

Philosophical Sensitives and Sensitive Philosophers: Gazing into the Future of Parapsychology

Joseph M. Felser
Kingsborough Community College

Parapsychology in Crisis?

It was in 1909 when William James issued his famous warning to anxious parapsychologists (known then, of course, as “psychical researchers”) that they should not expect too much too soon. Fifty or even a hundred years might pass, he cautioned, before achieving significant progress toward a comprehensive general theory of psychic phenomena (James, 1909/1969, p. 310). The meaning of the data was a question that would have to wait. In the meantime, collect, collect, collect!

Today, as we approach the upper range of James’ prediction, there is nevertheless little hope for a swift and timely dénouement. Despite earnest efforts on the part of such serious and capable researchers as Dean Radin (1997), parapsychology seems no nearer to producing an overarching theory of psi of a kind that would compel rational assent by mainstream scientists and philosophers than were the researchers of James’s own day. Even solidly-argued studies in such specific fields as survival research (e.g., Almeder, 1992) have fallen largely on deaf ears. This has led some understandably frustrated and battle-weary parapsychologists to seek refuge in the comforting arms of certain Eastern perspectives, namely Hinduism or Buddhism (e.g., Becker, 1993). These religions seem to hold out the promise of furnishing a theoretical framework more congenial to psi than the metaphysical materialism that still holds mainstream Western science under its spell.

Although such perspectives do, in truth, include psi phenomena, I have argued elsewhere (Felser, 1999) that ultimately the approach is

Please address correspondence to Dr. Joseph M. Felser, Department of History, Philosophy, and Political Science (D309), Kingsborough Community College/CUNY, 2001 Oriental Boulevard, Brooklyn, New York, 11235, USA or via email at: JFelser@kbcc.cuny.edu.

rigidly fixed by beliefs that ought to be open to question, but in theory, and (especially) in practice, are not. Thus, the subordination of psi to religious belief of *any* kind would inevitably result in an unfortunate distortion of the data and a consequent failure to appreciate their true meaning. All religions, without exception, are explicitly or implicitly dogmatic in the specific sense of harboring assumptions that are not open to questioning. Therefore, if parapsychology hopes to make genuine progress as a discipline, it should keep its distance from religion (including the religion of Science) and maintain its strict epistemological autonomy.

Whether parapsychology embraces or rejects this autonomy constitutes, in my view, the current crisis of the discipline. In this context it is worth reminding ourselves that the English word “crisis” derives from the ancient Greek word *krinein*, a verb that means “to decide.” The Greeks understood that there was an inherent metaphysical ambiguity attached to this “deciding,” one that invoked the classical conundrum of fate versus free will. On the one hand, the term referred to the critical juncture in an illness when a person, thanks to the will of the gods or the impersonal laws of fate, would either get well or die. But it likewise designated that turning point in a dramatic narrative when the hero must make a conscious moral choice that will determine his or her success, or lack thereof. As Heraclitus opined, character is destiny. We are free to fail after all.

I am convinced that the character of parapsychology is infected by a weird and persistent delusion regarding its own cultural significance, much as if William Randolph Hearst had hit himself over the head with a hammer and come to believe that he was no more than a local paper-delivery boy. Parapsychology long ago made itself parasitic upon scientific culture and its standards, and now (at least in some quarters) seems equally determined to become the handmaiden of religions and philosophies that are currently fashionable in certain intellectual circles. This happens because parapsychologists have yet to realize the singular importance of their discipline and its power to completely upend and transform all existing cultural forms (not excluding those of postmodernism, which will not have the last word). As to whether parapsychology will consciously choose to embrace or flee from its epistemological autonomy: This remains an open question.

Yet, as the ancients intuitively grasped, there are also larger (hidden, unconscious) forces at work. In some strange, perhaps ultimately incomprehensible sense, these forces transcend yet include the individual mind and body. Such are, of course, precisely the same greater forces that apparently lie behind parapsychological phenomena. Hence, if we wish to know something concrete about the future of parapsychology, we

would be wise to consult certain actual parapsychological *experiences* — in particular, certain relevant experiences of precognitive or prophetic dreams and insights.

Which brings me back to James's famous prediction. In its paradigmatically scientific form, a prediction is the result of conscious, deliberate, rational calculation. But, as we have already suggested, second-order knowledge *about* parapsychology must now be grounded in first-order parapsychological *experience*. On this basis, I have come to the conclusion that James's cautionary forecast was off — perhaps by as much as five hundred or so years. If my suspicion proves correct, parapsychologists who steadfastly maintain their independence from the sheltering octopoidal arms of religious (and other) co-option may have to wait slightly more than half a millennium for full vindication. Only then will parapsychology be in a position to promulgate a general theory of psi that will achieve true acceptance by what James himself cheekily dubbed “your genuinely scientific inquirer — I don't mean your ignoramus ‘scientist’” (James, 1909/1960, p. 310). (Alas, so much for the reassurances of instant gratification!) What, then, are the relevant psi experiences and how do they bear upon the future of the discipline?

