him (Newton, 1900). Granting the pervasiveness of Swedenborg's influence, which as Myers noted has in all probability "affected modern thought more deeply than most modern thinkers know" (1903, vol. 2, p. 219), the question to be considered here concerns the extent of that influence at the time and in the place required. Sometimes, as in the early cases cited by Podmore (1902, vol. 1, pp. 76-78) and Block (1932/1968, pp. 57-60), it is incontestable that the teachings of Swedenborg were the proximate inspiration for the contents of the revelations received; at other times (e.g., Delp, 1971, pp. 226-227) the chances appear rather good that the sensitive had some normal knowledge of Swedenborg even if this is not strictly demonstrable; in still other cases, such as that of Emile Ray, Cahagnet's child clairvoyant, the likelihood appears somewhat remote on account of the limited opportunities of the subject. But, even in cases of this kind, some allowance must usually be made for the hypothesis of normal influence. In the instance of Cahagnet's subject, not only was the investigator himself an ardent Swedenborgian, but Emile was

<sup>4</sup>Haddock also claimed, however, that his subject contradicted some of the statements of Cahagnet's subjects. Unfortunately, he does not provide any further information regarding these denials.

<sup>5</sup>This is not to say that Swedenborg's ideas regarding the afterlife were *sui generis*. Plato, Plotinus, and a number of other classical authors anticipated many of his leading ideas but with this difference: With them the nature of the hereafter was largely a matter for speculation, a supposition "that something of the kind is true" (Plato, *Phaedo*, 114d), whereas for Swedenborg it was a matter of sensuous experience, a description of "things seen and heard." Some of what he reported confirmed these older versions of the afterlife, but he alone claimed to derive his information from personal intercourse with human spirits.

<sup>6</sup>Emerson first delivered his public lecture on Swedenborg in 1845, about the same time that there began in America "a movement of the public mind toward Swedenborg, as palpable and portentous as that of Millerism or the old revivals" (Noyes, 1870, p. 539). While contributing greatly to this general interest in Swedenborg, and thus indirectly to the popular rage for spiritualism that shortly followed, Emerson never evinced much interest in the spirit manifestations, once referring to them contemptuously as "the Rat-revelation, the gospel that comes by taps in the wall, and thumps in the table-drawer" (1926, p. 260).

often a guest in his home during the course of the experiments, which considerably enlarges Emile's opportunities for picking up something of Swedenborg by ordinary means. Cahagnet, who seems to have been alive to this possibility, thought it unlikely because during one of their sessions Emile communicated information about the place of children in the afterlife that corresponds with Swedenborg's account in the *Arcana Coelestia* (1749-1756/1960, vol. 3, p. 109), which Cahagnet claimed at the time not to have read. Without doubting Cahagnet's word in the matter, he seems to have been unaware that the same passage from the *Arcana* is reproduced in *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell* (Swedenborg, 1758/1894, p. 221), a book with which he had long been familiar. Whether Emile had ever been exposed to the book or its contents during one of the many occasions when he was present in the experimenter's home cannot now be determined, but the very real possibility that he had is sufficient to disallow Cahagnet's claim that the correspondence between the two messages "proves that Swedenborg saw right, and . . . that my clairvoyant was in a good state" (vol. 1, p. 145).

Whether we attribute the many similarities between these several delineations of the abode of spirits to psychological, cultural, or paranormal factors, Deleuze's warning about accepting these supposed revelations at face value would appear well heeded. While many of the correspondences are still remarkable, lending some support to Gregory's contention "that all those who believe in the existence of a spiritual world, must feel that [these visions] may possibly contain revelations of it" (1909, p. 85), they offer scant comfort to those who accept such accounts solely on the ground of their internal coherence. This is especially so in view of the fact that many of these same sensitives agree with Swedenborg on matters that are demonstrably false, such as the plurality of inhabited worlds in the solar system. Another ground for caution is that many writers of the same period expressed identical views on a wide variety of matters, thus proving the ideas part of the intellectual milieu of the time. The Mormon prophet Joseph Smith, for example, who had almost certainly not read Swedenborg, presented a view of the afterlife that is remarkably like the Swedish Seer's in both general and particular conception, including the number of heavens and the characteristics of their respective inhabitants (Meyers, 1981). Others like Thomas Dick (1829), G. T. Fechner (1835/1906), and Edgar Allan Poe (1845/1902) pretended to no higher inspiration than their own intuition, but all produced works having many

ideas in common with writings of a purportedly spiritualist origin. Poe was, in fact, hailed by many English and French magnetists of the time as a fellow explorer in these obscure regions, two of his tales of mesmerism *in articulo mortis* having been reprinted in Europe as authentic accounts of remarkable happenings. Cahagnet, not aware that Poe's works were fiction, cited one as confirming to a remarkable degree information which Adele had revealed in the mesmeric condition (1850/1851, p. 185).

## VERIDICAL COMMUNICATIONS

Cahagnet's confidence in these several spirit teachings was not, however, based upon their consistency alone. Rather it appeared to him, as it has appeared to many investigators since, that communicators who have proven themselves accurate on matters we can check should be counted no less trustworthy when discoursing on matters we cannot. It is for this reason that his second volume of reports is composed almost exclusively of test cases intended to establish the identities of the alleged communicators. Of these numerous sittings, one will suffice to give the flavor of the whole (vol. 2, pp. 56-59). On January 31, 1848, Cahagnet was visited by one Abbe Almignana, a Spanish priest and doctor of canon law who was investigating the possibility of spirit return. During their discussion Adele, who happened to be present, suggested an experiment to satisfy the Abbe's qualms about the reality of communication with the dead. Passing into trance, she was asked to contact the Abbe's brother, who had died some two years before. Complying, Adele depicted a man dressed in what appeared to her as a very peculiar clerical costume, which she described in minute detail. She also mentioned that the man had not spoken French and had died after a lingering illness of the chest. At the conclusion of the sitting the Abbe was moved to exclaim, "'Tis enough to upset all reason — all received ideas; I am convinced — thanks, thrice thanks." Adele had been right in every particular save that she somewhat underestimated the communicator's age.

Though convinced at the time, the Abbe later had second thoughts. Was it not possible, he reasoned, "that clairvoyants saw the image of things impressed on the memory of the persons with whom they were in rapport; the image of my late brother being engraved on my memory, it was enough for M. Cahagnet to put me, by an act of his will, in rapport with his clairvoyant, for the latter to have

seen the image of my brother on the tablets of my memory" (quoted in Hare, 1855, p. 286).

Resolving to test this possibility, Almnagnana requested Cahagnet to try for the apparition of a person unknown to the Abbe except by name. To further forestall possible telepathy Almnagnana did not tell the person from whom he secured the name of what he was about, nor did he attend the sitting himself, leaving it to Cahagnet to convey the name to Adele. Despite these elaborate precautions, Adele promptly described

a person of middling stature, with light brown hair, about five-and-forty years of age, not pretty, small grey eyes, large nose, rather thick at the bottom; sallow complexion, wide mouth; she has what we call a thick neck; she has lost some of her front teeth; and the remainder are little better than stumps; she wears what is termed in the country an undress—corsage, of a brown colour, striped underpetticoat, somewhat short; a full apron, such as countrywomen wear; she has a square handkerchief on her neck; her hands betoken hard work. She used to work in the fields; she had a brother, who died after her. (vol. 2, pp. 62-63)

She also mentioned a small distinguishing mark on the apparition's cheek.

Receiving these details in writing, but not knowing how accurate they were himself, Almnagnana conveyed the description to Marie-Francoise Carre, the woman from whom he had gotten the name and sister to the deceased. She declared it exact in every respect, from the physical particulars to the manner of dress, save that she could not recall the mark on her sister's face. Wishing to check her recollection, however, she later read the account to a man who had also known her sister, asking if he was acquainted with anyone corresponding to the description. "Why, it is your deceased sister," the man replied, "there's no mistake about that." Even the mark on the cheek, he said, was correct, pointing out its exact placement when Carre expressed doubt on the point. Her memory jogged, Carre also recalled that her sister had a small swelling of the skin in that same location.

These "proxy sittings," as they later came to be called, are by far the most interesting reported by Cahagnet in showing the range of Adele's ESP. On another occasion a minister by the name of Rostan, inspired by the Abbe's success, secured from a servant the name of a person unknown to him, which was presented to Adele for purposes of extrasensory communication. The resulting description was again very nearly exact, including such identifying details as a physical deformity and the location of tumors from which the person had died (vol. 2, pp. 90-91). On still another occasion the

absent sitter had requested that Cahagnet try for the spirit of a certain man about whom he conveyed no information save the name. Again the description was declared exact, including a prominent mark under the left eye. Not remembering, however, whether the mark was under the right or left eye, the sitter managed to locate a portrait of the deceased, which showed a noticeable scar in the exact place specified by Adele (vol. 1, pp. 85-86).

