

# WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED ABOUT PSI? REFLECTIONS ON THE PRESENT OF PARAPSYCHOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

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Saint Augustine, the celebrated theologian of the Catholic Church, tells us that, as he was walking on the shore of a beach meditating on the mystery of the Holy Trinity, he saw a child playing with a nutshell. Saint Augustine got close: “What are you doing, little one?” he asked the child. “I am trying to collect all the water of the ocean in this nutshell,” he answered. The theologian, looking at him with surprise but with compassion at the same time, asked, “But how could you pretend to collect all the water of this immense ocean in this small nut?” With plain candor, the child responded, “And how do you pretend to understand the marvelous mystery of God with your tiny head?” (Brown, 2000, p. 213). It’s the same as it was for Saint Augustine: For those of us who work in parapsychology, psi escapes our comprehension and control. We parapsychologists confront one of the greatest problems of human nature: Is psi an ontological dimension (related to being), and as a consequence, still basically unexplored?

In my judgment, one of the great merits and achievements of modern parapsychology is to have applied the rigor of the scientific method to the exploration of phenomena which, even today, continue to attract great popular interest. These subjects always generate much metaphysical speculation. However, their study also comes accompanied with feelings of rejection, scorn, or direct negation on the part of the rest of the scientific community.

The systematic study of spontaneous cases—such as reports of psi experiences and *poltergeists*; the problem of the survival of the human personality after the death of the physical body in the form of memories of past lives by children; spirit identification employing sophisticated codification of messages; apparitional encounters, the investigation of anomalous experiences which for centuries have traditionally been the patrimony of occultism, spiritism, and folklore (“astral trips,” luck, detection at a distance, healing by faith, psychic reading); and the therapeutic treatment of traumatic anomalous experiences— all show the creativity in the designs of the parapsychologists, often surpassing what one encounters in other social sciences. Of course, many of these experiences have also been explored in attempts to identify the positive and significant correlations of psi with psychological, physiological, physical, and even geomagnetic variables.

But this conquest has also had a high cost in terms of the comprehension of these phenomena and experiences. The scientific method guarantees us security, control, and dominion, but at the same time it limits us, it narrows us, and it subjects us to a partial vision of the nature of psi phenomena. Its negative counterpart, a suffocating obsession for the scientific method, may work against psi performance if we were to take seriously into account *all* the recommendations of the skeptics to accommodate ourselves to their (pre)judgments. Social scientists with weak and immature scientific training can easily become prey to this “irrational” rationalism and mitigate their interest in the exploration of these incompletely understood human experiences, no matter what their ultimate nature may be. They compel us to adopt an absolutely conceited position like the one the skeptics attempt to construct for us with their arguments.

Even so, it is not as if we are trying to reject the scientific method (Feyerabend, 1988), fight the skeptics, or burn in a bonfire our parapsychology laboratories. It is notable that, in many studies carried out by the pioneers of psychical research, some of them ended up asking themselves about the nature of psychic experiences. Positivist scientists, like the French physiologist Charles Richet, were themselves convinced by their discovery of much of psychic mechanics, although the “explicative theories” proposed by these pioneers did not totally negate their previous vision of the world. For example, Richet’s theory of the “sixth sense” (1928) was supported by principles entirely physical and physiological, while he hoped that the next generations would respond to those questions that, even today, paradoxically, we continue to formulate in our laboratories.

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At the beginning of the 21st century, many investigators discovered that highly emotional events were associated with spontaneous psi experiences. They initiated a systematic study of these relationships using many objective types—for example, drawings or other hidden objects—with the cooperation of psychics, mediums, and common persons. But these simple experiments were severely criticized for lack of controls. Consequently, many of them remained marginal in the modern parapsychological literature. Even when they had successful results, they demonstrated aspects that many of us would have liked to replicate in our own laboratories.

The historical and social context has much to say in this respect. Following the two devastating world wars, much of the good psychological research, mainly in Europe, was silenced, predominantly replaced up to the present by research based on the Rhinean model. I am under the impression that this *change* of course led to the emergent Rhinean model becoming the *only* course. Attention to the quality and quantity of these investigations, which could have been conducive to a more sensible and relevant understanding of psi, was not sufficiently taken into consideration.