Precognition and Prophecy: Psi and the New Religious Consciousness

In 1949, psychiatrist Max Zeller returned to the ravages of post-war Europe to study with C. G. Jung. Zeller felt overwhelmed by the magnitude of the task before him. How could he help the world by seeing a few patients in the comfort of his office? The answer came in the form of a dream which he told to Jung:

A temple of vast dimensions was in the process of being built. As far as I could see — ahead, behind, right, and left — there were incredible numbers of people building on gigantic pillars. I, too, was building on a pillar. The whole building process was in its first beginnings, but the foundation was already there. The rest of the building was starting to go up, and I and many others were working on it. (in Sabini & Allen, 1994, p. 23)

Jung's response was to interpret the temple as the symbol for the new world religion which was in the process of being constructed by individuals all over the world, East and West, bit by bit, each contributing in their own distinctive way to the creation of a new form of religious consciousness. Had he lived just a few more decades, Jung doubtless would have seen in the continuing developments of feminism, postmod-

ernism, quantum physics, the cybernetic revolution, religious syncretism, the upsurge of interest in myth, and the popularity of the New Age, further evidence of and contributions toward this momentous transformation. Yet, when Jung pressed Zeller as to how long it would take to complete the temple, Zeller impatiently replied by saying, in effect, “How in the world would I know?” Jung, however, insisted that he knew: about six hundred years. He confessed that this information came from other people’s dreams as well as from his own. In other words, from experiences harboring a precognitive or prophetic element.

What I am suggesting, then, is that I do not believe that James’s prediction about the future of parapsychology will come true until and unless Jung’s prophecy concerning the new religion is fulfilled. What, then, is the connection between prediction and prophecy, or progress in parapsychology and the continuing evolution of religion?

The answer to this question is complex, and takes us directly into the eye of the historically stormy relationship between parapsychology, religion, philosophy, and science. In the first place, the production of a *bona fide* theory of parapsychology will require the widespread acceptance of a radically new form of theorizing. Instead of being marginalized as “merely psychological” or denied outright, the non-rational sources of intellectual inspiration must be explicitly acknowledged and incorporated into our rational theories of knowledge and reality. “The subjective” can no longer be a term of scientific derision. It will not be simply permissible but absolutely essential to reveal the manner in which personal and transpersonal experiences inform theoretical constructs and choices. As Rhea White (1993, 1997) has argued long and well, it is one thing to think *about* psi experiences from the outside, and quite another to think *from within* the standpoint of one’s own psi experiences, employing them, as Steven Rosen (1994) has suggested, as a “potential base of operations.” The latter, in effect, is what James himself attempted in his pioneering essay, “A Suggestion about Mysticism” (1910/1987), and, more recently, what Michael Grosso accomplished in his important book, *Soulmaking* (1992/1997a). And, of course, it was none other than James who had stoutly insisted upon the acceptance of the reality of the subjective as a core principle of rational inquiry, declaring that “it is absurd for science to say that the egotistic elements of experience should be suppressed. The axis of reality runs solely through the egotistic places — they are strung upon it like so many beads” (James, 1902/1936, p. 490). All inquiry, then, is self-inquiry. The only question is whether we are consciously aware of this fact or not.

An embrace of the subjective in this form and its integration with the rational principle would take us far beyond the current debate between the culture of literary postmodernism and that of scientific modernism

— a debate which is informed by a secret *entente* between the two would-be antagonists. Science, of course, attempted the impossible task of providing an account of the world from no particular point of view. Its goal was a purely objective, unbiased grasp of nature, uncontaminated by the least smidgen of human subjectivity (especially in its feeling and intuitive functions) which was itself regarded as the great corrupter of Reason and the enemy of Truth. But if science sought to give us an object without subjects, postmodernism reacted by insisting on the complementary reductive absurdity of subjects without a real object. So a leading postmodernist philosopher dismisses the very idea of a world “independent of our knowledge of it” as a “purely vacuous notion” (Rorty, 1982, p. 15). According to this anti-realistic doctrine, “the world” is nothing but the sum of all particular perspectives, nothing is objectively true or real, and all so-called “facts” are merely disguised interpretations that have yet to be unmasked as the creatures of certain highly specific interests, prejudices, forms of language, and so forth. Spin is god, God is spin, and the very idea of “nature” is but a primitive myth. In short, in the “nothing but” reductive conflict between modernism and postmodernism, it is either subjectivity *or* objectivity but not both.

This fundamental dualism, if only tacitly shared, links both postmodernism and modernism with the habits of mind of pre-modern religious traditionalism and its idea of the holy. As the anthropologist Mary Douglas long ago noted, in the dark heart of the archaic idea of purity (and the taboos that enforce it) lies a horror of the ambiguous, the anomalous, and the paradoxical. The archaic mind seeks “to impose system on an inherently untidy experience” by “exaggerating the difference between” opposites, such as “within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against” (Douglas, 1966/1984; p. 4). Cosmic order is maintained in the face of a monstrously chaotic commingling of that which is divinely ordained to be strictly separate.

“For [the author of the biblical book of] Leviticus the rock badger or Syrian hyrax is unclean and abominable. Certainly it is an anomaly all right. It looks like an earless rabbit, has teeth like a rhino and the small hoofs of its toes seem to relate it to the elephant.” (Douglas, 1966/1984; p. 73)

The puritan rigidity and reductive one-sidedness of traditionalism provides the key to understanding not only how the new religious consciousness will depart from the old, but also why parapsychology has a distinctive role to play in birthing the new form. For it is precisely in the experience of parapsychological phenomena that ordinary agents encounter robust anomalies in which our usual oppositions — male and female, within and without, self and other, mind and matter — are

inexplicably but undeniably brought together, not in an abominable confusion, but in an ultimately meaningful synthesis.