Of these several "proxy sittings," perhaps the most evocative of survival is the Fandar case. Early in August, 1848, Cahagnet received a letter from one M. Fandar, who lived in a town situated about a hundred miles away from Paris. In this letter Fandar, whom Cahagnet had never met, requested that Adele try for a vision of his deceased father, providing the name but no other particulars about the man's life or appearance. Cahagnet, ever eager to find another argument against the bugbear of telepathy, promptly agreed, though Adele professed a dislike for such absent experiments "because the spirits themselves, conscious that none of their friends are with me, come with more difficulty and answer my questions with constraint." Still, as Cahagnet insisted, Adele consented to try the experiment. "I see a man with grey hair, full ruddy countenance, large nose, stern look, smiling mouth, and this betokens a lively and good disposition; short neck and breathing with difficulty. I perceive pimples caused by heat of the blood on his face. He is pretty corpulent and of middling stature. I should say that he suffered in his legs. He wears a brown vest, and, I think, coarse grey pantaloons" (vol. 2, p. 137). Cahagnet forwarded this description to Fandar, who replied by return post that it was "very exact." In this case Adele had, by means of a name unfamiliar to either herself or the experimenter, gotten from a man neither had ever met, succeeded in accurately describing a deceased person unknown to everyone concerned save for the stranger living a hundred miles away. It was, one suspects, only with considerable restraint that Cahagnet refrained from commenting on the case, merely remarking that it made the telepathy hypothesis as then understood appear a "foolish argument."

Adele's talents, however, were not restricted to the bare recital of facts about persons who were strangers to everyone present. Often she duplicated, according to informants, the very intonations and gestures of the persons she personated, sometimes to the point to mimicking bodily symptoms. Perhaps the most spectacular example of this last occurred when Adele was asked to locate a missing person, whom she accurately described and declared alive



and living in Mexico. These last two points were never corroborated, but what served to impress Adele's auditors with the possible truth of the assertion was that she, in describing the man working out-of-doors, gave a perfect imitation of a person trying to shield the left side of his face from the burning rays of the sun. More marvelous still, within a short while what seemed to be a violent sunburn appeared on the left side of her face and shoulder, not fading until a full twenty-four hours later. Outside the weather was gloomy, but Adele had somehow developed an apparent sunburn which Cahagnet and others present perceived as hot to the touch (vol. 2, pp. 21-23).

While we may, with some justification, attribute such physical effects to the hypnotic production of simulated stigmata, in itself apparently not a paranormal ability, there still remains much about Adele's performances that would seem to require at minimum an astonishing capacity for ESP. Sometimes a fairly "simple" present-person telepathy may be adequate to accommodate the phenomena, such as evidently occurred during a sitting with the Baron Du Potet (vol. 2, pp. 75-76). In that instance Adele conveyed a wealth of information about the alleged communicator along with a most vivid characterization, so impressing Du Potet that he declared it like seeing the man again in life. Later, however, the Baron discovered that those points which most impressed him were precisely those prominent in his own mind at the time; others he supposed but did not know were correct were in fact quite wrong (Podmore, 1902, vol. 1, p. 87). On other occasions, however, Cahagnet's animus against the telepathy hypothesis would appear more than a little justified. In those cases where Adele described a deceased person unknown to everyone present, invoked by a mere name, then information transference of the type encountered by Du Potet cannot provide the whole answer, requiring an extension of the hypothesis to include what Andrew Lang (1900) called "telepathy *a trois*." In the Fandar case this would also require telepathic contact with minds rather remotely linked with those present, perhaps initiated in this instance by the physical stimulus of Fandar's letter. We are — in this and similar cases — brought up short between two alternatives, whichever we choose depending upon our general estimate of the probability of survival: Either Fandar's father had "survived" in some sense and had presented himself to Adele's clairvoyant vision, or she had somehow located and then tapped the mind of his son to construct a visual representation which she interpreted as an apparition of the dead. Sadly, despite

considerable effort and the passing of well over a century, most modern investigators of the survival question still find themselves halting between these two opinions.

## CONCLUSION

Some of the areas of research pioneered by Cahagnet have proven less fruitful than others. For example, his suggestion that communicators who have shown themselves knowledgeable about terrene affairs should be counted no less trustworthy when discoursing on more transcendent matters has proven unworkable in practice, none having demonstrated the kind of unalloyed veracity needed to warrant our receiving their bare assertions on faith.<sup>7</sup> There still remains, however, a thread of common ideas running through the mass of non-evidential material that is just sufficient to keep alive the suspicion that not all may be due to dream or guesswork. Ryzl's ([1972]) experiments with hypnotized subjects and Crookall's (1961) work with mediumistic communications have provided much interesting material that is broadly consistent with Cahagnet's findings, but unfortunately not in such a way as to overturn the supposition that such parallels are due to cultural influence. Hyslop's (1914) proposal for creating a consortium of mediums whose history and education we know well and who are ignorant of spiritualism might bring us nearer to estimating how much these communications owe to the general ambiance of modern spiritualism, but lack of interest combined with the immense resources needed to make such a project feasible have thus far managed to keep it well within the realm of possibility. A perhaps more practical suggestion is to compare the statements of Western communicators about post-mortem existence with descriptions drawn from non-Occidental sources, but not enough systematic inquiry has been done in this area to warrant any conclusion save that a case can be made in selected instances (e.g., Rogo, 1970). Still, even supposing such crosscultural studies successful advances us only so far toward finally deciding whether the communications are veridical in the sense of being truly revelatory of another realm of existence. There yet remains Myers' proposal that "there may be a

<sup>7</sup>This is true in Adele's case no less than in others. Once, for example, a spirit appeared whose multiple lies and general evasiveness made Cahagnet suspect its sanity (vol. 1, pp. 72-84). On other occasions the spirits made scientific blunders incommensurate with their claims of advanced knowledge. Thus, one averred that genetic inheritance is determined solely by the male, while the exalted shade of Swedenborg explained that sunspots are actually the shadows cast by passing planets (vol. 1, pp. 56, 122).

kind of sub-conscious consensus of opinion" (1903, vol. 2, p. 257) regarding such matters that transcends cultural and educational programming, a suggestion that is congenial with both the claims of Jungian psychology and some recent experiments with psychedelic drugs (e.g., Grof & Halifax, 1977). If such innate tendencies of mental functioning exist, we may end our study not with a more comprehensive understanding of the topography of heaven, but of incarnate human nature, these supposed revelations being in truth disguised representations of the archetypal world of the mind. In this eventuality, however, the reputed spirits' descriptions of their posthumous habitations may well prove relevant to the actual conditions prevailing in the supposed afterworld. Assuming survival of the sort envisaged by Price (1965) and Grosso (1979), the situation awaiting people after death would depend substantially upon their store of mental content while still alive.

Of course, all of this only serves to raise anew the fundamental question of survival. However much we may dispute with Cahagnet over the significance of his "spirit teachings," he clearly has the edge in the argument if there in fact exists evidence suggesting that the communicators were the veritable spirits of the dead. For many of Cahagnet's contemporaries the evidence was compellingly in favor of spirit return, but there were some even during this early period who preferred the alternative hypothesis of extended telepathy with the living. Their stated grounds for doing so were anything but adequate, consisting for the most part of unsupported affirmations, but it would appear from Cahagnet's own record that their instinct was sound even if their reasoning was not. Given what Adele called "a starting point and an object," on her own account she seems to have been able to reach out and tap the minds of absent persons. In attempting to gain clairvoyant access to a house she had never seen, for example, Adele requested that she be put

in communication with persons who are acquainted with some one dwelling in those places; then, when the person who is in communication with me desires to render perceptible to me another person, whose place of residence, I suppose, he is ignorant of, I find that I have a starting point and an object. I desire the fluid of the person at a distance to come and join that of the person whose hand is in mine; an effect of attraction is operated, uniting the two fluids which touched each other formerly, and thereby I obtain a conductor that directs me. (vol. 2, p. 114)

On other occasions Cahagnet found his clairvoyants able to probe the past through the memory stores of the living, which once resulted in a lively

exchange between Adele and another sensitive as to which one could uncover more about the other's past (vol. 1, pp. 150-154). On still other occasions (e.g., vol. 2, p. 194; 1860, pp. 141-149) Cahagnet found his subjects reporting on the distant doings of living agents, presenting the communications in the same dramatic form used in conveying purported messages from the dead. Cahagnet seems not to have realized how unsettling all of this is to the survival hypothesis, but to later investigators like Dodds (1934), the relevance of these and kindred facts to the question of postmortem existence was apparent: If sensitives can derive so much information by means of ESP directed upon the living, it serves no useful purpose to assume anything more when they present the same kind of information in the guise of communications from the dead. For Dodds, as well as for some of Cahagnet's contemporaries, the survival hypothesis was simply otiose.