When the scientific method was applied with rigor by modern parapsychology absent a predictive theory, instead of demonstrating how much information we have managed to discover about psi, it made evident our ignorance about the phenomenon every time we had to express ourselves in terms such as “anomalous cognition” or “remote influence at a distance.” Instead, we should remember the courageous and energetic discourses published by pioneers such as Charles Richet, Oliver Lodge, and William Crookes at their academies of science, and the work of other notable scientists who defied the opposition of a great number of their contemporaries (Boirac, 1917; Crookes, 1903; Hyslop, 1905; Richet, 1923). I am sure that they would have rejected the idea of modifying the term “parapsychology,” looking for substitutes that could be better adapted to the theoretical vacuum that we are leaving in our articles, books, or texts in psychology and other social sciences.

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that, basically, teaches us if our instruments of exploration are valid enough to justify knowledge. I am convinced that it is necessary to explore psi using instruments complementary to the scientific method. It is perfectly possible that phenomenological, transdisciplinary, psychoanalytical, semiological, linguistic, and systemic methods would provide us with valuable, reliable, and rigorous information—if they were suitably applied—just like the classical scientific method with which we have been attempting to this very moment to explore and understand psi.

*Accidentology* is a good example of a transdiscipline, due to the fact that its research methods are in close relationship to parapsychological procedures. Accidentology is of potential interest to physicians, nurses, engineers, architects, and insurance companies, because it studies the causes of accidents and develops procedures to prevent them, or—if they happen—to find strategies to confront them in time. This way the victims can be attended to with the greatest possible speed, avoiding deaths due to deficits of organization in situations of great physical and emotional tension, where other people are trying to help them. Naturally, nobody is “prepared” for an accident; similarly, nobody is prepared to experience a spontaneous psi occurrence.

The accidentologists have also examined the reliability of their observations and preventive measures in the form of simulations and controlled laboratory experiments. Inter- and trans-disciplinary action is necessary, combining strategies and experiences originating in fields so apparently opposite as nursing and engineering, just to mention those most strongly implicated. Police officers, firefighters, and security agents have contributed empirical data, resulting in a vast knowledge base of the causes of accidents, which today helps thousands of people in natural disasters (fires, landslides, earthquakes, hurricanes, storms), in transportation (cars, planes, trains, ships), and in job-related accidents of all kinds. They have explored accidents in their natural environments, have uncovered relevant statistics, and have meticulously examined physical, physiological, environmental, and psychological factors related to the principal causes of accidents.

These results point to conditions of natural observation that may contribute information about all the causes of the occurrence of psi phenomena. Parapsychologists have initiated a similar approach to exploring spontaneous psi experiences, determining their causes in an attempt to reproduce conditions that facilitate them in an appropriate experimental framework. But contrary to accidentology, the intensity of psi phenomenon in natural conditions is dramatically diminished in the artificiality of the laboratory:

The mechanization of the objectives, the subjects' and experimenters' motivations, and the creativity of designs aimed at avoiding the controls against sensory clues or fraud working against psi performance—all these must occur in a harmony that is often difficult to sustain.

However, the controversy does not arise because of parapsychology's methods, nor even because of its instruments, but because of its object. What is psi? What are its limitations? Disciplines such as psychoneuroimmunoendocrinology (PNIE) present epistemological problems. From a transdisciplinary perspective, PNIE explores the interrelationship of the defense mechanisms of an organism and the psychological characteristics that increase or decrease the possibilities of recuperation for a patient. A great number of successful studies include strategies of visualization, concentration, and relaxation for the treatment of biological dysfunctions such as cancer. In spite of their results, biologists do not agree about the object of study of PNIE. In which discipline should it be placed? A unidimensional treatment is impossible if we accept that the parts of the system complement and interact with one another. PNIE, like parapsychology, can also be seen, speaking epistemologically, as a transdiscipline that explores, at the same time, a psychological and physical dimension of psi (ESP and PK).