Allow me here the luxury of practicing what I preach by introducing a personal example. Recently I had a nightmare in which I fell into a pit. In a breathless panic, I dug my way through the soil to reach the surface. When I awoke with the afterglow of choking discomfort, I immediately understood the relation of my dream to certain events and feelings in my daily life. That very morning I set about the task of grading a set of term papers. I had given the class the option of creating a new religion or investigating an existing one. I sifted through the pile of papers to find the essay of a favorite student. Brian had elected to create a new religion, and he began by telling the myth of its founding hero. On page two I came across a passage that gave me goose bumps. In an eco-apocalyptic vision, Brian's hero finds himself swallowed by a vengeful earth, where he lay sleeping and trapped, until he awoke to claw his way to the surface — an almost verbatim description of my nightmare. Subsequently I picked out another paper of a student who had elected to write on Buddhism. I was reading a paragraph describing legends of the compassion for living things displayed by the youthful future Buddha, including the occasion when the prince Siddhartha nursed a swan felled by his cousin Devadatta. As I came to the sentence, "His shot hit the swan and it fell from the sky," I was startled by a loud "thump" against the windowpane. It was a bird. I ran outside to see if it had broken its neck (as some have in the past), or if it was merely stunned. But it was nowhere to be found.

Anecdotal reports of such telepathic and/or synchronistic phenomena are common enough, for example, in the intimate and emotionally charged atmosphere of the psychotherapy parlor. If my own experience is any indication (and I do not see why it would not be), I suspect that such phenomena are just as common, if grossly under-reported and unnoticed, in teaching and other group settings in which bonds of intimacy (whether positive or negative) are forged. Here subjective and objective, individual and group, self and other, and all the other categorical dualisms that inform our usual habits of thought are put radically into question. Still, most of us, most of the time would unquestionably prefer to ignore such anomalies and pretend that our daily life experience is far tidier and more ordinary than it actually is. As Thomas Kuhn (1961/1977) demonstrated, even those courageous scientific revolutionaries, who accept the challenge posed to existing theories by experimental anomalies, assiduously work to reinstate a pacific condition of scientific normalcy in which "outlaw" (anomalous) experiences are subsumed under a new, tidier, ever more comprehensive *nomos*. Even in the furthest, stratospheric reaches of theoretical physics, where such paradoxes as the

mutual interdependence of knower and known abound, the tendency has been to restrict such anomalistic categorization to phenomena at the microscopic level, and to deny its applicability to the lived experience of ordinary agents. In that sphere, it is said, Newtonian mechanics and its philosophical presuppositions duly reign — (parapsychological) reports to the contrary notwithstanding. Thus, in all cases, the simplistic rigidities of abstract *nomos* (whether conceptualized, to borrow Spinoza's infamous equivocation, in terms of *Deus sive Natura*) are allowed to eclipse the richly complex, paradoxical character of our concrete phenomenological *experientia*.

This one-sided, procrustean dominion of (“orderly”) idea over (“disorderly”) experience has been a prime *leitmotif* of the old religious consciousness, including the ostensibly more experientially-grounded spiritual traditions of Asia, as well as our own indigenous scientific “empiricism.” It is explicit in St. Augustine’s derivation of “religion” from the Latin *religare*, signifying an obligation to obey a super-natural divine law that stands over and against the dangerously anarchic impulses of our own inner experience. But it is also implicit in a Buddhist monk’s dogmatic insistence that a woman who had a near-death episode must be misdescribing her own experience (Sutherland, 1993/1995). For the woman claimed to have exited her body via her head rather than her feet — an exit point exclusively reserved, according to his Buddhist creed, for saints and gurus.

Anticipating the new religious consciousness, Jung sought to balance the epistemological scales by emphasizing the importance of paying attention to the anomalous for its own sake, even or especially where it renders us “stupid, naive, and helpless” before the facts (von Franz, 1993, p. 233). This humble fidelity to experience as it unfolds is linked to Jung’s derivation of “religion” from “the adverbial form of the Latin *religio*, meaning ‘conscientiousness, scrupulousness, exactness’” (von Franz, 1993, p. 236n). Here he followed and developed the pre-Christian tradition represented by Augustine’s inspiration and predecessor, the “pagan” philosopher Cicero, who connected religion not with obedience to external authority, but with *relegere* or *relictio* (Graves, 1948/1978), the careful, dutiful reading of signs and portents. That is to say with the wisdom of the Great Book of Nature. This is the very book Christianity banned as pornographic and that Science sought to decode and exploit for its own Promethean ends.

