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CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE PARANORMAL: AN INTRODUCTION

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Since the founding of the Society for Psychical Research in London in 1882 and its American counterpart in 1885, the paranormal has become the subject of serious academic enquiry. Led by philosophers such as A. J. Balfour, Henri Bergson, C. D. Broad, William James, and Henry Sidgwick, it has come to be regarded as a legitimate, though controversial area of study. Most facets of paranormal phenomena, those at least that seem to pertain to human states and powers, have come to be included within the distinctive discipline of psychical research or *parapsychology*, a term coined by J. B. Rhine.¹ The subject matter is abbreviated as *psi*: apparent “parapsychological factors or faculties collectively.”² Formal experimental work was pioneered by people like Rhine at Duke University, S. G. Soal at London University, and W. Carrington at Cambridge University.³ The *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* began circulation over eighty years ago, and today various refereed journals publish extensively on it.⁴

The paranormal has come to include in its field of reference a rather wide variety of apparent anomalies that involve states and powers that are ostensibly not explicable in terms of normal theories of perception and mechanical causation. Traditionally, it has been associated with extrasensory perception (ESP), within which are included telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, psychokinesis (PK) or telekenesis, and mediumistic communications.⁵ However, in an attempt to systematize intelligibly these and related phenomena, a helpful distinction might be made between (1) receptive-psi, signifying the psi which focusses on the receiving subject; and (2) expressive-psi, signifying the psi which focusses on the agent. A further distinction will also be made regarding

(3) otherworldly-psi, which posits the possibility of discarnate phenomena involved in various kinds of psi-reception and psi-expression.⁶

Receptive-psi includes (a) telepathy (where information or influence originates from another mind, rather than through normal sensory modes); (b) clairvoyance or remote viewing, clairaudience, and psychometry (where seen or heard information or influence originates from a physical object or event, rather than through normal sensory modes); (c) precognition (where information or influence occurs about the future); (d) postcognition (where past events are known without normal sensory means); (e) super-psi (exceptional psi-abilities); and (f) animal-psi (anpsi) (involving telepathy, clairvoyance, and clairaudience with respect to animals, including, for example, psi-trailing, homing, and healing).

Expressive-psi includes psychokinesis (where people, animals, and objects are directly influenced by a mind without normal sensory modes), which includes: (a) teleportation (movement of objects by PK), (b) hypnotism, (c) psychic healing and psychic stimulation, (d) levitation (where the subject elevates without normal means), (e) materialization (where objects are materialized from nowhere), and (f) apportionment (where objects disappear and reappear in another location).

The field of study is further expanded and complicated by the inclusion of the possibilities of the influence of discarnate spirits or forms of disembodied existence in explaining certain paranormal phenomena.⁷ In such contexts, psi events would involve realities beyond or distinct from that of this natural world. This obviously moves the paranormal beyond the discipline of parapsychology proper, and leads Donald Evans, for example, to distinguish between the possibilities of "this-worldly paranormal" (1 and 2 above) and "otherworldly paranormal."⁸ Although otherworldly paranormal phenomena might possibly be explicable solely in terms given for (1) psi-reception and (2) psi-expression,⁹ it is not clear that they are subcategories of these types, and they are usually described initially in terms of otherworldly reference. For systematic clarity I include them under a separate type, labelled "otherworldly-psi."

Otherworldly-psi includes (a) mediumistic communications (involving telepathy, clairvoyance, clairaudience, and automatic writing or speaking), (b) apparitions and poltergeists, (c) angelology, (d) spirit-possession, (e) out of body experiences or astral projection, (e) near-death experiences, and (g) past-life phenomena associated with rebirth or reincarnation claims.

The complexity of the subject and the advances made in the area naturally pose immense difficulties in coming to understand these phe-

nomena and assessing their status. For example, isolating specific forms of receptive-psi and distinguishing in particular cases between receptive-psi and expressive-psi are notorious problems. Moreover, much specialization has occurred in the context of an ongoing accumulation of data. Experimental techniques have been refined and there has been much significant research done on the role of variables in the experimental dynamic.¹⁰ For example, besides experimental methods and materials, various distinctive attitudes of the subjects clearly affect the data.¹¹ But there are wide-ranging variables pertaining to experimenter expectations and attitudes which also affect the experimental climate, ranging from fatigue to sexual attraction towards the subject.¹² As a consequence of the appreciation of the various physical, personal, and social factors surrounding the experimental climate of psi experiments, there is much controversy over the validity of specific research.¹³

But the popular appeal of the paranormal compounds the difficulties in studying and assessing the phenomena. The literature pertaining to it is vast but uneven in critical scope. Its treatment ranges from popular overviews to rigorous technical analyses, both sympathetic and disparaging of the various specific or general phenomena.

A cursory survey of the current publications reveals a wide variety of reaction to this complex area, from naively accepting the veracity of all the purported happenings to fiercely resisting the truth of any of it. It is a very controversial field in that it holds powerful emotional appeal, both positive and negative, for all segments of society. This is because its nature and status has significant implications for religious/atheistic, philosophical, and scientific attitudes and beliefs. It is a sensitive topic; it is intimately related, one way or the other, with fundamental experiences, attitudes, and worldviews.