The phenomenological method is also incisive, but, unfortunately, seldom employed in parapsychology. Nevertheless, its existential humanistic appreciation of the human experience permits a vision more *from* the point of view of the subject having the experience than other psychologies of behavioristic or psychoanalytic orientation (Irwin, 1994). This method may allow us to resignify the paranormal (or anomalous) experience and to become sensitive to its subjective qualities that the scientific method has only limited options to investigate. Besides, it has the potential to become especially useful as a therapeutic tool for persons who have had traumatic anomalous experiences, following the model of Rogerian and transpersonal therapies (Grof & Grof, 1989; Kramer, 1993; Gómez Montanelli & Parra, 2008; White, 1990, 1993).

The border between a psychological experience and a paranormal experience is quite confused and even irrelevant for people emotionally moved by an event that escapes their everyday experience and their construction of reality (Milton, 1992; [L.E.] Rhine, 1981). Parapsychologists with experience in laboratory investigation are sufficiently competent to choose phenomenological variables for their investigations, but these variables are not always reported in parapsychological experiments, for various reasons. Extrasensory communication, out-of-the-body experiences, near-death experiences, apparitions, and/or spiritual contacts, all provide valuable information about the frequency, type, teleological significance, and subjective spatial and temporal perceptions that may be of use to elaborate proofs of hypotheses for future experimental designs in controlled laboratory conditions (Alvarado, 1984; Ring, 1984; Stevenson, 1995a, 1995b).

Linguistics is another seldom-approached field by parapsychologists, but one of great importance for understanding the nature of psi and directing much of its behavior. The linguist Noam Chomsky (1972) conceives of language as an innate structure of the human species activated by an adequate stimulus from the social environment. Some linguists consider that, since birth, telepathy and language are one and the same (Guilfoyle, 1998). Consequently, in the bipolar universe of linguistics, the possibility that a child could paranormally absorb a structure so complex as a language's grammar is unthinkable: At one pole, children obtain their knowledge of language via surrounding adults' induction; at the other, children have an abstract knowledge of the language when they are born. However, some linguists consider that children possess telepathy since birth, because they are lacking a language that would interfere with their paranormal receptivity (Fitz Herbert, 1961; Schwarz, 1971)

Language functions as an isolating barrier against the telepathic exchange between people *and* as a substitute for telepathic exchange, since what separates the adult from the child in this instance is the presence of language. When we speak, listen, read, and write, we are virtually prohibited from using our telepathic potential. Consequently, it is possible that the success of psi depends on the semantic relations that are established in communication via telepathy, which permit us to understand the content of a message, always subject to inadvertent distortion by an incorrect interpretation. Such semantic connections are essential if we want to understand why emotionally charged events have a potentially greater "meaning" than abstract symbols or models with enormous semantic limitations such as those employed in parapsychological laboratories. A parapsychological exploration of the mother-child relationship and the elementary biological needs for survival (breathing, nourishment, affectivity) is strongly implicated in the

understanding of psi; perhaps in the future more introspective analyses will appear about the relationship between language with its rules and other paranormal experiences.

In the form of psi communication, this possibility can be examined more clearly. Radiesthetists usually employ instruments to facilitate the paranormal detection of lost objects. When the radiesthetist is localizing a target on the map of a territory, the “connection” between the radiesthetic rod or the pendulum and the target is not physical but semantic (linked by the symbolic map that the dowser sees; Levin, 1999). Paranormal detection using an object from the person from whom it is wished to obtain information, also called *psychometry*, operates under the same principle, even if the person is dead.

Closely linked to language, systemic theory also includes a model for the comprehension of psi. Systemic theoreticians propose that communication is a permanent social process that integrates multiple modes of behavior (gestures, looking, mimics, interindividual space) with a singular significance. Every phenomenon is meaningful, depending on its relationship with its context. Instead of an energetic transference, the systemicists propose that communication consists of information transfers of different orders of complexity. According to this model, there are guides that order the interaction of each system with, in particular, its significance in the context and any dissonances and expectations. Systemic theory criticizes the behaviorist model of “stimulus-response,” arguing for a bidirectional interaction: “I have trained my experimenter,” says a rat to another in a laboratory. “Every time I press the lever, he gives me food.”

Thus, in a fruitless attempt to *isolate* the variables associated with psi phenomena, (despite the fact that they are the traditional skeptics), many parapsychologists seem to forget the necessary *ecology* that must reign in the experimental situation, namely: a harmonic relationship among target, participants, and internal and external variables, where the experimenters often exclude themselves from the object of their study, observing from outside the nature of a phenomenon that, in reality (and I think, intuitively) incorporates them into the scenario more as protagonists than as spectators in the theater of the mind.