It is thus in helping to facilitate the transition from *religare* to *relictio* that the distinctive contribution of parapsychology is to be made. By this I mean, in the first instance, that parapsychology must outgrow its “Science envy” and abandon its quest for a final theory or universal explanatory scheme that will satisfy the tyrannical demands of the old

nomos. Instead of seeking to impose on psi phenomena a prefabricated model of meaning lifted from science or religion, parapsychology must encourage the organic emergence of meanings from within, that is, through ordinary individuals' unique and perhaps unrepeatable confrontations with the paradoxical character of their own anomalous experiences. Here parapsychologists must lead by example and voluntarily descend from the Olympian heights of the laboratory temple, dedicated to the worship of the gods Prediction and Control and to the mystification of the Cult of Expertise, and humbly enter into the wild terrain of psi experience — including and especially their own. It is here that perfect control and rigid dichotomies (although not acute observation and analysis) must be relinquished. As Rosen (1994) has urged:

What I am proposing is that progress in parapsychology hinges on a fundamental shift from being an enterprise whose first order of business is the accumulation of knowledge (to be followed by applications) to being one in which the primary goal is a therapeutic mending of our deeply destructive polarization. (Rosen, 1994, p, 178)

In Rosen's terms, the full healing power of meaning to mend what anthropologist Douglas identified as the exaggeration of difference can only be liberated by uniting (without, of course, confusing) the rational and non-rational functions of consciousness, not simply in theory, but in actual practice. In other words, psychics must become philosophers, and philosophers must become psychics.

This then, from the vantage point of the year 2550, is what I believe parapsychology will be viewed as having accomplished. Another way of putting it is that, in retrospect, parapsychology will be seen as having provided an essential halfway house to a thoroughly naturalized supernaturalism. Indeed, the very idea of the "supernatural" or "paranormal" will become obsolete. The concept of nature will have become sufficiently rich to encompass what are presently considered from the standpoint of mainstream scientific orthodoxy or sheer "common sense" ("the graveyard of dead philosophical theories" as my philosophy professor used to quip), abnormal, supernormal, ontologically scandalous, or utterly impossible events. As Grosso (1999) would say, the psi factor will be recognized as an objectively real, but non-physical element operating in nature. Psi will be regarded neither as unnatural nor as supernatural, but rather as a phenomenon capable of being investigated rationally in an open and impartial manner by anyone of sufficient goodwill and purpose who is unafraid of following the facts "wherever they lead us" (Grosso, 1999, p. 242).

This approach would seem consistent with the aspirations of such founders of psychical research as Myers, Sidgwick, and, of course, James himself. It was their collective decision to remove questions about survival from the realms of faith and theology by inquiring into the empirical evidence that marked the key turning-away point from the stance James (1902/1936) derided as “gross supernaturalism.” In a private letter to his friend Henry Rankin, James (1960, p. 265) confessed to the truth of the accusation that he wished to explain away Christianity while validating the natural basis — the psychic experiences — on which all religions are grounded. And, I suspect, many, if not most, contemporary parapsychologists would undoubtedly follow James *et al.* in endorsing the view that occurrences of psi are natural phenomena.

However, as psychical research evolved into parapsychology, the emphasis shifted from the descriptive phenomenology of concrete psi experience to the promise of decisive proof furnished by controlled experiment. Thereby, the nature and meaning of “nature” was itself transmuted. No longer appreciated as immediate felt and sensed quality, nature was reduced to the category of sheer abstract quantity. The new assumption was that only the experts could understand nature and properly interpret its signs and (mathematical) formulae. Furthermore, only those adepts capable of producing effects on demand would be of interest to researchers. Psi was thus removed from its native (public) habitat of everyday life and, like some rare specimen of exotic fauna, confined to the tightly controlled environment of private zoos, the exclusive property of an élite cohort of scientific experts and psychic celebrities.

In contrast, the new religious consciousness will embody a radically democratized form of inquiry. It will finally be accepted that psi is not the exclusive possession of specially gifted individuals (so-called “psychics” or “mediums”), but that, whether we know it or not, we are all psychic. The psi factor in human experience will thus be recognized as nothing more nor less than the individual’s personal portal to that “other” dimension of nature which the older religions either mythologized and worshipped as personal gods, or else sanctified as a specifically “spiritual,” if impersonal, principle of transcendence. Participants in the new religious consciousness will feel free to accept the invitation of psi phenomena to explore this dimension for themselves and to engage in an unprejudiced and open-ended inquiry into the meaning of their experiences. This free and open inquiry will, in effect, constitute the new form of religious practice (Felser, 1995).

A self-conscious inquiry into meaning is, of course, a recognizably philosophical enterprise. No less a figure than Socrates opined that questions of meaning are the very heart of philosophy, and his student

Plato agreed with him. Hence, the new religious consciousness will be deeply philosophical even as the old philosophy of materialism will be a dead issue. But so too, alas, will all the old dogmatic religious formulas of revelation and salvation, as well as those of enlightenment and liberation. For all these venerable schemes of West and East alike rest upon assumptions that are, in the final analysis, put beyond questioning. Among these would be, respectively, the divinely-given biblical truths, or else the sacrosanct interpretations of the guru-founder's experience of venturing through the psi portal.

As philosopher Joel Kramer and sociologist Diana Alstad (1993) have observed, this dogmatizing feature of present-day religion is intimately bound up with the very act of making something "sacred." Such a practice implies that questioning or criticizing (and thus revising or changing) the relevant beliefs and customs is forbidden, or, as the anthropologists would say, taboo. Eve violated the great taboo in Eden by eating the forbidden fruit and questioning God's act of making that one tree sacred. For asking questions and trusting her hunches, she received the punishment of death — not to mention the *hors d'oeuvres* of pain in childbirth and four thousand years of institutionalized misogyny.