Indeed, recent surveys would indicate that at least some paranormal experiences are not that uncommon. George Hansen notes "that over half the population in the U.S. have had psychic experiences and believe in the reality of the phenomena."¹⁴ Since the 1970s there has been a significant rise in interest in the paranormal, including the development of the New Age movement as well as a more general popular openness to various forms of spiritualism, angelology, and paradeath phenomena and afterlife possibilities.¹⁵

On the other hand, there are those who are deeply skeptical of paranormal possibilities. One example is the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), whose magazine, *The Skeptical Inquirer*, includes over 35,000 subscribers. This group is very media-proactive and influential, especially amongst the highly educated, despite the fact that it has largely abandoned scientific

study and generally disregards the serious research of refereed journals of parapsychology. CSICOP focusses upon an "ongoing, organized debunking of the paranormal," which it considers to be characterized "by irrationalism, subjectivism, and obscurantism."¹⁶

The point of this volume is to examine critically such sweeping claims—to attempt to clarify the rational status of various distinctive facets of the paranormal in terms of recent studies and developments. In light of the radical divergence between its supporters and detractors, as well as the immense complexity of the topic, it seems crucial to bring some critical perspective to it. The essays in *Critical Reflections on the Paranormal* examine honestly and judiciously various aspects of the nature and implications of the paranormal, in light of contemporary treatments given by partisans, skeptics, and neutral observers of the phenomena. They involve reflections on assumptions, support, and criticism of various paranormal phenomena that have been generated by past and contemporary researchers and commentators on the field.

Hugo Meynell begins the focus in chapter 2, "On Investigation of the So-Called Paranormal," by distinguishing between three possible kinds of skeptical attitudes towards the paranormal. *Pseudoskepticism* assumes that all significant data that is gathered in support of various paranormal realities are the consequence of deception or lies on the part of relevant participants. This form is contrasted with legitimate skepticisms: *Skepticism-a* is the application of every paranormal claim, including those of their very possibility or impossibility, to appropriate measures of testing. These he adapts from Bernard Lonergan's epistemological framework: one ought to establish the nature of the phenomena, explore the various possible modes of its explanation, and tentatively determine that which is "the most convincing and economical," including an openness to evidence which would falsify such a judgment. *Skepticism-b* is the view that might follow from the application of the methods of skepticism-a: that no genuine paranormal events actually happen with respect to specific classes of the phenomena. Meynell considers both skepticism-a and -b to be legitimate attitudes, though he does not think that the application of skepticism-a in some areas of the paranormal will justify skepticism-b. The specific paranormal phenomena which he begins to examine in terms of the methodology of skepticism-a are cases of precognition, mediumistic phenomena, and afterlife possibilities.

Meynell uses his discussion of the research of J. B. Rhine and S. G. Soal as a springboard to raise the problems of fraud, natural law, experimenter variables, and replication. Fraud, a charge raised in the case of Soal's experiments, is always a possibility in paranormal activity and

research, but Meynell insists that one ought not to subscribe to this explanation in cases where the evidence does not warrant it. For one thing, it is not clear that evidence against paranormal realities is always initially stronger than that which favors them. Perhaps paranormal powers and realities are not beyond the laws of nature; moreover, sometimes the evidence appears just as strongly in support of paranormal phenomena as other evidence tends to support particular natural laws. This kind of cumulative evidence means that one should not confidently *assume* the infallibility of scientific laws, nor presume deception at the outset.

Meynell also notes how skeptical attitudes might very well affect negatively parapsychological experiments. Performance proficiency in fields other than the paranormal is clearly affected by the attitudes of colleagues or observers, be they supportive or hostile. Meynell sees no reason why civility and encouragement on the part of the investigators is not compatible with critical acumen, especially since the expectation of fraudulence is unjustified as an assumption.

But even positive experimenter attitudes do not ensure successful replication of significant results. Productive participants of experiments often cannot even repeat their own performances, let alone other participants repeating successfully the same experiment. The issue is compounded by the "file drawer" theory, which supposes the existence of many unsuccessful experiments that go unreported. The database then remains incomplete, and the favorable results of those reported experiments are misleadingly distorted. But Meynell argues that recent research suggests that this problem is exaggerated, and in a number of cases reasonable file drawer estimates have not adversely affected the success of experiments.

Replication in the area of mediumistic performances is currently hindered by the apparent reluctance of contemporary practitioners to subject themselves to laboratory analyses. Although Meynell does not propose possible reasons for this reluctance, he constructively relates mediumistic accounts to afterlife issues. On its own, mediumistic evidence for afterlife possibilities is not very persuasive. But in combination with near-death accounts, as well as the many documented instances of automatic writing, clairvoyance, and astral projection, Meynell argues that the case for an afterlife becomes very strong indeed. This body of evidence in support of afterlife possibilities is further bolstered by recent work in support of past-life memories. Meynell argues that the cumulative strength of the source material is quite strong, "about the same order of evidential support as the theory of evolution." One must either agree that the case is quite formidable or postu-

late a massive, independent fraudulence or hallucination. Moreover, he closes his essay by suggesting a general account of personal identity in these contexts. He speaks of "quasi memories," with which one might identify psychologically and physically in various ways, and by which one can coherently suppose she is the same conscious subject with that of previous occurrences.