As a consequence, from the systemic perspective, parapsychologists should pay more attention to the relation between repeatability and the “experimenter effect.” For example, in general terms, the lack or difficulty of repeatability in parapsychological experiments prevents experimenters from arriving at substantive conclusions. The psychology of the experimenters in the experiments is intimately linked with their negative or positive results and with their hypotheses, even when all the participants receive the same motivation from them. Future designs could experimentally examine this variable—that is, by employing a personality questionnaire unknown to the experimenters, which would permit comparing the results of “successful” psi experimenters with those deemed “not successful” (Parker, 1977; Sargent, 1980), or comparing the results of experimenters who design and administer their investigations with those of experimenters whose investigations are designed by them but administered by others, indifferent to or little motivated by the experimenters’ hypotheses.

In any case, an underlying problem remains: The lack of a general theory of psi may lead parapsychologists to elaborate a suffocating number of hypotheses, or still worse, to find foolish correlations simply because we ourselves have no agreement on whether to continue investigating according to those studies that promise a more holistic understanding of the psi process. Instead, in my personal experience, we listen attentively to the nurturing conventions of the Parapsychological Association, whose speakers present studies of high methodological quality, attractive design, and reliable controls but remain committed to aspects of psi that are completely unconnected or very little interconnected and lack a general theory that would support them.

Moreover, many social sciences count on an important, sure, and predictable subvention system [of financial support], a small part of which represents—perhaps—the total investment in the whole history of parapsychological investigation. Why do we feel so satisfied with these subventions as a positive and unrejectable economic resource? We should no longer expect to profit from the existential panic of some multimillionaire anxious about the destiny of his soul after death, or the inheritance of some parapsychology sympathizer, or the possibility of guessing the winning number of the lottery, with whose prize we would be in a position to support parapsychology for the rest of our lives and the lives of the next generations of parapsychologists in our institutes and research centers. Do parapsychologists suffer from the narrow view that the only sure path to success is to acquire appetizing fortunes that could be destined to respond to the millenarian questions that humanity has considered since antiquity? Maybe the

governments and scientific foundations of all our countries should worry seriously about these questions and formally finance our investigations!

I define “parapsychology” as a discipline that principally applies the scientific method with the object of understanding psychological processes that operate in two forms of psychical interaction: one subjective, which permits people to obtain or to transmit information (extrasensory perception or anomalous cognition), and the other objective, in the form of a remote mental influence (psychokinesis). ESP as much as PK escapes—apparently—the control of our present dominant monist-materialist philosophical paradigm, if I use the words of philosopher Thomas Kuhn (1962/1996). After more than a century of psi research, parapsychologists have concluded that the psi phenomena produced in controlled environments are not sufficient or intense enough to be accepted as a fact of the natural world or to force a change in the present paradigm.

What have we parapsychologists learned? What do we know about psi? Which parameters should we consider “scientific”? Like Wilber (1990), I think that there exist at least three domains of human nature. There is a domain of the sensorial and physical that can be accessible by the *eye of the flesh*; a mental domain, whose ideas, thoughts, and images are perceived by the *eye of the mind*; and a domain of the transcendental or spiritual, known through the *eye of the spirit*. Each eye reveals a different aspect of reality; moreover, what is revealed by one eye is not necessarily accessible to the others. Wilber also reminds us that we make all kinds of errors when we attempt, imprudently, to see everything through only one eye or permit only one form of vision to usurp the domains of the other two.

“My shoe does not fit the foot of someone else,” says Wilber (1990, p. 18). However, there exists at least one point of contact among the three realities. Science—in the form of psychical research and parapsychology—can find aspects of reality that are of value to those interested in spirituality. To get close to a complete image of reality, we must have, at least, a triptic vision. We can consider that there exist different forms of knowledge to approach the “real.” None is better than the other. Whether we speak of science, philosophy, or religion, each one interprets reality in ways that are its own, with different objectives and different themes.