Granting that his arguments were not always equal to his conclusions, however, does not detract materially from Cahagnet's accomplishment. In his work on the question of survival, he recognized early on what later investigators would require many decades to realize: that progress on the question cannot fairly begin until the sitter has been removed from the experimental situation. He also was among the first to perceive that psi, once admitted as an alternative to survival, makes the spiritistic hypothesis much more credible by showing a component of human personality that is not comprehensible in terms of conventional spatio-temporal dimensions. From this observation it is still a far cry to the more radical view that there is something about the mind that transcends the conditions of mortality, but such considerations do lend some much needed plausibility to the view that the nervous system is not a *conditio sine qua non* for the manifestation of consciousness. Without this assurance there is not the barest possibility of survival, but once concede that a sensitive can perceive thoughts or things at a distance and "you admit an intelligent being or fluid, independent . . . of the material body, able to know such things; such a being or fluid rightly deserves a name; we will term it a soul" (vol. 2, pp. 7-8). Cahagnet may not have demonstrated that this "soul" survives death, but he did succeed in laying the only secure foundation upon which that claim can rest.

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# Skepticism and Dogmatism: Review Article on Recent Critical Books on the Paranormal

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In recent years, a significant number of books critical of psi research have been published. I imagine that some stimulus for writing the books came from the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) since most of the authors are associated with the Committee. Such books seem to have a ready publisher in Prometheus Books, which is owned by Paul Kurtz, the Chairman of CSICOP. Perhaps also the claims of the paranormal are too strong to be ignored, and, from the point of view of parapsychologists, it is better to be attacked than ignored. I will review briefly the following nine books which, I should point out, deal with much that is outside the scope of scientific parapsychology. For the most part, I will ignore non-psi topics covered in these books.

- Abell, G.O., and Singer, B. (Eds.). (1981). *Science and the Paranormal: Probing the Existence of the Supernatural*. New York: Scribner's.
- Alcock, J.E. (1981). *Parapsychology: Science or Magic? A Psychological Perspective*. Elmsford, NY: Pergamon Press.
- Frazier, K. (Ed.). (1981). *Paranormal Borderlands of Science*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Gardner, M. (1981). *Science: Good, Bad, and Bogus*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.
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- Marks, D., and Kammann, R. (1980). *The Psychology of the Psychic*. Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Neher, A. (1980). *The Psychology of Transcendence*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Taylor, J. (1980). *Science and the Supernatural: An Investigation of Paranormal Phenomena Including Psychic Healing, Clairvoyance, Telepathy and Precognition*. New York: Dutton.

Zusne, L., and Jones, W.H. (1982). *Anomalistic Psychology: A Study of Extraordinary Phenomena of Behavior and Experience*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

The Abell and Singer anthology includes discussions of "UFOs, pyramid power, psychic healing, the Bermuda Triangle, biorhythms, sensations in plants, Kirlian auras and more." ESP is included under the "more," and forms only a minor part of the book. The articles of some interest to parapsychologists are "Parapsychology and Quantum Mechanics," by Martin Gardner; "Scientists and Psychics," by Ray Hyman; and "Life After Death," by Ronald K. Siegel (a reprint of his article in *Psychology Today*).

In his foreword, Paul Kurtz sets forth the overall rationale and the objectives of the book, and incidentally the philosophy of CSICOP, which he was instrumental in founding. First, scientists have a responsibility "to apply the methods of science to the scrutiny of claims of the paranormal and thus contribute to public information and education" (p. viii). "We believe," Kurtz asserts, "that scientists should not simply reject unorthodox claims out of hand, however fanciful they may appear, but rather should submit them to careful investigation" (pp. viii-ix). If these statements represent the true spirit behind CSICOP, one would hardly suspect any difference between its objectives and those of the Parapsychological Association as regards the domain of psi.

Abell and Singer expand on this theme a bit further in their Introduction. They argue that the claims and speculations discussed in the book are "usually made by nonscientists," but "scientists" have rejected most of them. "Where there is a conflict between scientists and those outside of science . . . it would be a reasonable strategy to give more credence to the experts — the scientists — than

to those outside the relevant discipline" (p. 4). Again, these are reasonable statements with which parapsychologists and their critics could agree. On their face value, they imply that the judgment of scientists working in the area of psi, i.e., parapsychologists, should be relied on for basing opinions on these matters. A critical rhetorical twist, however, keeps parapsychologists in opposition to scientists who are skeptical of these phenomena.

With his characteristic clarity and sarcasm, Martin Gardner breezes through the difficult terrain of quantum mechanics and E.H. Walker's theory of psi. "Walker has proposed ways in which his theory could be tested, but," asks Gardner, "is it worthwhile to fund the testing of a theory of translocation, metal bending, and placement effects before it has been demonstrated that psi effects actually take place?" "For once," Gardner goes on to say, "I find myself agreeing with Rhine. Paraphysicists would do well to abandon theory and concentrate on devising experiments that can be replicated by unbelievers" (p. 68). Once again it is easy to see how parapsychology is in a no-win situation. When evidence in support of the existence of psi is presented, it is dismissed on the ground that it does not make any sense or that there is no theory to provide an explanatory model. When such a theory is in fact attempted, it is rejected on the premise that there are no facts to explain.

In his essay, "Scientists and Psychics," Hyman argues that the strategy of skeptics to explain away psi effects by supplying normal explanations or by advancing ad hominum arguments is "badly misguided" because such an approach assumes that there is something to be explained. "But the real surprising consequence of any careful examination of the cases put forth in behalf of paranormal individuals by scientists over the past 125 years," Hyman points out, "is my discovery that they have failed completely to produce anything that needs scientific attention" (p. 130). One needs to consider providing explanations for psi results only when the evidence "meets minimal requirements of standardization, reliability, validity, and replicability" (p. 132). "Wallace, Crooks, Targ, Puthoff and all other scientists who claim to have 'scientifically' investigated claims of psychics," have, according to Hyman, failed to meet those standards. Apparently, Hyman's strategy is one of rejecting psi without committing Hume's fallacy, i.e., arguing from antecedent improbability. His would be an extremely worthwhile enterprise if his examination of parapsychological

evidence followed the same rules and criteria that are applied to all other areas of behavioral science. But the truth of the matter is that if we demand the same standards of reliability and replicability as he does for psi, several areas of psychological research that are referred to in psychology textbooks would need to be deleted and ignored.

James Alcock, in his *Parapsychology: Science or Magic?*, argues that parapsychology is a pseudo-science and attempts to show why people believe in paranormal phenomena when these do not really exist. A greater part of the book is devoted to a discussion of the latter. Chapters 6 and 7 are more directly relevant to parapsychology than the others. In Chapter 6, "Science or Pseudo-Science: The Case of Parapsychology," Alcock employs the criteria of Mario Bunge (who, incidentally, is the general editor of the series of which this book is one title), to argue that parapsychology is a pseudo-science. It is a pseudo-science, according to Alcock, because parapsychology (a) subscribes to a subjectivistic theory of knowledge inasmuch as parapsychologists believe in the sheep-goat effect and experimenter effects; (b) it advocates a world view "admitting elusive immaterial entities"; (c) it does not "overlap with another field of research"; (d) it does not have a "specific background of well-confirmed theory"; (e) it contains "an unchanging body of belief"; (f) its hypotheses are "untestable" and are "in conflict with a larger body of knowledge"; and (g) its methods are "neither checkable by alternative methods nor justifiable in terms of well-confirmed theories" (p. 144).

Alcock rightly says, "I claim no expertise outside my own specialty of social psychology" (p. vii). This, however, does not prevent him from dabbling in the philosophy of science, physics, and, of course, parapsychology to draw crucial conclusions and make definite pronouncements about the scientific status of parapsychology.