Like Hugo Meynell, Donald Evans is concerned in chapter 3 with the skeptical attitudes and assumptions brought to bear upon paranormal phenomena. In "Parapsychology: Merits and Limits," he focuses on the influence of positivistic scientific methodologies in parapsychological studies. Early in this chapter, Evans distinguishes between "causal mechanism" approaches to the paranormal and "psi-abilities." Causal mechanistic understandings arise from positivistic assumptions which insist on accounting for phenomena solely in terms of physical mechanisms. This approach demands proof that anomalies associated with the paranormal are not merely coincidental phenomena and seeks to explain them in terms of a scientific account of causal mechanisms. But this rules out the very possibility of psi-abilities involving influence without physical intervention (PK) or perception without the physical senses (ESP); in this view these labels signify anomalous events, not possible realities or abilities. On the other hand, the psi-abilities approach involves an assumption that agents can be causes ("*John moves the billiard cue*") even where we do not know what mechanical causation involving local contact is at work. This applies whether the human abilities be ordinary (moving a cue) or psi (PK).

Positivists assume that the only way to come to know reality is through the scientific method, insofar as it illuminates hidden causal mechanisms in terms of the principles of isolation, repeatability, quantifiability, and theoretical plausibility. Evans summarizes these principles, then discusses some of their limitations within the positivistic framework. Causal mechanisms cannot explain how mental activities might initiate physical changes, and there is evidence to suggest that consciousness can and does affect changes in the brain. Moreover, positivism assumes that the scientist is an agent who can apply at will the principles of science; it presupposes agent causality. Although clearly not all agent causality involves action of the mind upon matter, the positivist scientist herself assumes agent causality in her actions. Evans uses these arguments to support his view that human reality is more than what scientific methodology can uncover and explain.

This does not mean that scientific principles have no relevance to parapsychology. Not only do scientific experiments have a positive bearing upon attempts to prove or disprove the reality of psi-abilities,

they also can illuminate the specific conditions within which various psi-abilities might obtain. Evans begins to illustrate these two points through an examination of the official statement of the Parapsychological Association. This statement calls for explanatory causal mechanisms to account for apparent anomalies. But to ignore statistically significant data until specific physical mechanisms are established is an unwarranted dogma. So too is the requirement to eliminate all alternative explanations, if the demand excludes the possibility of a psi-abilities explanation altogether.

Evans goes on to cite some of the difficulties mentioned by Meynell regarding replication in parapsychology, and responds to the issue optimistically. Perhaps psychic ability is not restricted only to certain gifted individuals and improves with practice. Moreover, although there are certain subjective and circumstantial factors involved in significant experiments, these can be replicated, even if the replication is not of an "impersonal" scientific nature.

Evans illustrates his views in reference to a series of apparently statistically significant psychokinetic experiments performed by William Braud and Marilyn Schlitz. The experiments, involving primarily nongifted psychics, focused not on uncovering causal mechanisms but rather on agent-causality as this might pertain to the practical application of psychic healing. Braud and Schlitz took careful measures to rule out placebo-explanations and fraud, as well as seven other possible nonkinetic explanations, including other paranormal powers. Although it is likely the experiments required positive openness and motivation towards success, these kinds of conditions are consistent with a variety of other human capabilities and their replication possibilities are not restricted to gifted psychics.

But also in reference to replication, Evans suggests that direct access to paranormal phenomena might be beyond the limits of strict science. Postivistic methodological assumptions restrict experience possibilities to those that can be impersonally verified. But if certain energies, powers, or events involve private experiences which arise only through a relevant process of personal change, positivistic perspectives cannot judge such truth claims, for these are not publicly observable phenomena, though some of the effects of these experiences might be. Evans says "the *meaning* of many statements is intrinsically linked with the *experiences* on which they are partly or entirely based and . . . many of these experiences are not accessible to people, or are only partly accessible, unless they undergo the appropriate *process* of personal change." So Evans argues both that it is rational to question impersonalist scientific dogma which insists we can only come to know reality

through scientific methods, and that one should take seriously certain cases of alleged paranormal happenings. Even a single case, if it is adequately detailed, can provide reason for an individual to regard paranormal powers or cognitions as veridical. Citing unusual experiences arising in informal meditative settings, he suggests that the most effective ground from which to judge these happenings "is one's own personal experience of one's own psi-abilities."

David Ray Griffin further elaborates upon elements discussed by Evans, focusing in chapter 4 on the history and nature of mechanical causation, the various attitudes towards the paranormal, and the implications for the philosophy of religion and theology should certain paranormal powers come to be accepted. In "Why Critical Reflection on the Paranormal is so Important—and so Difficult," Griffin acknowledges the prevalence of the kind of pseudoskepticism cited by Hugo Meynell, and stresses the importance of an open-minded treatment of the evidence. The hostile and contemptuous a priori attitude on the part of many scientists and philosophers is explained by Griffin in terms of the serious threat parapsychology poses for the assumed basis of modern science—mechanical causation.