However, for the new religious consciousness, the old taboo of taboos will become the natural mode of operation, as psi and rational reflection are allowed to mutually interpenetrate and cross-fertilize each other in the absence of restrictive rules (scientific or religious) against miscegenation. Nothing will be sacred in the traditional sense. There will be no *a priori* limits placed on the questions that one is permitted to ask. Only thus will the "mending of our deeply destructive polarization" be furthered.

Psychics or Sensitives?

The full implications of the naturalization of the supernatural and the ascendancy of the philosophical over the superstitious approach to religious truth are, of course, far beyond my ability to discern. However, I believe that over the past 2500 years — and particularly in the last century or so — history has already thrown us significant clues concerning the future course of religion in the form of the periodic appearance of what might be called evolutionary mutations. These "mutants" are the "philosophical sensitives" and "sensitive philosophers" referred to in the title of my paper.

I have four specific figures in mind. However, before I say more about them, I think it is useful to say a few words about my preference for the quaint term "sensitive" over the more familiar "psychic." While, at first,

it may seem like a semantic detour, this issue of terminology turns out to be relevant to our present efforts at predicting the future.

Thus, if and when psi is recognized as a part of nature, it must also be recognized as an integral part of human nature. The label of “sensitive,” which at first blush reads like a creaky Victorian antique, has a decisive advantage over “psychic” in this regard. Whereas “psychic” suggests something mysterious and far away, “sensitive” has obvious ordinary language associations with our more familiar faculties of feeling and perception.

The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines “sensitive” as “[c]apable of perceiving with a sense or senses,” and also as “[s]usceptible to the attitudes, feelings, or circumstances of others.” There is evidence aplenty that psi phenomena are intimately connected both with emotions and our “ordinary” faculties of perception. I base this contention not only upon my own psi experiences (Felser, in preparation), but also upon the experiences of well-tested psi subjects and researchers.

For example, Ingo Swann (1991) has stated that his “hits” in controlled remote viewing experiments increased dramatically when he ceased to regard his abilities as the result of the operations of some occult “extrasensory” faculty and instead envisaged them as an indefinite extension of his physical senses. This success was also facilitated by his decision to allow his hand to draw what he had “seen” in sessions rather than attempt to describe verbally (and thus intellectually filter) his direct impressions.

As for feeling, it has long been known, for example, that boredom plays a negative role in the laboratory by hindering efforts to mechanically reproduce psi results. At the very least, a feeling of keen interest in the outcome seems essential to efficient psi functioning. A subject’s emotional (or even esthetical) interest in a target has thus been observed to play a positive role in remote viewing experiments (Graff, 2000).

Outside the laboratory those who have spontaneously experienced telepathy and apparitions (of both the living and the dead) have likewise pointed to the key roles played by the emotions of sympathy and love (not to mention guilt and sorrow). Such affects have been identified both as triggers and as concomitants of psi (Moody with Perry, 1993; Botkin, 2000). My own psi experiences agree with these findings. Rosen (1994) has gone so far as to suggest that telepathy might be more accurately understood not as “a paranormal knowing of that which is other, as much as a knowing with other” (p. 176). In other words, telepathy might be the ultimate expression of empathy, uniting the feeling and cognitive faculties in a higher evolutionary synthesis that includes but transcends both.

Swann (1999) notes that this was actually implied in Franz Anton Mesmer's early definition of "animal magnetism" as a form of "rapport" established via "magnetic influences" having to do with "empathy," meaning "the capacity for participating in another's emotions and feelings." It was only subsequently that this emotional connection was obscured when the concept of animal magnetism was "slightly redefined so as to include 'participating in another's ideas'" (Swann, 1999, p. 6). Somewhat later the process of intellectualization was complete when it became ideas rather than feelings that were supposedly being communicated. On the one hand, this shift in meaning was more scientifically respectable because emotions and feelings were regarded by science as too "squishy," that is, subjective and distorting. But the shift also fit with the Platonic prejudice that *psyche* has nothing to do with *soma*, and that the affections are born of unfortunate somatic attachments, which it is the philosopher's duty to break.

Yet, the earlier vocabulary employed by psi researchers may be more faithful to our actual experience. This suggests that there is, in truth, a deep ontological bond between the physical and non-physical (psi) aspects of nature, a bond largely obscured by more recent ways of thinking and talking. (William G. Roll's current investigation into the possible connection between allergic and psychic sensitivities is an important, and perhaps prescient, exception.) The physical and non-physical are parts of an inherently meaningful whole — in the individual case, an intimate biography of the dance of body and soul — that cannot be separated without hopelessly fragmenting that unity.