The scientific method is a way to obtain and validate knowledge. Rigorously, parapsychology does not use an “alternative” methodology, since it applies the classic scientific method. Like Fisher, the prestigious American mathematician who defended Rhine, maintaining that parapsychology must be criticized from other places than statistics, we also can say that, if parapsychology can be questioned, it must be from some other place than the lack of application of the scientific method.

The principal problem of parapsychology originates, in my view, from its difficulty in formulating a predictive theory of psi. There is no agreement among parapsychologists about this. In spite of the existence of diverse explicative theories, the majority of them do not have “proof weight.” And even if, using meta-analysis, some empirical generalizations could be “proved,” these would have scant predictive power, being able to explain only a minimal portion of the variance.

To argue that meta-analysis permits an empirical generalization equivalent to a proof weight is an error, unless its predictive power were sufficiently strong and consistent to allow it to explain the variance. The philosophical paradigm prevailing in a determined historical or social epoch influences what we consider normal or “real,” or adjusts to our vision of reality and the mechanics that we know. If psi phenomena did not compromise the stability of the present paradigm, along with the feeling and thinking of the scientific community, probably there would not be any questioning.

The impossibility, at least for the moment, of a practical application of psi abilities also limits its acceptance. But the lack of repeatability is not an excuse, even if practical application were the only requisite for its acceptance. The problem of repeatability is a proper concern of the social sciences in general, many of which still see this requisite of the physical sciences and mechanics as a legitimate determinant of accepted knowledge. However, there are many scientists who resist parapsychological work, not only arguing that it condones low methodological quality but also admitting that the existence of psi conflicts with their vision of the world. Often, such an absolute opposition to the existence of parapsychological phenomena means that those parapsychological reports that authors look to be printed in the social or physical sciences journals, even absent any methodological defects, are rejected anyway if their results are positive.

Sociologist Marcello Truzzi (1987), a keen analyst of skepticism, elaborated on the intellectual narrowness demonstrated by the critics of parapsychology: “Scientists are not the paragons of rationality, objectivity, openmindedness and humility that many of them might like others to believe” (p. 3). Nobelist James D. Watson, codiscoverer of the structure of DNA, agreed: “One could not be a successful scientist without realizing that, in contrast to the popular conception supported by newspapers and mothers of scientists, a goodly number of scientists are ... narrow-minded and dull....” (Watson, 2010, p. 234).

As psychologist Hans Eysenk (1970, p.12) observed, “Scientists, especially when they leave the particular field in which they have specialised, are just as ordinary, pigheaded and unreasonable as anybody else, and their unusually high intelligence only makes their prejudices all the more dangerous....” The question is, are these reactions violations of prejudice or violations of the laws of nature? The materialistic assumptions that underlie the denunciations by parapsychology’s critics are already being abandoned. During the 20th century, the goal of neuroscience was to understand the workings of the mind in terms of the physical laws governing the material brain. It was an article of faith that a thorough understanding of the brain’s atoms and molecules would lead to an understanding of consciousness itself. As astronomer Carl Sagan said, “[The brain’s] workings—what we sometimes call mind—are a consequence of its anatomy and physiology, and nothing more.” (Sagan, 1986, p. 68). Or, as Nobelist Francis Crick observed, “... a person’s mental activities are entirely due to the behavior of nerve cells, glial cells, and the atoms, ions, and molecules that make up and influence them” (Crick, 1995, pp. 213–214).

The bankruptcy of the materialistic approach to consciousness is now being openly admitted. The theoretical biologist and complex systems researcher Stuart Kauffman put it, “Nobody has the faintest idea what consciousness is.... I don’t have any idea. Nor does anybody else, including the philosophers of mind.” Also, philosopher Jerry A. Fodor expressed a similar opinion, saying, “Nobody has the slightest idea how anything material could be conscious. Nobody even knows what it would be like to have the slightest idea about how anything material could be conscious. So much for the philosophy of consciousness” (both quoted in Dossey, Greyson, Sturrock, & Tucker, 2011, p. 132). Theoretical physicist Freeman Dyson (2011) agreed: “The origin of life is a total mystery, and so is the existence of human consciousness. We have no clear idea how the electrical discharges occurring in nerve cells in our brains are connected with our feelings and desires and actions.” In other words, parapsychology’s findings violate not the laws of nature but the ingrained prejudices of its critics about how the world *should* work. Brian Josephson (2008), a Nobel physicist at Cambridge University, is among the physicists who have carried out probed experiments in which physiological changes occur in the subject before the stimulus happens.