Parapsychology brings into question the assumption that all causation is a matter of direct contiguous action of one physical particle upon another. Griffin gives a brief account of paranormal events within the framework of the general categories of extrasensory perception and psychokinesis. These paranormal powers all seem to involve action at a distance or a nonmaterial causal influence, in contrast to the local contact associated with mechanical causation. Griffin suggests that historically the idea of action at a distance, or noncontiguous causation, was rejected over time in response to religious concerns that miracles might be interpreted in terms of natural influences, and because of worries that witchcraft might be theoretically grounded in such a perspective. Then interpretations of the theory of gravitation, dualistic perspectives, and even cosmological arguments all contributed to a belief that by the early modern period held that noncontiguous causal influence only occurred in supernatural intervention, a possibility which itself was eventually generally denied as materialism displaced dualism in the late modern period.

Griffin argues that a number of factors have contributed to the assumption by most contemporary scientists and philosophers of the impossibility of noncontiguous causal influence. The most important of these is the element of wishful thinking that influences two distinctive methodological orientations—the rational and the empirical. The rational is a methodology guided by paradigms, where prior beliefs frame the

interpretation, and the empirical is the data-led, where data determines belief. Empirical evidence and rational argument favorable to parapsychology is regularly overlooked by both data-led empiricists and paradigmatic rationalists because of hopes and fears which include the potential frustration of scientific progress, the undermining of the authority and prestige of science, the presumed dangerous powers of parapsychics, the subversion of the supernatural claims of Christianity, and the revisions of science that parapsychological realities would entail.

But Griffin suggests that such revisions implicit to the acceptance of the paranormal, though significant, are not radically extreme. They would involve the inclusion of a second form of efficient causation—noncontiguous causal influence—which implies a mind-matter distinction (not an ontological dualism), but this feature can fit coherently into the current scientific worldview. Moreover, the hypothesis of this “action at distance” helps to provide an intelligible and coherent account of freedom, physical realism, and time, all of which are assumed phenomena that a solely sensationist theory of perception cannot explain.

From a religious, theological standpoint, the reality of parapsychology has significant implications. Noncontiguous causal influence explains how miracles might be perceived as no different from other forms of divine causation, and suggests that psychokinetic powers in the cases of extraordinary healing might be understood in terms of a divine-human cooperation. This would counter charges of divine impassibility or arbitrariness. More importantly, agent-causality provides an analogy within which one might conceive of divine activity in the world. If true, it also helps to support claims of religious experience, which in a strictly sensationist doctrine of perception are impossible. The paranormal thus might provide a credible analogue that gives claims of religious experience plausibility, including the possibility of the experience of nonphysical values as “one dimension of the constant experience of God.” Moreover, postmortem afterlife possibilities of a disembodied nature are given intelligibility and plausibility in this paranormal perspective, in terms of ESP and PK. Out-of-body experiences, near-death accounts, past-life memories, and mediumistic phenomena can then be interpreted as evidence in support of afterlife possibilities.

In “Reflections on Incorporeal Agency,” Terence Penelhum extends this discussion about the relevance of paranormal perspectives for religious beliefs, focusing specifically in chapter 5 on the possibility of noncontiguous causal influence. He provides an analysis of the nature of the activity of an incorporeal personal being, and develops the implications of such human spirit agency for the idea of divine agency.

The idea of spirit agency involves an effective action on an object external to the agent's body. Penelhum refers to a Cartesian model of normal human agency in order to illustrate spirit agency. This begins with a mental stage, involving choice or volition, which precedes both the body's movement and the actual movement of the object in question. Spirit agency would eliminate the body movement that occurs in normal processes of agency. In such cases either the judgment or intention directly affects the object (psychokinesis) or the object takes the role of the agent's body—where the object is "animated" by the agent's mind (animation).

In discussing these possibilities, Penelhum stresses the distinction between merely thinking or wishing a deed and the actual doing of a deed. He argues from this crucial dynamic that spirit agency involves the postulation of a mind-body dualism because it requires that the location of the efficacy of the intention, and not just its conception, be somewhere other than the body. There seem to be two possibilities: the intention is to be found either in the mental stage (PK) or in the object which acts as the body in the animation theory.

Penelhum analyzes both possible options of spirit agency. In the context of dualistic perspectives it has been suggested that PK is a power that is manifested in all normal mind-body interactions. In this view the movement of external objects is not an extraordinary claim—it is simply an extension of a power we exhibit in our normal unconscious body movement. But Penelhum points out that PK cannot be associated with the normal mental control of one's own body. Indeed, this unmediated control over one's own body is one of the conditions of it being one's own body; typical PK claims do not characterize the moved object as an aspect of the agent in question, and they moreover require conscious mental volition on the part of the subject.

On the other hand, the animation theory is sometimes perceived as more economical than PK for it appears not to involve the inner mental act. Penelhum questions this opinion. Although the animation theory involves the idea that the spirit temporarily occupies the moved object, the process is not "equivalent to the object's moving itself." As in the understanding of PK, volitional features of the animation process must be mental in nature in order to speak legitimately in terms of animation of spirit agency rather than those of the self-movement of an object. Though the animation theory suggests that the object plays a role similar to the spiritual agent's body, it must postulate, like the PK model, mental acts associated with the volitional agency of the spirit.

These considerations of both PK and animation do not illuminate the nature of the powers postulated in moving external objects through

noncontiguous contact, nor do they clarify controversial issues of personal identity that are normally settled with reference to bodies, such as the processes of disembodied spirit-individuation or agent-identity through time. But Penelhum's reflections do have relevance to theological questions. Although the idea of incorporeality is sometimes cited as crucial in avoiding anthropocentric conceptions of God, Penelhum thinks that it suggests with respect to spirit agency that the mental life of God be "in some respects rather like ours."