Therefore, it is not surprising to find the contradictory statements and all-too-frequent exceptions to untenable generalizations in which he often indulges. For example, while debunking parapsychology, Alcock treats parapsychologists as a group who share the same questionable methods and false philosophy. But in concluding the chapter he admits:

It would be unfair to treat all parapsychologists as though they shared a common approach to the study of the putatively paranormal. Some accept even the wildest claims in the absence of evidence, and some have no idea of what constitutes evidence and no inkling of the many problems involved in drawing inferences from experiments. But there are others who are much more sophisticated and *capable* of doing careful research, although

they sometimes seem blinded to error and artifact by the intensity of their guiding beliefs. (p. 143)

What about those times when they are not so blinded? Is it not the responsibility of the critic to deal with the best rather than the weakest evidence? While attempting to rebut the claim of some parapsychologists that a few psi effects are no less replicable than some in psychology, Alcock is quick to point out: "It is hardly a defense to compare one's own record to that of the weakest areas of another discipline" (p. 137).

Again, Alcock makes generalizations about parapsychology which any serious acquaintance with the field would prove false. Consider the following statements: "It seems that in parapsychology critical viewpoints are almost never given serious treatment" (p. 123). The book *Extrasensory Perception After Sixty Years* (Pratt et al., 1940) discusses all published criticisms of parapsychological research up to that time and deals with 35 counterhypotheses to ESP. Rao (1979) published a thorough rebuttal of the criticisms by Moss and Butler (1978). From time to time parapsychological journals have published some of the most severe criticisms of research in the field (Child, 1977; Kennedy, 1979; Stanford, 1977).

"Parapsychologists usually fail to report negative outcomes and skeptical criticism in their discussion of the paranormal" (p. 123). Any one who attends the annual conventions of the Parapsychological Association (PA) or reads its proceedings, *Research in Parapsychology*, knows that there is no dearth of experimental reports containing negative results. And, in recent years, the PA has even been open to skeptics such as Ray Hyman, James Randi, and Marcello Truzzi to make their points in its forum.

"The extent to which vast majority of parapsychologists are ignorant of or disinterested in 'normal' science is striking" (p. 127). The truth of the matter is that a vast majority of those engaged in parapsychological research spend a good portion of their time doing "normal" science, since there are so few full-time positions in the field.

The chapter entitled "Parapsychology and Statistics" is an attempt to persuade the reader that extra-chance results reported in parapsychological literature "may be little more than an illusion produced by experimental 'contamination' (i.e., uncontrolled variables which influence experimental results) and/or the vicissitudes of statistical analysis" (p. 147). Alcock criticizes psi experiments for not including control groups, which he considers necessary for controlling the extraneous variables. He

further points out that occasional extra-chance results do not demonstrate the existence of psi, since such results are also obtained by matching random numbers. Parapsychologists have in the past responded to similar criticisms. John Palmer (1981), for instance, has shown how the notion of control groups is irrelevant when the objective of an experiment is one of obtaining evidence for the existence of psi.

Kendrick Frazier's book, *Paranormal Borderlands of Science*, is a miscellany of articles reprinted from the *Skeptical Inquirer*, the journal of CSICOP which Frazier has edited since 1977. He makes it very clear in his introduction that by "borderlands" he does not mean frontiers of science. As he puts it, "in large part the activity that goes on in these borderlands has nothing to do with the true spirit of science. This is the land of pseudo-science, fringe-science, and the paranormal" (p. vii).

The book is in two parts. The first, "Skeptical Inquiries into the Paranormal," is more relevant to parapsychology than the second and consists of five sections: (1) Psi Phenomena and Belief, (2) Tricks of the Psychic Trade, (3) Geller-type Phenomena, (4) Stories of Life and Death, and (5) Rhythms of Life.

The lead chapter of the volume is Paul Kurtz's "Is Parapsychology a Science?" Inasmuch as Kurtz is the chairman of CSICOP, this paper may be considered to be a position paper of the Committee on parapsychology. Kurtz refrains from explicitly labeling parapsychology a pseudoscience, but the implication of what he considers to be pseudoscience is clear and unmistakable. He finds parapsychology lacking in rigorous experimental method, coherent testable frameworks, and replicable results which together deny parapsychology the label of science. A thorough rebuttal and logical repudiation of Kurtz's arguments may be found in Marcello Truzzi (1980), a fellow skeptic, who argued that it is reasonable to consider parapsychology "a legitimate scientific enterprise whether or not psi actually exists."

In a chapter entitled "Science, Intuition and ESP," Gary Bauslaugh pictures parapsychology as bad science, and argues that "the vision of the universe presented by parapsychology is limited, sterile, amoral and has none of the beauty and ethical value of a true mythic-poetic vision" (p. 26). Ray Hyman writes on "cold reading" and how it taps "a fundamental and necessary human purpose" (p. 46). This is followed by a chapter by Ronald Schwartz who attempts to show that Peter Hurkos used similar techniques to fool his audience. James Randi provides a further illustration of cold reading

with the case of Geraldine Smith, a Canadian “psychic.”

David Marks and Richard Kammann report two studies in which they attempted to simulate Geller procedures to show that the “effects” can be obtained by normal procedures. For example, drawings sealed inside envelopes were accurately reproduced by student volunteers who were allowed to hold the envelope to the light or use any other method but not open the envelope. Christopher Scott and Michael Hutchinson report that Masuaki Kiyota was unable to cause psychic photographs under controlled conditions.

In “Psychology and Near-Death Experiences,” James Alcock argues that “the various characteristics of ‘death’ experience have been found to occur, alone or in a combination, in various ‘normal,’ non-death circumstances, such as those associated with emotional or physical stress, sensory deprivation, hypnagogic sleep, drug-induced hallucination, and so on,” and are “not *unique* to any postmortem existence” (p. 167). In his review of *The Amityville Horror* by Jay Anson, Robert Morris gives extensive reasons for considering that the book has little value. “On the surface,” he points out, “it looks as though various problems, including inconsistency, exaggeration, and distortion are abundant, and there is suggestive evidence of fabrication” (p. 178).

*Science: Good, Bad and Bogus* by Martin Gardner is a collection of his articles and book reviews published during the past 30 years. Much in the book is relevant to parapsychology, even though there are several chapters that are completely outside the scope of psi research. Included also are the rebuttals from authors whose books and views Gardner criticized in his reviews, and his own responses to those rebuttals. All these make interesting reading and give informative insights into the nature of psi controversy and the strategies employed by the skeptics in their persuasive attempts to debunk the paranormal.

While Gardner’s biases and prejudices are quite transparent in his style and conclusions, unlike some of his skeptical colleagues, he is both earnest and brilliant. Therefore, I enjoyed reading Gardner even when I disagreed with him. On occasion, I even learned from him. For example, Gardner takes J.G. Pratt to task, I think very appropriately, when Pratt, who otherwise scored many points in his exchanges with Gardner, unwisely succumbs to his faith in S.G. Soal’s honesty in the face of compelling evidence that Soal had cheated and attempts to give an improbable paranormal explanation for the oddities in Soal’s data. It usually does not help to

rationalize a failure when the right thing to do is to admit it.

Having said this, I find it appalling that the ploy most favored by Gardner in debunking parapsychology is his attempt to establish guilt by association. He seems to have an extraordinary relish for ad hominum arguments. To give just a few examples, Gardner attempts to discredit Honorton’s important Ganzfeld experiments because he believed in the macro-PK ability of Felicia Parise. Helmut Schmidt’s (REG) PK work is belittled by pointing out that he believed in the psychic abilities of Geller and that he carried out some of his PK research with cockroaches. Maimonides dream telepathy experiments are criticized because Stanley Krippner, one of the researchers connected with that research, published an article on the purported psychic ability of Ninel Kulagina. Harold Puthoff is ridiculed as a scientologist, and so on.

Again, Gardner makes much of John Wheeler’s irate ad hominum against parapsychology and reprints his attack on parapsychology, backing it up with Wheeler’s prestige as “one of the world’s top theoretical physicists.” But, in the same breath and in the same chapter, he writes as a counter to a letter of rebuttal of Wheeler by Brian Josephson and others: “One may have the highest respect for the signers of the above letter — one of them, Brian Josephson, is a Nobel Prize winner — at the same time recognizing that knowledge of physics no more qualifies a scientist to evaluate psychic claims than does knowledge of chess or medieval Latin” (p. 199). Does not this recognition apply to Wheeler as well, who in more than one way disqualified himself as a knowledgeable and objective critic of parapsychology? In this connection we may recall that Wheeler accused Rhine of falsifying data in a Lamarckian experiment, an accusation that he was subsequently forced to withdraw.