This was also the conclusion of no less an authority than Eileen Garrett, the famed Irish medium, psi researcher, and founder of the Parapsychology Foundation (and about whom I will have much more to say below). "I would be inclined to interpret these [psi] powers as a manifestation of individual supersensitivity," Garrett wrote, adding:

As I have already indicated I found my own powers to be intimately related to the events and experiences of my earliest childhood; and it may be that the mediumistic gift is an extreme intensification of infant awareness and response during the preverbal period, carried over into adulthood. (Garrett, 1969, p. 216)

But the Greek word *psyche* has contrary connotations. In the hands of Plato in the *Phaedo* (the dialogue that purportedly describes Socrates's final hours before his execution), it became associated with an unchanging, disembodied rational intelligence that has nothing whatsoever to do with the changing "body," which is identified as the source of all ignorance or evil. By "body," then, Plato meant not only the physical organism but also the senses, emotions, imagination — indeed, every-

thing except pure reason or “soul.” As a practical demonstration of this attitude, Socrates’s wife Xanthippe is forcibly removed from the scene of her husband’s imminent death because she dares to express a “womanish” emotional interest in the outcome.

The ontology that will be embraced by the new religious consciousness must of necessity go beyond either old-fashioned Platonic or Cartesian mind/matter dualism as well as beyond old-fashioned reductionist monisms (whether of a materialist or idealist bent). Rosen (1994) has employed the phrase “nondual duality” to suggest something of the radically paradoxical — to some, no doubt, downright pixilated — flavor of this new position (and he is in the process of formulating a major elaboration of his perspective). But whatever its nomenclature, the new, post-postmodern worldview that is just now germinating will have to provide an intelligible account of the relationship between the physical and non-physical aspects of nature without either confusing or reducing one to the other. It must be able to present a coherent idea and image of a total human being without denigrating or denying any aspect of our nature or experience. This includes the physical body and all those aspects of human personality that have suffered because of their association with the despised feminine. Xanthippe must therefore be re-admitted to the dialogue as a fully equal partner if the dialectic — and parapsychology — is to progress.

In sum, whereas the arthritic term “psychic” tends to fix us in old, outdated habits of mind, the more linguistically agile “sensitive” has the decided advantage of being able to straddle entrenched categories of thought. “Sensitive” is emphatically not a little old lady in tennis sneakers; rather, she is a lithe, ultra-hip, post-postmodern Eve, an athletic augury of the dynamic, utterly paradoxical shape of things to come.

Four Mutants: Psi Plus Phi

As I suggested above, the plot of historical development is replete with elements of literary foreshadowing. The shape of things to come has occasionally cast long shadows from the past with the appearance of an unusual individual who combines elements of psi with a philosophical attitude. I will now briefly discuss four such noteworthy “mutants” in the hope of giving us some useful clues to ponder.

Socrates

First, a warning: Like Jesus, Socrates wrote no texts. His dialectic was conversational and spontaneous, and carried on among his fellow Athenians. Thus virtually all we know of Socrates comes from what his pupils

and close friends, Xenophon and (especially) Plato, chose to record in their respective texts. Xenophon was a general and a gentleman but a plodding writer at best. The more imaginative and talented Plato, on the other hand, was an aspiring playwright before he met Socrates and burned all of his plays. Yet all of his philosophical dialogues are mini-plays, enacted dramatic narratives in which historical fact freely mixes with imaginative fiction. His dialogues were the first “fact-based” docudramas. So making statements about the historical person of Socrates is always a bit treacherous — although perhaps slightly less problematic than trying to disentangle the historical Jesus from the Christ concocted by the early Church.

Nevertheless, one clue to the authenticity of our portrait of Socrates is the confessed difficulty scholars have experienced in trying to pigeon-hole him. My own undergraduate teacher, the renowned Plato scholar J. N. Findlay (1978), bemoaned Socrates as a tantalizing tangle of contradictions, a “unique mixture” of “precise logic” and “mysticism” (p. 15; p. 74). Arguably the founder of western philosophy and possessed of one of the sharpest analytical minds ever, Socrates was also a prodigious sensitive who heeded the admonitions of his *daimon* (literally: guardian angel), the inner voice that had spoken to him ever since early childhood. The *daimon* warned him if something he was about to do or say might prove harmful to him in some way.

This precognitive or premonitory function is what Ingo Swann (1993) would term the Nostradamus faculty — or NostraFac for short. Swann describes how his own NostraFac saved his life on several occasions. In one instance, he was walking down a Manhattan street listening to taped music on his Walkman when he heard a mysterious voice yell over the music “Stop!” as he approached the curb. Stop he did, which was extremely fortunate. For just then a speeding car whizzed past, followed by a police cruiser in hot pursuit. Had he stepped off the curb even a few inches, Swann believes it is highly likely he would have been killed.

Socrates trusted his own NostraFac implicitly. In fact, Plato hints in the *Euthyphro* that it was largely because Socrates was teaching the youth of Athens about their own NostaFacs that the Athenians condemned him to death. (Imagine receiving capital punishment today for giving well-attended workshops on developing one’s psi talents!)

Moreover, Socrates also took the pronouncements of the Oracle at Delphi quite seriously. Just how seriously is evidenced by the fact that the Oracle’s declaration that Socrates was the wisest of the Athenians precipitated his mid-life crisis which eventually led to his becoming a philosopher. His paranormal encounter with oracular wisdom proved to be a life-shaping, transformative event, sparking his lifelong inquiry into

the meaning and implications of his singular experience. This is what Rhea A. White (1993, 1997) terms an “exceptional human experience,” or EHE. Socrates’s entire philosophical career could thus be construed as a single extended EHE.