Even if PK is suggested as a plausible account of divine activity, we still need to postulate a mental act prior to the movement in order to secure the distinction between God and the objects of divine activity. But this requirement of an effect mediated by an inner act would appear to impinge upon the notion of divine omnipotence. Moreover, to suggest an account of quasi-embodied animation does not solve the issue. Even if we propose an unmediated agent-control on the part of the Divine, likened somewhat to a person's mind-control over her own body, we must still postulate some kind of inner mental act distinct from the movement in order to maintain the distinction between the divine spirit and the object of activity, and thereby avoid the charge of pantheism.

There are of course significant differences between human intentions and the idea of divine intentions: God does not attempt and fail in action, nor does the Divine have conflicts or changes of intention, as humans do. Although these differences accentuate the necessity of analogy in human reference to divine intentions, Penelhum nevertheless insists "there would seem to be a logical requirement that there be some feature of the divine mental life that performs the same role or function that inner expressions of intention play in our case, and in that of finite spirits, if there are any."

In chapter 6, Susan Armstrong also relates issues in paranormal phenomena to religious questions, though she focuses specifically on the question of the postmortem survival of animals. In "Souls in Process: A Theoretical Inquiry into Animal Psi," she suggests with David Griffin that psi supports afterlife possibilities. She develops her argument in the context of an overview of the varied evidence of animal psi. Like Donald Evans, who stresses the significance of single instances of alleged paranormal happenings, she affirms the importance of spontaneous psi phenomena, generally referred to as anecdotal evidence. Although the weaknesses in such an approach are many, including distorted accounting, lack of replication, and sampling and investigative biases, they avoid the difficulties of sterile experimental settings which can inhibit performance, and they can have some bearing upon the

more careful and systematic analysis of the other two kinds of evidence, the formal experimental or semi-experimental.

Armstrong goes on to illustrate a wide variety of all three kinds of evidence that has accumulated over the last sixty years with respect to animal psi. Although she acknowledges the various difficulties in testing both human and animal psi, as well as the questions and limitations of some of the experiments, she judges the data of the varied studies to be significant. It "suggests that individual animals of many species exhibit some degree of psi functioning," but typically as psi recipients rather than givers.

In attempting to account for these phenomena, she proposes A. N. Whitehead's "process thought." In Whitehead's metaphysics, ultimate reality is depicted in terms of "actual occasions" or momentary events. The defining characteristics of things are a result of a sequence "of occasions of experience" which vary in complexity according to the arrangement of the "situation" or world within which they are positioned. Past actual occasions contribute to an actual occasion through the feeling or "prehending" of these previous occasions into the actual, which gives it form. In this way it becomes an enduring entity of either an aggregate form, with no dominant member, or a form with a dominant entity, which can be called a "dominant occasion." In the latter type, the dominant member consolidates not only subordinate entities but also subordinate societies of past and actual occasions. The human psyche is an example of a very complicated and centrally organized dominant occasion, intimately connected to a vast array of past and actual occasions which play a significant role in its development and constitution, as various prehensions integrate these into momentary experiences.

It is with respect to the experiences of these actual occasions that the paranormal becomes prominent. Normal sensory experience involves a presentational immediacy through temporal events that are linked contiguously together. Its immediate nature gives it a general clarity and consciousness of perception that is not typical of paranormal perception via the "mode of causal efficacy." This second, nonsensory, mode of perception is grounded in the metaphysical relation of occasions of experience, where feeling or intuition of past and other occasions discloses reality directly, "without other actual occasions in between." The transmission of these intuitive prehensions is immediate, bypassing typical contiguous chains through atemporal forms which link various occasions together at subtle levels. Armstrong speaks of "hybrid physical prehension," wherein earlier occasions feel themselves in the context of the actual occasion. This means that usually this immediate conceptual prehension is unconscious, hidden by the contiguous

consciousness of the present actual occasion. Sensory consciousness mediates psi activities by its very attention to present circumstances. But occasionally an immediate prehension becomes a conscious phenomenon, thereby revealing this noncontiguous mode of perception to consciousness.

Although animal psi is primarily receptive, rather than expressive, it nevertheless suggests that animals are constituted by distinctive psyches. Armstrong argues that because evidence would suggest that animals participate in hybrid physical prehension, they must have minds like, though simpler than, humans. Insofar as one maintains human postmortem survival on the grounds of the nature of the psyche, one should extend this belief to animals. She points to evidence of animal apparitions to bolster her argument, and closes her paper with a summary of religious perspectives on animal immortality, including four kinds of arguments to support the possibility: divine justice, an extension of the idea of spirituality beyond that of human rationality, universal salvation, and divine love.

Extending the focus on this theme of afterlife possibilities, Heather Botting examines paradeath phenomena, or near-death experiences in chapter 7. In "Medico-scientific Assumptions Regarding Paradeath Phenomena: Explanation or Obfuscation?" she outlines in the context of various illustrations two possible kinds of explanations of the phenomena. Standard physiological accounts depict such experiences as the consequence of drugs or anesthetics, or brain trauma or dysfunction, wherein anoxia leads to a disruption of the temporal lobe, releasing endorphins into the bloodstream. These in turn lead to deluded visions and feelings of euphoria displacing the intense fear involved in the physical trauma. The other option centers the cause in the mind rather than the brain, suggesting a sentient and conscious disembodied existence to account for the phenomena of paradeath experiences.