*ESP and Parapsychology* is a revised edition of C.E.M. Hansel’s *ESP: A Scientific Evaluation* (1966). Almost all of the material from the previous volume is retained and several new chapters are added to bring the book up to date and to include psychokinesis as well. Many of the errors that were pointed out by the reviewers of the first edition remain uncorrected. For example, the chapter on the Pearce-Pratt experiment concludes with the following paragraph in both editions:

A further unsatisfactory feature lies in the fact that a statement has not been made by the central figure, Hubert Pearce. The experimenters state that trickery was impossible, but what would Pearce have said? Per-

haps one day he will give us his own account of the experiment. (p. 123)

But in 1967, Pearce did make the following statement which Stevenson (1967) had published, and surely Hansel was aware of it, because in his revised edition he did refer to Stevenson's review of his book, which contained the statement:

In reference to the suggestions made concerning the experiments that Dr. Gaither Pratt and I did at Duke University, I do not hesitate to say that at no time did I leave my desk in the library during the tests, that neither I nor any person whom I know (other than experimenter or experimenters) had any knowledge of the order of the targets prior to my handling the list of calls to Dr. Pratt or Dr. Rhine, and that I certainly made no effort to obtain a normal knowledge by peeking through the window of Dr. Pratt's office — or by any other means. (p. 258)

I have argued elsewhere (Rao, 1981a) that Hansel's critique of the Pearce-Pratt experiment is neither responsible in its conclusions nor entirely truthful in the statement of facts. I believe that the same thing can be said about his treatment of Helmut Schmidt's experiments.

Unlike Hansel, David Marks and Richard Kammann "did not set out to shoot ESP down." We are told that they "fell for the where-there's-smoke-there-must-be-fire fallacy." Unfortunately, the writing style and the rhetoric they indulge in all too often in their book, *The Psychology of the Psychic*, do not quite convey the same impression. At any rate, while it may be possible that ESP does not enjoy the same degree of antecedent improbability in their minds as in Hansel's, their overall conclusions about the state-of-the-art in parapsychology are no more open to the possibility of psi.

The book itself is a valuable critique of the early experiments at Stanford Research Institute (SRI) by Russell Targ and Harold Puthoff and the claims of Kreskin and Geller. Like James Alcock, Marks and Kammann go beyond a mere refutation of psychic claims and attempt to answer the question, "Why do so many people believe in nonexistent phenomena?" They attribute these beliefs to the "natural biases and errors of human perception and judgment."

The most important section of the book, as far as scientific parapsychology is concerned, has to do with remote-viewing experiments. They argue, on the one hand, that the SRI experiments are methodologically weak in that the subject's transcripts contained *cues* which enabled the judges to successfully match them against the target sites. On the other hand, they point out that their "own attempts

to replicate the Targ-Puthoff effect under artifact-free conditions have consistently failed" (p. 41).

Marks and Kammann made a significant contribution to parapsychological methodology by diligently going after the details of the Targ-Puthoff experiments and by bringing into the open possible sources of error. Whether or not the artifacts would affect all or most of the observed effect, our awareness of the sources of error is important in itself. I think the problem with the SRI experiments is that they were not submitted for full publication in professional parapsychological journals, which, in my judgment, would have pointed out the methodological weaknesses and led to improved procedures before the publication of the results.

The failure of Marks and Kammann to obtain significant results is not of monumental significance in and of itself. It serves little purpose, however, to suggest that the working environment of Marks and Kammann is psi inhibitory, even though they themselves describe the background as one "of scorning skepticism from most of our colleagues, who must have believed the two of us had finally gone completely kookie" (p. 18). Even if Marks and Kammann had obtained significant results, they would not absolve the SRI experiments of their methodological shortcomings. Nor would they have provided evidence that would have convinced most skeptics. They would doubtless have been dubbed as parapsychologists unworthy of scientific attention.

In *The Psychology of Transcendence*, Andrew Neher attempts "to shed the light of understanding on experiences that were often cloaked in mystery." He examines the whole spectrum of experiences from heightened sensory activity to mystical and ecstatic states. Included between these are visionary states, voluntary control of autonomic processes, altered states of awareness, creativity, and subliminal perception. Thus, by transcendental experience, Neher means any experience that entails "heightened functioning." The central thesis of the book is that in this sense of heightened functioning transcendental experiences are real, natural phenomena which can be used for one's benefit, and that there is no need to invoke paranormal processes to account for them since the evidence for the paranormal is "far from conclusive."

This thesis suffers from several fallacies. First, of all, whether the so-called transcendental experiences have natural explanations depends largely on how those experiences are defined. Second, there is no intrinsic reason why psychic experiences, if they are real, may not have natural explanations that are not yet well understood. Third, the reality of psi is



seldom based on the presumed paranormality of transcendental experiences in the sense Neher defines them. Fourth, the naturalistic explanations of a number of transcendental experiences are simplistic and their mechanisms are ill defined. Finally, if psi is real, it provides a more parsimonious explanation for a variety of experiences that are traditionally regarded as genuinely transcendental.

The weakness of Neher's argument becomes apparent when we recognize that his reasons for the evidence for psi as inadequate apply with equal force to the evidence he uncritically accepts when discussing the natural explanations of transcendental experiences. His rejection of the existence of psychic ability is based on the understanding that the "possibility of methodological errors is all too real and the replications all too few" (p. 150). But, then, much of the research in areas such as meditation and voluntary control of internal states is methodologically no better than psi research, and the replication rate in some of these areas is also no better than in parapsychology. It would appear, therefore, that the only reason for rejecting psi evidence is its presumed paranormality.

John Taylor is a mathematical physicist who earlier published the book, *Superminds: An Enquiry into the Paranormal* (1975), in which he espoused the supernormal and hoped that abnormal radio wave emissions would explain genuine PK and ESP phenomena. The present book, *Science and the Supernatural*, is a complete turnabout and reveals, as Martin Gardner described it, the "extraordinary mental bending" of Taylor.

"I started my investigation of ESP," Taylor tells us, "because I thought there could be something in it. There seemed too much evidence brought forward by too many reliable people for it all to disappear. Yet as my investigation proceeded that is exactly what happened. Every supernatural phenomenon I investigated crumbled to nothing before my gaze" (pp. vii-viii). Taylor's investigations have two aspects. First, he was unable to find evidence of psychic feats such as spoon bending, even though he himself had difficulty in explaining how Geller could have normally caused the spoon in his hand to break into two pieces. More important, however, is his inability "to relate the paranormal to science itself," which leads Taylor to conclude that "there is a clear contradiction between science and most supernatural phenomena."

Taylor argues that scientific explanation of a phenomenon presupposes its quantification. Quantification is possible only if the phenomenon is

reducible to its material constituents and force. "Electromagnetic forces acting on the normal constituents of our bodies" are, according to Taylor, the only possible means of explaining the paranormal. His investigation of the traditional paranormal phenomena such as ESP and PK shows, that they do not fit into an electromagnetic explanation. Thus, they stand in contradiction with science and therefore they must be presumed to be unreal.

Taylor's reasoning would be noncompelling to those who do not look at science the way he does. Science in the abstract is not the sum total of the knowledge of the world at any given time. Science, unlike religion, assumes that our knowledge of the world is incomplete and that it is ever changing. Change does not always mean growth. Sometimes it involves transformation and shifts in our fundamental assumptions concerning the nature of the universe. The importance of psi rests precisely on its incompatibility with some of the assumptions that are widely accepted.

Taylor's position is very similar to that of David Hume's refutation of miracles, which, as I have shown elsewhere, is patently circular (Rao, 1981b). Like Hume, Taylor attempts to deny the existence of paranormal phenomena because he could find no normal explanations for them. The nonexistence of a phenomenon cannot be asserted on a priori or theoretical grounds when an empirical claim for its existence is made. To do so is to commit Hume's fallacy.

In *Anomalistic Psychology*, Leonard Zusne and Warren Jones cover much of the same ground as Neher in his *Psychology of Transcendence*. But they do so in a more systematic, comprehensive, and in some ways a more satisfactory manner than Neher. Two kinds of anomalistic phenomena are discussed in this book: (1) those psychological phenomena "that do not fit the current scientific world view" of most psychologists; and (2) the paranormal phenomena that can be explained at least in part "in terms of known psychological principles."