Yet, it is also quite clear that, for Socrates, taking the *daimon* and the oracle seriously was not tantamount to taking them absolutely literally. This is evident, for example, in Plato’s *Euthyphro*, in which Socrates is represented as rejecting outright such narrow-minded literalism. Indeed, Socrates expresses open-mouthed incredulity as Euthyphro, a priest of the Olympian cult, proudly declares (in true Bible-thumper fashion) his unequivocal belief in the literal truth of the stories of the gods’ sultry soap opera-ish affairs and endless family vendettas.

Nor is this critical attitude left behind when it comes to appraising his divinatory experiences. For example, when the Delphi Oracle pronounces him the wisest of all, Socrates is thrown into a quandary because he feels he can neither uncritically accept nor skeptically reject that statement as given. His response to this crisis is to withdraw in order to ponder the meaning of the Oracle’s pronouncement, which he decides must be understood symbolically if it is to make proper sense. “Socrates,” he reasons, does not refer to him as a specific individual, but rather to anyone who, like himself, recognizes their own ignorance. The wise are those who know that they do not know. This learned ignorance becomes synonymous with the font of true “wisdom.” Thus Socrates reinterprets the key terms of the Oracle’s revelation plastically and playfully, as opposed to rigidly and literally, as the priest Euthyphro was wont to do.

And what about his *daimon*? Did Socrates subscribe to the ancient folk tradition which taught that the *daimon* was an independent, external entity, a “guardian angel,” affixed to him at birth by the gods (or by fate or chance)? Or, did he believe that the warnings actually emanated from deep within his own NostraFac? While his forceful rejection of traditional mythological fundamentalism argues in favor of the latter as his true view of the nature and identity of the *daimon*, consistency with his idiosyncratic definition of “wisdom” argues for an agnostic willingness to keep such questions open. In the end, then, Socrates was a pragmatist regarding the *daimon*. As he says at his trial (in Plato’s *Apology*), following his conviction and the pronouncement of the death sentence, he trusts the *daimon* because it has always served in the past to keep him safe. Whatever it is, it is real because it works.

The contemporary philosopher of science Ian Hacking (1983) has observed that it is possible to be a realist about entities but an anti-realist about theories. One can reasonably hold that some theoretical entities (e.g., electrons, God, or even psi) really exist, independently of our knowledge or awareness of them, without necessarily believing that the

theoretical descriptions we have of those entities are literally or completely true representations of their reality. The theory would be regarded as a mere tool or device, a convenient symbol-system for working with certain aspects of the entity.

This type of philosophical instrumentalism is precisely what is needed in order to maintain the fine line between the imperative of taking psi seriously and the fallacy of taking it (and its messages) purely literally. An ability to remain aware of the symbolic and metaphorical aspects not only of first-order psi data but also of our second-order parapsychological theories is essential. The really interesting news is that this sort of philosophical sophistication is not limited to philosophers. It has also been spotted in more than one *bona fide* sensitive.

Eileen J. Garrett

By her own reckoning, Garrett (1969) was trained to use her prodigious sensitivity in the context of the English spiritualist movement and its rather fixed and narrow concept of “mediumship.” She honed her abilities in the spooky atmosphere of the Edwardian séance parlor, with its apports, ectoplasm, and restless spirits of the dead. (Although, I hasten to add, Garrett herself was not a physical medium and never practiced materializations.) Eventually, however, she would embrace an emphatically philosophical approach to questions about the nature and identity of her “spirit controls” Uvani and Abdul Latif. Although the controls themselves insisted upon their fully independent, real existence outside her consciousness, Garrett herself was not so sure. “I saw the configuration of the controls molded, as it were,” she acknowledged, “in the images of those who believed in them” (Garrett, 1969, p. 225), including, of course, herself.

Like Socrates, Garrett had an exceptionally open and pragmatic mind. She proved willing and able to use the controls as tools with which to gather verifiable information that ordinary means could not provide. But with respect to the controls’ true identity, she remained steadfastly agnostic — although this did not measurably diminish or adversely affect their telepathic, clairvoyant, or precognitive performances. In that sense, she ceased to “believe in them,” that is, to accept their claims of independence at face value. This put her at odds with conventional thinking which held that that either the controls were precisely what they claimed to be — namely, disembodied spirits of the dead — or else they were merely split-off subconscious fragments of the medium’s own personality. Swimming against the cultural tide, Garrett rejected this stark, simplistic dichotomy, symptomatic of the cultural turf war being waged between science and spiritualism. She frequently suggested that the

distinction was inadequate to fully capture the far more complex and subtle truth of the matter.

Garrett accordingly did not feel convinced that even her own extensive mediumistic experiences licensed her to make dogmatic pronouncements to soothe the bereaved. Here was her most radical departure from the culture of Spiritualism (and what distinguishes her from many New Age sensitives). On the contrary, she felt that those experiences raised large, disturbing, and perhaps unanswerable philosophical questions concerning the nature of personality, personal identity, and reality itself. “I am unified and drawn into the thoughts and actions of others to a degree not even I can understand,” (Garrett, 1969, p. 169) Garrett confessed. Upon which immediately followed this further candid — and exceedingly Socratic — admission:

In spite of my search for the continued meaning of self, it is a fact that a great part is still a stranger to me. Every day some new side of me is revealed. *On these occasions, I know that I do not know myself* [italics added]. I am a mass of motivations, not independent, not separate, not distinct. I feel a certain sadness that I have not arrived at any answer that would throw light on survival for others; but since I have less knowledge of what is *myself* [italics in original] than most, I do not even know what might survive. (Garrett, 1969, p. 169)

Whereas Socrates was primarily a thinker and only secondarily a sensitive, Eileen Garrett was first and foremost a sensitive and only secondarily a thinker. Still, her mature philosophical statements concerning her spectacularly successful career as a sensitive identify her as one, like Socrates, at the forefront of the ongoing evolutionary attempt to unite the rational intellect and intuitive psi in a more dynamic and formidable synthesis.