Botting cites the work of Karlis Osis, which speaks against the physiological accounts of paradeath experiences, and she goes on to argue that temporary disembodiment accounts do not trivialize the pain and suffering normally associated with death, as some critics have argued. Moreover, critics who point towards unpleasant paradeath experiences and cases of no paradeath experiences in criticizing afterlife possibilities fail to appreciate that such phenomena count just as strongly against physiological accounts. How can innate physiology explain both positive *and* negative near-death experiences? And why does such an innate response not occur in some cases?

Moreover, physiology cannot explain paradeath experiences that are conscious—the "peak-in-Darien" phenomena which involve con-

scious visions. Nor does it account for factual knowledge claims that could not arise through normal sensory experiences, when near-death victims claim to recognize people and events beyond their sensory range. Even ESP on the part of people present with the paradead person cannot account for this phenomenon in cases when the facts remain as yet unknown.

Botting notes the kind of dogmatic defiance exuded by certain positivists, as Donald Evans illustrates in his essay, and goes on to show the limitations of wish fulfillment and delusion in treating the paradeath phenomena of peak-in-Darien experiences and various kinds of apparitions. Moreover, physiological accounts have yet to provide a thorough explanation of these and other specific elements of the paradeath phenomenon. Like David Griffin, she suggests that the general resistance to paradeath and other paranormal events in general is not because of effective objective scientific reasons but rather "a matter of personal belief and explanation."

She too questions the effectiveness of mechanistic-materialist paradigms in accounting for paradeath phenomena, and criticizes the insensitive mistreatment and disparagement of those people who experience or study phenomena that fail to fit the established scientific framework. Botting suggests that the hostile attitudes of some skeptics might be grounded in the very inability of socioscientific models to account intelligibly for paradeath phenomena. Evidence continues to bring the system into question, but the deep resistance to scientific revolution forces the anomalies to be treated as deviant—a consequence of physiological defects or pathologies on the part of the subjects. Like Donald Evans, she argues that mechanistic-materialist models might not be the sole means for knowing reality, and calls for one which can conform to the various dimensions of experience.

In chapter 8, Stephen Braude further pursues the question of the relevance of the paranormal in supporting afterlife possibilities, though he takes a contrasting position from that of Heather Botting with respect to the possibility of ESP as a plausible explanation. In "Postmortem Survival: The State of the Debate," he focuses primarily upon the research concerning ostensive past-life memories that some people have considered to support rebirth or reincarnation claims. Rather than proposing survivalist hypotheses, Braude proposes the possibility of "super-psi" to account for the phenomena. He suggests that cases of knowledge of or other characteristics related to a past life might be adequately explained by reference to super-psi—an unusually refined and high degree of psychic functioning on the part of living subjects—rather than by associating a past life with the subject in question.

Much of the resistance to such a possibility on the part of researchers, argues Braude, is unwarranted, and by neglecting the super-psi hypothesis the survival literature is to some extent limited and misdirected in its approach. He argues that the extent of posited psi in such cases is neither radically excessive nor different from typical psi functioning. The possibility of such a high level of psi functioning is supported by mediumistic phenomena, certain PK experiments, and ostensible precognition. But crucial to its plausibility is the recognition that psi in this context would be "motivated": Braude "posits the operation of psychic abilities in the service of some agent's genuine or perceived real-life needs and interests." Moreover, the relationship between psi and normal human demands and concerns very likely extends to unconscious—and therefore often hidden—desires and motivations.

But the survival literature generally ignores the psychological nuances that would be associated with the operation of psi in terms of covert and inconspicuous interests or needs. Various forms of personality dissociation, for example, evidence strikingly similar phenomena to that of mediumship cases, and seem relevant to certain reincarnation cases. It "appears that dissociation liberates or permits the development of abilities that would presumably not have manifested in normal waking states." In cases involving reincarnation claims, personality dissociation would combine with the psi functioning of living subjects to explain the phenomena.

Braude begins to illustrate the deficiencies of research in this regard by examining the hypothesis of parental influence in explaining purported past-life memories of children. This hypothesis has been proposed and rejected by some researchers, on the grounds that parents in certain cases have no prior detailed knowledge of the deceased person who is associated with their child's alleged memories, nor knowledge of other reincarnation cases. But Braude argues that other cases are irrelevant to the specific instance; and, more importantly, such a focus does not address the crucial questions of possible parental motives for desiring a child's association with any, or a specific, previous personality. What is important in such cases, and would provide information pertinent to the super-psi hypothesis, is "the personal meaning *behind* the detail." In what ways might the past-life connection of the child be significant to the parent? This information requires a depth-psychological probing on the part of the researcher that is generally lacking in alleged rebirth cases.

Braude goes on in his essay to respond specifically to critical issues raised for the super-psi hypothesis, including an exploration of the relevance of out-of-body experiences (OBEs) as evidence for survival. In

cases of OBEs, he suggests a two-stage ESP process wherein the subject first interacts with another mental (telepathically) or physical (clairvoyantly) state of affairs, followed by an interpretive context wherein the subject filters the material "according to their own psychological idiosyncracies, prevailing moods, needs, concerns, etc." Such an account, argues Braude, suggests how OBEs might be "a particularly vivid (or imagery rich) form of veridical ESP," one which accounts through the second (interpretive) stage for the wide variations in accuracy and depth and degree of images of subjects, and without the need to postulate the actual presence of the subject at the location in question.