We can find contradictions between their occurrence and our culturally accepted view of reality, but not, as many of us have believed, between their occurrence and the scientific laws that have been so laboriously developed. However, parapsychology’s findings and the accumulated data from a century of consciousness research suggest that scientists’ buoyant pronouncements represent not understanding but a congealed intellectual enterprise that has foundered on its own inertia. The result is the *illusion* of understanding.

Materialists *dosometimes* change their views, at least somewhat. Daryl Bem in 1994 spoke with Cornell fellow faculty member Carl Sagan—a popularizer and communicator of the space and natural sciences, famous for his 1980 television series *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage*. Sagan was also a prominent cheerleader for a materialist view of consciousness and a brutal critic of parapsychology. As Bem and Sagan talked, Sagan repeated the skeptics’ perennial complaint that there are no replicable findings in parapsychology. Bem asked Sagan whether he had taken the time to look at contemporary research findings. When Sagan admitted he had not, Bem suggested he do so before continuing to make such an assertion. Sagan promised he would, asking Bem to send him a copy of a research paper Bem had recently completed with Charles Honorton, Director of the Psychophysiological Laboratory in Princeton, New Jersey (Dossey, 2011). Bem did this shortly afterward. The subject of the paper was a meta-analysis of a host of ganzfeld studies, in which an individual who was experiencing mild sensory deprivation attempted to describe information being sent to him in ways that did not involve sensory mediation.

The paper made an impact. Sagan called Bem and invited him to present the data and arguments to Sagan’s senior seminar called “Critical Thinking.” Bem complied shortly thereafter. The next thing

Bem heard of their discussion was the following passage, which appeared in Sagan's (1995) last book, *The Demon-Haunted World*:

[T]here are three claims in the ESP field which, in my opinion, deserve serious study: (1) that by thought alone humans can (barely) affect random number generators in computers; (2) that people under mild sensory deprivation can receive thoughts or images projected at them; and (3) that young children sometimes report the details of a previous life, which upon checking turn out to be accurate and which they could not have known about in any other way than reincarnation. (p. 302)

If this sounds like a radical conversion, it was not, for Sagan's next words were: "I pick these claims not because I think they're likely to be valid (I don't), but as examples of contentions that *might* be true. [These] ... three have at least some, although still dubious, experimental support. Of course, I could be wrong." Although a minimal concession, it was at least a departure from dogmatic absolutism. It's Sagan's "might" that's important.

The conflict over parapsychologists' findings reveals an unfortunate development: Science, which fought for centuries to free itself from the dogma of the Church, is now mired in its own dogma, scientism. To my mind, parapsychologists' experiments are the modern equivalent of Galileo's telescope, down which the authorities refuse to peer; indeed, recall the learned men of Galileo's time who refused to look through the telescope. They were of the opinion that data from telescopes were not relevant. The same thing is happening today, except that the limiting doctrine is coming not from the Catholic Church, but from science—the new religion of the 21st century.

In this suggested new approach, emphasis would be placed on identifying these nonevident target qualities by focusing on the nature and congruence consensus of percipient responses to various target events. Whether psi is able to access such qualities is quite testable, by the careful study of such responses and avoidance of confounding by possible stacking effect and response bias. To give a very simple example, one might study the existence and nature of the conventionally invisible human aura by having multiple viewers, tested independently, observe the space around the periphery of the body in which auras are hypothesized to exist, while the rest of the human target's body is completely blocked from vision, using randomized sequences of target person present or absent, behind some truly opaque screen. Conventional free-response methods could be used in such studies. The additional use of the Projective Differential could allow both quantitative and qualitative assessments, along with quantified response congruence measures. Similar approaches can be employed, emphasizing responses and degrees of response agreement, to explore many of the additional psi functions suggested above.

Over the history of parapsychology, many calls have been made for the "critical" experiment that would at last allay all doubts about the reality of psi phenomena. Skeptics have persistently demanded ironclad research protocols. Meta-analysis has shown successful replication in several separate protocols with high confidence. Such academic battles and their accompanying publicity have had some value.