While references to parapsychological phenomena are made throughout the book, two chapters are devoted to an exclusive discussion of them. The first gives a brief introduction to the subject matter of parapsychology and the experimental methods and data analysis employed in psi research. There is also a brief discussion of some of the better known experiments such as the Pearce-Pratt experiment and the Pratt-Woodruff experiment. In assessing these experiments Zusne and Jones depend heavily on Hansel and accept uncritically many of his

criticisms. However, they seem to accept the evidence for the sheep-goat effect. Pointing out the failure of Layton and Turnbull to replicate their own results in a second experiment, Zusne and Jones write: "the effect is nonetheless there, for the number of studies that show positive results exceeds the number of negative studies by a substantial margin" (p. 388). They also refer without criticism to the experiments of Helmut Schmidt with REGs and conclude that of all the studies conducted in this area "about three-fourths show positive results."

The second chapter, "Explanations, Models, and Theories of ESP," also includes a discussion of PK. Raising the question of whether parapsychology is an art or science, Zusne and Jones point out that "as an art or skill, psi does not receive very high marks" (p. 417). But they seem to agree that parapsychology exhibits the two essential elements of science: a body of knowledge and the use of scientific method. Why, then, is there such a controversy about the field? The key to the controversy, according to Zusne and Jones, is that there is no explanation or known process to account for the way an ESP stimulus evokes a response. As they put it:

There is an unbridged gap between this [ESP] response and the presumed stimulus for this response, the unseen card in the deck. How does the subject learn what the card is? This gap requires a leap of faith or belief in the reality of the unknown psi process. Until this gap is bridged, parapsychologists and non-parapsychologists, the believers and the non-believers, the sheep and the goats will continue their debate without arriving at a resolution. (p. 420)

Despite the overall skeptical orientation of the book and several unsubstantiated critical statements that permeate the discussion of psi research, the general approach is open and tolerant. Unlike most other "debunkers" of psi, Zusne and Jones clearly see that criticisms such as that psi cannot be produced on demand and that there is no definitive experiment in parapsychology can be levelled equally well against many areas of psychological research. Additionally, they point out that the argument that "scientific laws do not fail in association with particular people . . . if used against psychology in a similar manner, would invalidate much of psychological research" (p. 419).

There is much else in the book I found interesting. The discussion of the origin, development, and persistence of belief systems is especially informative. It is not difficult to see that this analysis of anomalous beliefs applies in many ways to skeptical beliefs as well.

Skepticism, like belief, involves several shades — from the dim tenacious rejection of a claim to brilliant scientific repudiation. We may broadly distinguish among three kinds of skepticism. The first is *dogmatic* rejection, which involves the refusal to look at evidence. It is a tendency to reject anything that disturbs a well-trenched belief. In other words, when one accords zero probability for the occurrence of an event, nothing will ever alter this belief in its nonexistence. This kind of a rejection is simple and direct. We practice it more often than we are willing to accept. As a subjective tool it is useful to stabilize our beliefs and to economize our efforts.

To the degree that we are open to external inputs, we may become aware of claims that contradict our beliefs. A natural response in such a situation is simply to ignore the counter-claim. But persistence of such a claim would be disturbing because it would create dissonance and tension. This leads one to profess a public rejection of the claim. Such a rejection may take one of three forms. The first is directed against the antecedents of the claim and the claimant, resulting in character analysis of the proponent, innuendoes, and ad hominum arguments. Attempts at establishing guilt by association fall in to the same category. Parapsychology is often criticized for its antecedent occult associations. For example, a psi experiment is attacked on the grounds that the experimenter is a scientologist. Such strategies may be subjectively satisfying in coping with and even reducing dissonance, but would hardly contribute toward the settlement of the problem itself.

The second form is directed against the consequences of the claim. It involves a logical determination of the inconsistencies and contradictions in our knowledge of the world if the claim is accepted as genuine. It raises the question of meaning and explanation. Phenomena that make no intellectual sense and that have no adequate theory are rejected. This form of rejection is intellectually more respectable than dogmatic rejection because it is based on rational grounds and would indeed be valid if our understanding of the universe were perfect at any given time.

The third form of rejection is directed at the claim itself — its validity on scientific grounds. Science recognizes the fallibility of human intellect and our less-than-perfect grasp of the nature of the universe. Therefore, it does not determine the status of a claim on the basis of its antecedents or the

consequences. Instead it focuses on the evidence for the claim. It does not argue from antecedent improbability or manifest conflict with known "laws." It simply examines the claim for its scientific worth by appropriate empirical analyses and scrutiny.

Thus, we have skepticism born out of (1) our prejudice and presuppositions, (2) the nonintelligibility of the claim, and (3) its empirical invalidity. The first is appropriate and efficacious at the subjective level, but inadequate as a refutation of a claim, and would be considered as sheer dogmatism. The second is legitimate in discussing metaphysical issues and phenomena for which no empirical claims are made. But rational skepticism is clearly inappropriate to repudiate a scientific claim, i.e., a claim backed by empirical evidence. The only kind of skepticism that has a place in scientific discourse is the skepticism born out of appropriate empirical examination of the evidence.

With this perspective in mind, it is easy to see that much of the criticism against psi research is clearly irrelevant to the question of whether psi exists. Many of the rhetorical arguments against psi are no doubt a consequence of psi's anomalous nature which accords low subjective probabilities for its existence. Such arguments, however, do not help clarify the legitimate issues of contention between the proponents and the opponents of psychic claims. Instead, they reinforce dogmatism on the part of believers as well as disbelievers. A fruitful dialogue between the parapsychologists and the nondogmatic skeptics presupposes an understanding of the ground rules for evaluating empirical evidence. When such an understanding exists between psi researchers and their critics, they can then learn from each other. For example, the first criticisms of Rhine's work contributed considerably to the improvement of ESP test techniques. Again, the discussion of statistical procedures used to evaluate ESP results has been fruitful, and I believe consensus now exists in the general validity of these procedures even among the critics. More recently, the work of Marks and Kammann, which points out the possible sources of error in the remote viewing experiments of Targ and Puthoff, and the analysis by Betty Markwick (1978) of Soal's data which suggests data manipulation by Soal, are important critical contributions to the field of parapsychology.

Even if parapsychologists and skeptics agree on the ground rules for assessing the evidence of psi, it does not follow that they would all agree on the meaning of that evidence. What appears as compelling evidence to one may not be so compelling to

another. Inasmuch as our subjective probabilities tend to differ as regards the existence of psi, the requirements for acceptable evidence may vary. When dealing with anomalous phenomena that enjoy low replication rates, one should be reasonably cautious. Withholding judgment or demanding more evidence is neither improper nor unscientific. But demanding more evidence is not the same as denying the existing evidence.

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## Reviews

### THE SHADOW AND THE LIGHT: A Defence of Daniel Dunglas Home the Medium

by Elizabeth Jenkins

(London: Heinemann, 1982. Distributed in the U.S. in North Pomfret, VT. David and Charles. 275 pp. \$32.50, cloth.)

*Reviewed by Rodger I. Anderson*

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As the first full-scale study of Home to appear in English in over a generation, Elizabeth Jenkins' *The Shadow and the Light* aroused considerable interest among psychical investigators even before it came off the press. This was due in large part to the changed climate of thought regarding the kind of phenomena reported of Home. Where earlier researchers like Podmore were inclined to view Home as an artful juggler and mesmerist who was blessed with a singularly credulous clientele, modern investigators have learned to approach the subject in a much more open manner. Laboratory research in PK, improved techniques in the field investigation of RSPK, and semi-formal studies like the Philip experiment (Owen and Sparrow, 1976) have all combined to mitigate against the view that would consign all physical phenomena to the limbo of fraud and misperception. It is, in brief, no longer quite so glaringly true that a medium like Home can be branded a charlatan simply because of "that general presumption against the operation of the supposed new physical energy" needed to explain his feats (Podmore, 1902, Vol. 2, p. 243).

If it is no longer fashionable to dismiss Home out of hand as a congenial imposter who differed from others only in the depth of his cunning and his ability to cause several witnesses to concurrently hallucinate, it does not follow that we must perforce accept his feats as incontestably genuine. The presumption of fraud still remains for a variety of

reasons, not the slightest being the demonstrated proclivity of physical mediums for chicanery, but at least now there is no longer any reason to regard that presumption as indefeasible. Providing the evidence is of sufficient quantity and quality, the modern investigator may reasonably choose to accept Home as a genuine medium who produced an amazing plethora of inexplicable phenomena, some of which indicate that human personality survives death.