But Braude's specific responses to critical issues facing the hypothesis of super-psi are bolstered by an overriding and crucial concern: further depth-psychological analyses of individuals relevant to specific cases are required in order to assess properly not only the super-psi hypothesis but also the survivalist explanation that is opposed to it. And this demand applies not only to cases of ostensible rebirth, but extends also to other survival research.

Despite his resistance to survivalist accounts of alleged past-life memories and out of body phenomena, Braude feels that research pertaining to postmortem survival is significant enough to rule out "mal-observation, misreporting, and fraud" in a substantial body of cases. Hugo Meynell agrees in his essay on this point, but not all scholars share this view. Heather Botting acknowledges the negative attitude evinced by certain skeptics towards both subjects of near-death experiences and parapsychologists who are sympathetic to them. With reference to paranormal phenomena in general, David Griffin mentions Henry Sidgwick's observation about the "absolute disdain on a priori grounds" of some skeptics towards various aspects of the paranormal. Often this critical attitude takes the form of moral denunciation, questioning the character of both subjects and parapsychologists. Both Donald Evans and Hugo Meynell mention the problem of fraud in this regard. Meynell labels as "pseudo-skepticism" the extreme position that all significant evidence supporting paranormal phenomena is a result of deception or lies, and argues that it ought not be assumed at the outset in evaluating paranormal claims. Evans suggests that paranormal powers might very well be within the grasp of most people and might even improve with practice. By focusing experiments away from gifted psychics towards these neophytes, the parapsychologist can better secure against the charge of fraud.

In chapter 9, "Morality and Parapsychology," James Horne draws this question of fraud into the larger issue of the moral status of the paranormal. He focuses primarily on parapsychology, the study of the

paranormal, and frames the moral issue within the question of its status as a practice: "Is it a cooperative human activity that tends to produce and extend human good, or does it tend to do the opposite?" He then goes on to answer this question by responding to three standard charges raised against parapsychology.

Parapsychology has been accused of wasting human resources, of being fraught with morally culpable human errors, and of having a corrupting influence upon both subjects and experimenters. Against the first charge, that it is an indulgence that squanders time and resources, Horne notes J. S. Mill's observations about the importance of a "mixed life" which includes recreational pursuits within the framework of more useful or pragmatic ideals. To include parapsychology as a respectable activity of such a mixed life, however, requires that it be a morally and intellectually acceptable field of endeavor. This relates to the second and third charges.

On the question of fraud, Horne notes that the moral character of the founders of parapsychology has generally not been in doubt, but rather their methodologies have been questioned. One must distinguish between the fraudulent character of the experimenters and weak experimental designs that leave open the possibility of deception on the part of subjects. It is important to maintain the distinction between parapsychologists who investigate paranormal claims, and the subjects of their experiments, some of whom have been disreputable. The cases of proven fraudulence on the part of scientists, even in contemporary studies, are relatively rare, hardly endemic as some critics have charged. Rather, Horne cites the similarities in character and results between parapsychologists and scientists of more respectable fields, which also include their share of fraudulence. Moreover, there have been limited positive results in paranormal experimentation for a variety of reasons: weak experimental designs, the difficulties in isolating paranormal events, and problems of replication. But these limitations do not speak against the morality of the practice.

Rather, the morality of the practice is brought into question given the nature of the examined phenomena. As Donald Evans points out in his paper, the subject matter of parapsychology is private, not open to the public verification that is associated with the "hard" sciences. Horne notes the similar difficulties facing psychologists of religion, and goes on to discuss the significance of empathy on the part of parapsychologists towards their subjects as well as the characteristic state of mind associated with successful performances. Participants are most effective when they are interested, calm, and hopeful about the results. Moreover, subjects and experimenters both must be subjectively

involved in the process in order to secure the best results.

This, indeed, raises concerns about parapsychology as a science. However, this “sheep-goat effect,” as Horne describes it in reference to the work of Gertrude Schmeidler, is found also in social psychology, in terms of the Rosenthal effect. Experimental climate is a crucial element for both parapsychology and psychology. Moreover, he cites instances in anthropology which also involved experimenter involvement in understanding certain phenomena. Both parapsychology and the practice of magic occur in situations of chance and involve unverifiable beliefs. Both hold that experience can be transformed beneficially in the context of outstanding coincidences, when a positive attitude is brought to bear upon particular circumstances. Linking magic to parapsychology, Horne suggests “that successful parapsychologists not only study magic but on occasion participate in it.”

Horne cautiously defends such practices, even though he associates the patterns of imagination and attitude of both subjects and experimenters of parapsychology with the orientation of gamblers. Indeed, the morality of gambling has been challenged much in the manner that Horne questions parapsychology in his essay. The charges of wastefulness, foolishness, fraudulence, and obsession have been raised against gambling by its critics. But these condemnations are not decisive. There may be some benefits associated with gambling. It only becomes clearly destructive in extreme cases involving abuses, corruption, and addiction.