Parapsychology research has far better research protocols as a result, indeed, better than several mainstream sciences, and those protocols should give anyone who actually knows the literature confidence that, in Gertrude Stein's pithy phrase, "there is some there there." Of course skeptical vetting is critically important to good research. It is fair to say that we all have biases, and without help from our skeptical and critical friends, we make mistakes and overlook possible misperceptions and misinterpretations.

Given that there are many experiments and observations of high quality showing anomalies in a wide range of disciplines, along with independent findings pointing to effects of consciousness that are not accounted for in ordinary psychological or physical theories, we can say that there is excellent "evidence" that consciousness interacts with physical reality. There is a powerful general point to be made from the psi literature.

We have laboratory experiments on extrasensory perception, clairvoyance, psychometry, psychokinesis, and more. But with more than 100 years of research by highly qualified scientists looking from different perspectives at the extended capacities and limitations of the mind, we can consider whether their findings converge. We also have extensions of these efforts to learn something in the real world,

some pragmatic and some purely experimental. Pertinent to our theme, such work may be regarded as applications of techniques and findings from controlled laboratory research. Similarly, studies of micro-psychokinesis in the laboratory have led to field research on group consciousness, attempting to confirm that special states of resonance or coherence reportedly stimulated by ritual, music, collaboration, and cooperation may have a detectable presence beyond the experiential.

The Global Consciousness Project is a multilevel example of convergent evidence (Nelson, 2008). Its application of powerful modeling and statistical techniques to search for structure in this large and complex database seeks convergent evidence internally. But this evidence converges with and extends the field studies of group consciousness and laboratory research with individuals. The GCP results say essentially the same thing as do the results of decades of psi research in laboratories around the world: Consciousness is real.

Consciousness has a role to play as a presence in the physical world. Our work as psi researchers is to go on with efforts to learn more about that presence, and to make clear that the role of consciousness in the world is both real and important. In this second decade of the 21st century, it is becoming apparent that that role is critical.

Presentiment research requires us to set a goal. What would we consider a success for parapsychology and presentiment research, in particular? Ultimately, as with any science, the goal is to gain a better understanding of “life, the universe and everything” by testing and revising hypotheses and theories. To increase the pace at which we go forward, we need more people and more money. There are already a number of encouraging developments resulting in more scientists listening to, and becoming involved in, parapsychology.

The scientific method relies heavily on our present interpretation of time and causality. If empirical data and theoretical developments in presentiment research lead us to conclude that time and causality differ fundamentally from what we hold them to be now, then the scientific method may find itself, paradoxically, in uncharted territory. Unfortunately, much of parapsychological research is as far removed from this as it is possible to be, given our preoccupation with precluding fraud and error. With so little effort to make our tasks personally relevant to our participants, we open ourselves up to displacement effects. With this in mind, perhaps we should not be asking why our replication levels are so low, but rather whether we get more replication than we deserve.

Parapsychology’s real problem is not with our phenomena: It is that there is almost no money in the field. It is virtually impossible to prosper as a full-time research-contract worker in parapsychology, and many of our number have to take other jobs to subsist, especially in Latin American countries. The current situation is fairly typical. This impression is consistent with Sybo Schouten’s (1983) well-known calculation that the number of person-hours invested across the lifetime of parapsychology from its beginnings, with the establishment of the Society for Psychical Research in 1882, equates to only 2 months of research in conventional psychology in the United States.

This strategy of taking other jobs can create opportunities for graduates with an interest in parapsychology to get their first step on the academic ladder. But when the principal investigator has a university salary, then more of that money can be used to service direct research costs rather than paying wages. For example, previous grants from the Bial Foundation have been used with some success to bring Ph.D. students into parapsychological positions, and some of these have now graduated and secured tenured positions at other universities, despite their research interests primarily involving parapsychology.

This pattern also occurs in other disciplines, but with their greater numbers they include many able technicians who are willing to conduct the kinds of modest replication extensions that Kuhn would have called “normal science.” It also seems likely that the limited number of persons involved in parapsychology has consequences for the nature of the research that is undertaken. For example, parapsychology seems to attract innovators who have been successful in developing new protocols, adapting methods from other areas, or demonstrating “proof of principle” by reporting significant psi effects using such methods. These innovators relatively quickly lose interest in simple confirmations and move on to develop yet more methods and approaches, with the early adopters soon following suit.