With the time so clearly propitious for a reassessment of physical mediumship in general and D.D. Home in particular, it is somewhat surprising that the first major study of the medium to appear in recent years should have so little to say that is novel or enlightening. Aside from containing a small amount of new information about Home's relationship with Robert Browning and the famous Lyon versus Home lawsuit, the book offers nothing original in the way of approach or fact that would enable the reader to accurately assess the honesty or otherwise of Home and his phenomena. This would not be a fault if Jenkins' purpose was only to write another popular biography of the medium, of which there already exist several, but her aim is evidently more ambitious. Subtitled "a defence," the book purports to demonstrate to any "impartial person" that Home's levitations and other psychokinetic effects were genuine and not the contrivances of fraud or illusion. In effect Jenkins offers to overturn the Podmorian approach to Home's phenomena by presenting the reader with a credible apologia for the medium, but a close reading of the book raises considerable doubts about her qualifications for the task. Podmore, whatever his other failings, clearly wrote from the perspective of psychical research, but Jenkins' viewpoint is much nearer that of Home himself, who according to one witness she cites, "appeared to regard unbelief in himself . . . as a mysterious dispensation he could not try to account for" (p. 190). In Jenkins' book there is none of Podmore's agonizing over the evidence, none of his careful sifting of reports to detect possible loopholes for fraud; rather, she somewhat cavalierly assumes that Home's effects were genuine and proceeds on that basis to unfold the story of his life as a miracle

worker of marvelous powers. That he may well have been, but Jenkins does nothing to persuade us of the fact beyond offering repeated assurances that such feats as are recorded of him are inexplicable as the products of fraud. Why this is so she does not say, nor does she mention that a number of Home's more wonderful prodigies — including his bodily elongations, imperviousness to fire, and even the phantom hands that seemed to melt away in the sitter's grasp — can be explained without resorting to the hypothesis of paranormal powers (e.g., Christopher, 1970, pp. 183-4; Price and Dingwall, 1922, p. 98). Of course this by no means proves that Home was a prestidigitator of prodigious talents, but it also does not prove that he was not. Here, as elsewhere, the investigator must make a decision that Jenkins seems to find quite baffling: Either these effects, rare and elusive even if genuine, are produced by wholly unknown means or they are the outcome of such common and well-understood causes as illusion, error, or conjuring. Stated in this fashion, the balance of probability is clearly against those who affirm the reality of such phenomena as due to a new motive power, a balance which can indeed be tipped but hardly by assuming with Jenkins that so many witnesses could not have been deluded. As Prince (1933) demonstrated, those who have been most emphatic in their declarations that a given effect was incomprehensible as the product of fraud or illusion have usually been the most easily deceived.

It would be easier to forgive a little credulity in Home's case on account of the sheer impressiveness of his performances, but Jenkins evinces an eagerness to believe that steps far beyond the special case of Home. Kate and Margaret Fox, for example, are presented as true mediums who confessed to fraud only because "deranged by alcoholism" (p. 8); we are not told how this presumed "derangement" enabled them to convincingly demonstrate the fraud on a public stage. The story of the "pedlar's ghost" that inaugurated modern spiritualism is said to have been vindicated by the discovery of human remains in the cellar of the Fox residence, though again we are not told that a physician who examined the remains pronounced them a hoax (Hyslop, 1909). Other mediums Jenkins regards favorably include the Davenport brothers, "two young Americans who possessed paranormal powers of the most extraordinary nature" (p. 160); William Eglinton, "the most remarkable medium after Home" (p. 178); Florence Cook, "who combined some considerable degree of psychic power with the mentality of a criminal" (p. 256); and Madame Blavatsky, "a woman of immense occult learning and amazing

supernormal powers" whose psychic gifts rivaled Home's own (p. 257). All of these individuals were either detected in fraud or accused of it in the most incriminating circumstances, but Jenkins makes no mention of that fact except to indicate in Cook's case that the evidence for her genuineness is "contradictory and confusing." The most charitable view to take of Jenkins' silence regarding the frauds and impostures of these so-called "mediums" is to suppose her innocent of the relevant facts. Such naivete regarding the history of psychical research may not have served Jenkins ill in her biographies of Elizabeth I or Jane Austen, but it is a debilitating defect in a book devoted to the most celebrated physical medium of all time.

Distortions such as these might be put down to simple carelessness did they not form part of an overall pattern of half truths and selected facts whose evident purpose is to provide what Jenkins is pleased to call a "defence." There is, to be sure, still evidence in her narrative of a somewhat nonchalant regard for facts, such as when she asserts that an 1831 poem by Poe was written to honor Sarah Helen Whitman when it was actually composed for another person entirely, but these are minor lapses compared with the concerted effort to rescue Home from what Jenkins perceives as the calumnies of his critics. Some of Home's less laudable personality traits, his vanity and lack of constancy, for example, are admitted but made to appear a part of his "child-like" disposition, which may be true but tends to weaken the force of the "weak and vain" descriptions left by many. It is, however, particularly with regard to the alleged exposures of Home that Jenkins' defensiveness for her subject is most evident. In one instance, for example, a witness described a "spirit hand" that appeared during a seance held in 1855. According to the narrative quoted by Jenkins,

The object appeared mainly at one or other of two separate distances from the medium. One of these distances was just that of his foot, the other that of his outstretched hand, and when the object receded or approached, I noticed that the medium's body or shoulder sank or rose in his chair accordingly. This was pretty conclusive to myself and the friend who accompanied me; but afterwards, upon the invitation of one of the dupes present, the "spirit hand" rose so high that we saw the whole connection between the medium's shoulder and arm, and the "spirit hand" dressed out on the end of his own. (p. 48)

Without additional confirmation this episode really counts for no more than what others "saw" during seances with Home, but Jenkins hastens to defend the medium against even the slightest imputation of fraud. "It has now been ascertained," she relates, quoting Zorab (1976), that what the witness probably

saw was an ectoplasmic form exuding from the body of the medium. Incredibly we are told that this supposition is warranted "in the present state of psychical research" despite "the fact that the substance has been counterfeited by fraudulent mediums," which only goes to prove "that its existence is accepted and its appearance sufficiently recognized to make an imitation intelligible." Fortified by this logic, the reader is asked to accept a highly controversial incident from the mediumship of the notorious "Dr." Francis Ward Monck, who Jenkins freely admits engaged in fraud but exonerates on this occasion because of the sheer incredibility of the performance. In this same connection it is worth noting that the leading witness to Monck's feat, A. R. Wallace, was led by a similar chain of thought to pronounce in favor of certain stage conjurers, their vociferous denials notwithstanding.

The other example of alleged deception in Home's career is the so-called "Biarritz incident." This is too involved to detail in a review, so I will here only indicate where Jenkins' account requires amendment. She first says that Dr. Barthez, the narrator of the incident, was not in attendance at the sitting and is thus a second-hand witness, which is quite possibly correct but by no means certain in view of the contrary testimony of his daughter. Second, she asserts that no statement exists supporting the alleged discovery from anyone other than Barthez and Morio de l'Isle, the person who supposedly detected the fraud. Again, this is not quite true. The Empress Eugenie, who was in attendance at the seance in question, several times confirmed the story to different members of the royal family, though to outsiders she denied the report on the ground that no one could have the temerity to impose upon royalty (Solovovo, 1930). Third, Jenkins misrepresents the Empress' attitude toward Home. The Empress indeed "admitted . . . the reality of paranormal phenomena, quoting precise and detailed examples," but this was said not in reference to Home's phenomena but to spontaneous psychic experiences of people known to her (Osty, 1936, pp. 122-123). She also, and this is an important point in view of her knowledge of what went on at the Biarritz sitting, did not affirm Home's complete integrity as Jenkins alleges. Rather, the view of the Empress, which was also that of the court, was that Home's powers, whatever their exact nature, did not preclude adroit conjuring (Metternich, 1921). If this opinion was widely shared among Home's sitters, and there appears some evidence suggesting it was (e.g., Dingwall, 1962, p. 118; Myers and Barrett, 1889, p. 122), an occasional "slip-up" on the me-

dium's part would be no reason to raise the sensational hue and cry that Jenkins supposes must have followed if Barthez's report was true.