Nevertheless, the serious dangers gambling poses to addictive personalities parallels and illustrates the moral perils associated with parapsychology. The paranormal can become an addictive and destructive obsession for some people. Horne concludes that there are real moral risks associated with parapsychology. But there is no more reason to disapprove of it than there is to object to gambling or certain religious practices.



Despite major differences in focus, approach, and position of the various authors of this volume, there are common or related concerns weaving through the chapters. James Horne addresses specifically an issue raised both directly and indirectly in many of the chapters, arguing that in and of itself parapsychology is not an immoral practice. A number of the authors address fundamental methodological issues, especially as these pertain to extreme skepticism towards paranormal phenomena. Heather Botting points out weaknesses in physicalist

accounts of paradeath experiences, calling for further reflection on mechanistic-materialist paradigms of inquiry. This latter opinion is echoed by both David Griffin and Donald Evans. Griffin explores possible reasons behind the resistance towards such methodological revision, and notes some of the implications of a scientific model that would include the possibility of noncontiguous causal influence. Evans illustrates the limitations of positivist scientific methodologies, elucidates a psi-abilities approach, and stresses the significance of further paranormal research even in the absence of causal mechanistic understandings of apparent paranormal powers and realities.

Some of the authors, directly or indirectly, discuss issues associated with various otherworldly psi. Like David Griffin and Donald Evans, Hugo Meynell criticizes extreme skepticism associated with various paranormal phenomena and discusses specifically questions associated with research and experimentation. Both Meynell and Griffin suggest the relevance of receptive-psi and expressive-psi for issues pertaining to postmortem survival. Terence Penelhum explores the nature and implications of certain paranormal powers as they apply to spirit agency, and evaluates their relevance for questions surrounding divine agency. Heather Botting clarifies elements surrounding near-death experiences, while Susan Armstrong evaluates in the context of process thought the status of animal psi, and develops its implications for afterlife possibilities. Finally, Stephen Braude stresses the importance of depth psychology in illuminating cases of past-life memory, and defends in this context super-psi as a plausible explanation of the post-mortem survival phenomena.

But the most common, general thrust of the diverse contributions of this book is found in the approach to and regard for the subject. Certain paranormal phenomena do not warrant attitudes of extreme and dogmatic skepticism, but rather invite the kind of serious and critical attention on the part of both empirical researchers and philosophers that is evidenced by the authors of this volume.

NOTES

1. G. R. Schmeidler, *Parapsychology and Psychology: Matches and Mismatches*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland, 1988), 7.

2. J. B. Sykes, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 7th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982).

3. Regarding the controversies surrounding S. G. Soal, see the chapters by Hugo Meynell and James Horne in this volume.

4. For example, *Journal for the American Society for Psychical Research*, *Journal of Parapsychology*, *International Journal of Parapsychology*, *European Journal of Parapsychology*, *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, *Journal of Scientific Exploration*.

5. C. W. K. Mundle, "ESP Phenomena, Philosophical Implications of," *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 3, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 49–58.

6. This schematic is influenced very much by the chapters in this volume by David Ray Griffin, Susan Armstrong, and Donald Evans. See also David Ray Griffin, "Parapsychology and Philosophy: A Whiteheadian Postmodern Perspective," *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 87, no. 3 (1993), 217–88. Although extraterrestrial phenomena, astrology, and palmistry are sometimes included as paranormal phenomena, it is not clear how they are related to the major categories. I do not attempt to draw them into this general schematic.

7. For example, besides the postulation by some thinkers of real, creative, and autonomous disembodied entities in attempts to account for certain mediumistic communications, C. D. Broad postulated the possibility merely of a temporary psychic factor which includes certain experiential modifications or memory traces of the deceased individual with which the medium links.

8. See Donald Evans's chapter in this volume.

9. See, for example, the chapter by Stephen Braude in this volume, which proposes various forms of psi as an explanation for certain postmortem paranormal phenomena.

10. For a good summary of the research pertaining to experimental variables, see G. R. Schmeidler, *Parapsychology and Psychology*, especially 29–92. She also provides a significant bibliography concerning relevant past and recent research in this area.

11. For example, M. T. Orne has distinguished subjects in terms of the common types of "antagonistic," "apprehensive," "good," and "faithful." See "On the Social Psychology of the Psychological Experiment: With Particular Reference to Demand Characteristics and Their Implications," *American Psychologist* 17 (1962), 776–83. See Schmeidler, *Parapsychology and Psychology*, 32–33, for a summary of the problem.

12. See R. Rosenthal, *Experimenter Effects in Behavioral Research*, (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1966).

13. See the chapters by Susan Armstrong, Hugo Meynell, Donald Evans, and James Horne in this volume.

14. G. P. Hansen, "CSICOP and the Skeptics: An Overview," *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 85 (1992), 51. Hansen cites on this infor-

mation A. Greeley "Mysticism Goes Mainstream," *American Health* 6 (1987), 47–49, and E. Haraldsson and J. M. Houtkooper, "Psychic Experiences in the Multinational Human Values Study: Who Reports Them?" *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 85 (1991), 145–65.

15. See the chapters by Heather Botting, Hugo Meynell, and Stephen Braude in this volume.

16. Hansen, "CSICOP and the Sceptics," 19, 22, 41–42.