Parapsychological Developments in Argentina (1990–1995)

ABSTRACT: Although Argentina lacks organized attempts to study parapsychological phenomena, some good work is being conducted by small groups of researchers. There are also many educational programs, most of which lack official recognition by the Argentinean educational system. Two important conventions that brought together many Argentinean workers were those organized in Buenos Aires by the Instituto de Psicología Parapsicológica in 1994 and 1996. At this point, one of the main concerns of serious Argentinean parapsychologists is to get officialization about research conducted in other parts of the world in the hope that the future will bring more resources to develop a scientific parapsychology in this country.

In Argentina, as in other Latin American countries, parapsychology is a field in a state of flux. On the one hand, Argentinians have no homogeneous parapsychological community. There is good work done by some small groups, but they lack resources to reach a higher number of people potentially interested in the subject. This keeps serious activities on a small scale. On the other hand, a great number of charlatans who call themselves “parapsychologists” and what they do “parapsychology” are very active, carrying on practices that are in complete opposition to the scientific approach.

To describe fully the social situation as it exists today, I will describe all the parapsychological work known to me, including that which deserves mention and that which does not. Both types form the social reality of parapsychology as my country. Unfortunately, I know of only a few people who are active now. Their work covers two areas: education and research.

A recent survey conducted by the Argentinean corporation Planificación & Diseño obtained information on belief in psychic phenomena and other topics. Eighty-one percent of the people surveyed believed in astrology and horoscopes, 74% in ESP, 59% in reincarnation, 57% in UFOs, 16% in ghosts, and 11% in Spiritism (Informe Especial, 1992).

Regarding education, many small institutes teach parapsychology. Most of these give short general introductory courses, including discussion of theoretical analyses of psi phenomena and practical issues. Most of them do not follow the classical scientific approach. Although there is no standard educational program, the law in Argentina permits the existence and activity of these institutes even if the degrees they confer have no official recognition. However, in the past Argentinean had a Parapsychological Unit as part of the Secretary of Public Health (at the end of the 1940s) and in 1975, President Juan Domingo Perón requested by decree the in-
Another contribution to the conference was a review of the life and work of engineer José S. Fernández (1889–1967) by Jorge Villaruz (1994). Fernández introduced mathematical procedures for the evaluation of tests of ESP and PK in Latin America. Clinical psychologist Daniel Gómez Montanelli (1994b) presented a paper on so-called "parapsychologists" who research and the research into reincarnation cases of Ian Stevenson. Gómez Montanelli is editor of a spiritual journal Cienas del Espíritu (Philosophy of the Spirit). In this period, Gómez Montanelli brings together scientific and spiritualistic ideas, following a similar line to that of the transpersonal psychology of Stanislav Grof (Gómez Montanelli, 1993, 1994a).

Only two men of the Parapsychological Association are mentioned in the Encore Psi. Marco Oliva Moyoan, an Argentinean psychologist who lives in Brazil and is the Director of the Centro Integrado de Pesquisas do Homem (Integral Center for Research on Human), however, some groups have attempted to introduce legislation arguing for the recognition of the educational importance of parapsychology (although such groups do not clearly state whether the incorporation of parapsychology into official teaching is necessary, that is, whether the field should be accepted as a separate program of study in the public and private universities). Another form of educational activity has been the organization of symposia and congresses, which have disseminated information about parapsychology at a popular level. In the last fourteen years there have been hundreds of parapsychology symposiums, but most of them are not critical about methodology and limit themselves to a superficial presentation of some parapsychological topics.

In 1994, our group, the Instituto de Psicología Paranormal [Institute of Paranormal Psychology] or IIP, held the Primer Encuentro Psi: Nuevas Dimensiones en Parapsicología [First Psi Encounter: New Dimensions in Parapsychology], a conference that brought together several researchers to present scientific parapsychology to the general public and to discuss the topic from an interdisciplinary perspective, focusing on methodology, general theories, and historical analyses. About 50 people attended the conference (Parra, 1994b).

Psychologist Oscar Barros, from the Laboratorio de Investigaciones Parasensoriales [Laboratory of Parapsensory Investigations], presented work conducted at a neuropsychiatric hospital in Buenos Aires with schizophrenia patients and with normal adults, including some blind individuals. The study consisted of the administration of the Max Lascher test of chromatic perception to subjects and an attempt to test the possible relationship between color perception and the subject's mood states. Another paper was presented by Walter Gardini, professor of yogic philosophy and master of yoga and comparative religion at the Universidad de Salvador (Buenos Aires) and one of the most prominent orientalists of the country. He talked about the place of paranormal powers in Patanjali's Yoga Aphorisms, one of the most ancient books of Indian culture (Gardini, 1994; see also Gardini, 1993).
The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that infants be placed on their backs to sleep to reduce the risk of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). This practice, known as back sleeping, has been associated with a significant decrease in the incidence of SIDS in the United States. The AAP guidelines also suggest that parents should avoid putting infants to sleep in a bed with adults, as this can increase the risk of suffocation. In addition, the AAP recommends that infants be breastfed for the first 6 months of life, with the option of continued breastfeeding for up to 2 years of age. The AAP guidelines also emphasize the importance of regular well-child check-ups and the use of safe sleep practices to prevent SIDS. The AAP guidelines are supported by a wealth of scientific evidence and are based on the latest research in the field of pediatrics. The AAP's recommendations are updated regularly to reflect the latest research and evidence-based practice.