Whether or not the Biarritz incident can be counted as evidence of imposture on Home's part, Jenkins' handling of this and other controversial incidents in Home's life proves her book primarily a work of hagiography rather than biography. In this it neither stands above nor beneath other books about Home that have treated the medium in a less than dispassionate manner. Wyndham's scurrilous attack, *Mr. Sludge, the Medium* (1937), for example, portrayed Home as an unmitigated scoundrel without, however, offering any real evidence of rascality on Home's part. Jean Burton's *Heyday of a Wizard* (1944), though far more satisfying as biography, similarly pictured Home as an imposter who played the role of medium so convincingly that he finally deceived even himself, but again no particular facts were advanced in favor of the interpretation. Jenkins' book, like these others, also approaches Home from a definite perspective that seems to follow less from the evidence presented than from certain assumptions the author brings to that evidence. The adequacy or otherwise of these respective views can be decided upon the ground of how much sense they make of the medium's entire life and career as determined by the most comprehensive and searching scholarship, but it is precisely on this point that the efforts of Wyndham, Burton, and Jenkins prove themselves least satisfactory. It is difficult to make sense of Home as a conjurer, however adept, in view of the Amsterdam sittings or those numerous seances in which the so-called "earthquake effect" was exhibited (e.g., Zorab, 1970), but it seems equally difficult to attribute everything he did to a new motive power in view of the evidence suggesting, as one witness put it, that "when his spiritual powers fall short, he does his best to eke them out with imposture" (Hawthorne, 1883, p. 427). In short, what is wanted is a more comprehensive view that allows sufficient room for *all* of the evidence in Home's case, not just that which portrays him as either a master of chicanery and illusion or an evoker of spirits extraordinaire. Perhaps now historians can begin to explore this broad, promising middle ground which neither Jenkins nor her predecessors fully perceived.

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## A COLLECTION OF NEAR-DEATH RESEARCH READINGS

by Craig R. Lundahl

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*Reviewed by F. Gordon Greene*

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Publication of Craig Lundahl's anthology marks a new stage in the development of near-death studies. This book offers knowledgeable readers a chance to pause and look back at the beginnings and early activities in the nascent field of near-death experience (NDE) investigation. For new readers it provides a fairly representative sample of the scien-

tific research and theory into NDEs conducted in the last decade.

The book consists of thirteen papers, divided into five sections. Ten of these papers have appeared previously in various scholarly journals. One of the three yet to be published summarizes the already well-known study of one hundred and two near-death subjects by Kenneth Ring. Thus only two papers contain entirely new material.

The first of these entirely new contributions forms by itself the initial section of the book. "Near-Death Experiences and the Unscientific Scientist," by Harold Widdison, criticizes the attitudes of mainstream scientific skeptics regarding the possible transcendental or supernormal import of NDEs. He constructs a scenario similar to Thomas Kuhn's famous "structure of scientific revolutions" model. Scientists and scholars skeptical of parapsychological and transpersonal orientations in near-death studies are seen as members of the "old guard" dedicated to the suppression of "uncomfortable facts" and to the preservation of existing "paradigms." Researchers open to parapsychological and transpersonal interpretations of NDEs are viewed as revolutionaries intent on the advancement of science.

Widdison delivers many solid arguments on the issues in question and I feel his general thrust accurately describes the current status of NDE studies in the scientific community at large.

However, the position of not even one scientific skeptic is specifically cited or referred to, in or out of context. The effect is to lessen the impact of what might otherwise have been an even more impressive inquiry into the nature of scientific narrowmindedness.

The second entirely new contribution to NDE literature is John Audette's "Historical Perspectives on Near-Death Episodes and Experiences." It forms, by itself, the historical section of the book. A wealth of little-known historical information relevant to NDEs is found in this fascinating piece.

Audette's paper suffers from at least one drawback, however. Although his intent is to demonstrate the universality of NDEs, practically all of the cases documented are from the Western world from the 18th century to the present. Surely a few specific examples of NDEs from ancient and medieval times and a few more cases from other cultures would have made this a far more representative historical review.

The next piece, "Cardiac Arrest Remembered" by R.L. MacMillan and K.W.G. Brown, inaugurates the largest section in the book which is concerned with recent scientific studies and reports of NDEs. It

presents and discusses an intriguing cardiac arrest related NDE account from the late 1960s.

"Depersonalization in the face of Life Threatening Danger: A Description" by Russell Noyes, Jr. and Roy Kletti follows. This paper typifies many other contributions made by Noyes and his various colleagues to near-death research. A number of interesting NDE accounts are presented. The phenomenologically rich NDE questionnaire employed elsewhere by Noyes structures the paper.

Osis and Haraldsson then detail the results of their cross-cultural deathbed vision study constructed from surveys of physicians and nurses in the U.S. and India. The use of statistics that enabled them to gather so much weighty data seemingly favorable to the prospect that some aspect of human consciousness survives physical death has, in my opinion, yet to be seriously challenged. Most of this evidence suggestive of survival was related to the matching of complex variables. These included correlations between the dying patient's mood and clarity of consciousness with the reported quality, content, and intents of the envisioned apparitions.

An excerpt from Moody's best seller *Life After Life* follows. The experiential stages of NDEs are outlined in Moody's concise, clear, and thoroughly engaging style.

Ring's description of his NDE study designed to scientifically scrutinize Moody's informal investigation is next. In this, the first attempted statistical appraisal of Moody's NDE work, Ring generally confirmed Moody's findings.

The NDE study of Michael Sabom and Sarah Kreutziger follows with another attempted statistical confirmation of Moody's research. The same basic statistical design employed by Ring was used and, as with Ring's investigation, the core characteristics of Moody's model were confirmed.

Charles Garfield's "The Dying Patient's Concern with Life After Death" is next. This brief and informal discussion by a professional oncologist renders a timely reminder. Despite the widely disseminated picture of NDEs as conduits to ecstatic pleasure and seemingly transcendental insights, NDEs are sometimes accompanied by feelings of extreme discomfort and fear. Garfield's collection of several hellish NDEs is a caveat that negative NDEs cannot be entirely explained away as the idiosyncratic discoveries of one zealously inspired researcher (Rawlings, 1980).

"Near-Death Experiences of Mormons" by Lundahl is next. It reviews and discusses eleven incidents of NDEs among Mormons between the years 1838 and 1976. The accounts are provocative

and the experiential uniformity they share with accounts from other NDE studies provides further striking evidence favoring the universality of NDEs.

Kenneth Ring and Stephen Franklin's "Do Suicide Survivors Report Near-Death Experiences?" concludes Part Three. This was the first attempt to seriously ascertain in what ways, if any, the NDEs of suicide survivors varied from NDEs induced by accident or illness. The frequency and content of suicide-attempt-initiated NDEs were found to conform with the general structure of illness and accident-related NDEs.

Michael Grosso's "Toward an Explanation of Near-Death Phenomena" comprises the theoretical section. Grosso examines a wide variety of recently postulated theories for the NDE. Various explanations such as drug ingestion, sensory deprivation, cerebral anoxia, temporal lobe seizure, religious expectation, and others are examined and all found to be inadequate. Grosso ends by positing a Jungian approach to the NDE derived from the concept of the collective unconscious and its contents, the archetypes. After briefly defining the archetype as "the point of intersection between personal time and timeless transpersonal being" (p. 223), Grosso introduces the notion of an "Archetype of Death." This "Archetype of Death" may be conceived of as a collective psychic structure, the purpose of which is to assist humans to grow or evolve spiritually during death transition. Grosso stresses the need to integrate parapsychological findings into this Jungian model.

The final selection is Lundahl's "Directions in Near-Death Research." He states that over three thousand documented cases of NDEs have been collected, demonstrating that such phenomena are authentic. Lundahl then briefly reviews the kinds of research he feels might provide for the further development of near-death studies. Several parapsychologically oriented strategies potentially relevant to NDE research are mentioned. The prospect that NDEs may have a bearing on the question of post-mortem survival is also noted. In addition, a few examples are given illustrating the possible psychotherapeutic value of near-death studies. Lundahl ends with the observation that the study of NDEs may eventually have an enormous impact on all of our lives.

I have two criticisms of the collection in addition to those already mentioned. Lundahl introduces the term "circumthanatology" as a name for near-death research in a somewhat confusing manner. Nowhere is it clearly stated that it is he who is introducing this term and nowhere does he argue for it as an appropriate name for the field. Finally, the



observations of some of the more materialistically inclined thinkers (e.g. Alcock, 1979; Siegel, 1980) interested in NDEs would have greatly improved the representative balance of the book. Almost all of Lundahl's selections are either neutral or positive in tone to parapsychological and transpersonal understandings of human nature. How can researchers open to transcendental interpretations of NDEs ever hope to attract wider interest to this viewpoint when their forums fail to include the voices of those who are more skeptically minded?

Despite these problems I feel that Lundahl's anthology is a valuable contribution to NDE literature and will serve as a useful guide for NDE research in years to come.

#### References

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