As the PA reaches the beginning of the second decade of this century, we are faced with a variety of issues related to the function, purpose, and development of our Association. In this short message I want



to emphasize co-operation and involvement, but I do not want to promote the illusory view that there are no real differences in approach and method or that those differences are not important. Our differences are fundamental to our identity as a profession and cannot be dismissed by mere calls for union that ignore the roots of our differences and offer little in the way of specific solutions to our problems. What I propose is the constructive use of our differences to serve our best interests. Our disagreements signal our strength, because they highlight the different areas of expertise that have been brought to bear on the complex problems of our field.

We can all offer much to effect future change. The Board is always open to ideas from the membership. If you see a problem with something (e.g., international relations, dealing with the media, relations with other scientists, development of research standards), you can be part of the solution by offering specific suggestions or by volunteering to serve on committees to deal with the problems about which you care the most. In addition, because of our diversity, the membership of the PA has a variety of talents, approaches, and experiences, all of which can be useful in furthering the professional goals of the Association.

There are a lot of hardworking and intelligent people out there dedicating themselves to fieldwork. They are publishing, on their websites and in popular books, tantalizing hints of data from which the field as a whole could benefit, both scientifically and methodologically. Many of these folks also seem eager for more education, for excellence: Many of them want to do the best job possible for their clients and for themselves, whatever their ideologies. What should our response be?

Since Carlos S. Alvarado's (1989) article "The Language Barrier in Parapsychology," English-speaking parapsychologists have been cautioned about the importance of international communication. At the same time, there has been other evidence of interest in knowing and understanding the work of non-English-speaking parapsychologists. International communication has been discussed in a number of other articles, commentaries, and conventions.

I would say that some of the language barriers that exist may be overcome if—in addition to contact through correspondence with PA members and articles published in international journals—there is increased personal contact among parapsychologists around the globe. It is obvious that occupational commitments and economic difficulties are the first obstacles that impede this contact, but frequently it is the only road to a confident and dynamic flow of communication. An example of the results of such personal contact comes from recent PA Conventions in three countries—France, Brazil, and Italy—where attenders had the opportunity to strengthen a professional association and make friendships that transcended the boundaries of geography and language.

The language barriers actually diminish, compared to the geographical barriers in parapsychology. On the other hand, a good initiative to help to demolish such barriers is the ongoing international communication between Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking parapsychologists. Empirical evidence shows more continuous communication among English-speaking parapsychologists than among Latin American parapsychologists (Alvarado, 1989). Although the problem is a difficult one to solve, some measures may be taken to implement strategies to minimize the language barrier. Since English is generally read by most parapsychologists, perhaps this language can be used to build a bridge.

Although these days it seems to be fashionable to say that we need to be more international in the membership department, I like to think I have had some positive influence in non-English-speaking countries. As president, I would recommend that we put forth special effort in raising funds for our organization. The only solution is "new blood." We are lucky that this year there was a "new face" running for President, and that some more "new faces" ran for the Board. We need new members at every level.

Maybe the scientists should place themselves in a better position to judge reality. One can perceive the sense of malaise of some of these scientists when they realize that whatever they know about reality is actually so very poor, limited, and defective. The question underneath is: *On which part of the track are we today?* Some parapsychologists claim to have reached the goal. They say that the evidence is sufficient, or at least very suggestive, to affirm that psi exists (the investigation directed to proof). So the "new goal" is to explore the forms by which psi is manifested (the investigation directed to the process). Parapsychologists are also telling us that both types of persons often place nails on the racing track due to their intolerant models of reality and their habit of examining with prejudice the quantity and quality of the evidence.

Supposing that the search for psi were a racetrack where each driver is a parapsychologist in an attempt to reach the goal, the question is: What is the prize for reaching the goal? The less ambitious could say that the prize is to prove definitively the existence of psi and to banish every doubt from the minds of the skeptics and society in general. Others—maybe more ambitious—could say that the prize is the control of psi. Assuming that nobody has yet reached the goal, the pessimists could say that the runners are closer to the point of departure, and the more optimistic could say that the runners are closer or very close to the final goal.

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