Jane Roberts

Like Eileen Garrett, Jane Roberts, best known for her twenty years of trance-time speaking for the self-described “energy essence personality” known as “Seth,” acquired the tag of “medium” and later, as the New Age unfolded, of “channel.”¹ In Roberts’s case, however, this labeling was not the result of an early involvement with Spiritualism. (As described in her books, her powers arose spontaneously, and she remained a self-taught sensitive.) Such labels are, in any case, reflective of our own

1. Roberts resisted and disdained both metaphors as misleadingly suggestive of a passive reception of messages that are untainted by the receiver’s own personality.

impoverished vocabulary and a compulsive (pseudo-scientific) need to pigeonhole phenomena that cannot be neatly categorized.

As Garrett did with regard to her “controls,” Roberts managed to resist the two alternative conventional explanations of the Seth personality. That is to say she refused to accept that Seth was either a “spirit guide” or a split-off fragment of her personal unconscious. Neither fully separate nor entirely parasitic, she grew to think of Seth as a window on a multidimensional form of selfhood, the idea of which she foreshadowed in three seminal works, *Adventures in Consciousness* (1975), *Psychic Politics* (1976a), and *The God of Jane* (1981). In her holographic vision, each aspect of the larger identity is a unique assemblage of a bank of characteristics shared by the whole. Both she and Seth co-existed as distinct, yet kindred, branches of a family tree of consciousness, joined at the root source, yet each growing relatively independently from each other. If Seth was an aspect of her, it was no less true to say, in her view, that she was an aspect of Seth.

In retrospect, Roberts believed that there was a decidedly philosophical impetus that thrust her through the psi portal for the first time. In late 1963, months before the Seth sessions began, she was suffering through a mid-life crisis in which a “small household tragedy” (Roberts, 1986, p. 57) like the death of her cat could plunge her into an emotional tailspin. Her poetry became crowded with dark, oppressive images of death and decay. Life became stale and meaningless. Neither materialistic science nor theistic religion could provide any satisfying answers to her numerous questions.

Then one evening, after a normal supper, a stunning episode occurred as Roberts sat down at her writing table. In an instant, she sensed her consciousness rushing out of the window of her house as it merged with the very air and the leaves on the trees. When she returned to her body after this spontaneous *ecstasis*, she found that her hand had scrawled out a dozen-paged manuscript filled with metaphysical ideas that were completely foreign to her understanding and even contrary to her own consciously held beliefs (Roberts, 1986, p. 51). These were the very ideas that the Seth personality would subsequently expand on over the next twenty years.

Roberts became convinced that the window of the sensitive had opened for her (and would open for others) only “when we have ceased to rely upon most of the answers that have been given to us by others and found wanting” (Roberts, 1986, p. 60). In other words, we must abandon the false creature comforts of what I have elsewhere (Felser, in preparation) referred to as scientific and religious “Answerism” for the rigors of a fully-fledged inquiry into the psi aspect of nature. As Roberts herself realized, such an inquiry produces as many questions as it does

answers, for the complex, oddly sized truths of our experience do not easily fit our one-size-fits-all procrustean intellectual beds:

Yet ultimately it seems that answers to the most important questions only lead to more meaningful questions in which terms like “yes” or “no,” “true” or “false,” “real” or “unreal” finally vanish in a greater context of experience large enough to contain the incongruities, eccentricities and seeming contradictions in which our greater reality happens. (Roberts, 1966/1976, p. xiii)

It is not that these distinctions themselves would vanish in a featureless totality — “a night in which all cows are black” — but rather, that our penchant for simplistic “either/or” thinking would have to yield to a more generously paradoxical “both/and.”

Roberts was well aware from her own experience that the “greater reality” contains a complex admixture of elements that require a sophisticated appreciation of the varied possibilities of interpretation. She constantly questioned herself and her own experiences, and was aghast at those who yearned to surrender their autonomy to her and (what they perceived as) her all-knowing “spirit guide.” It was all too easy for such individuals to relinquish their responsibility for correctly interpreting information gleaned through psi.

Roberts (1981) observed that when we gaze through the psi portal, we are confronted by the inner equivalent of television newscasts, documentaries, dramas, sci-fi fantasies, and educational programs. On this (physical) side of the portal, we are aware that the rules of interpretation, as well as the types of truths communicated, vary according to the difference in genres. Thus, for example (mine, not hers), no sane and reasonable individual would expect to meet Special Agents Fox Mulder and Dana Scully of *X-Files* fame at the FBI building in Washington. We understand that the *X-Files* is a fictional drama meant to entertain, not inform, and that its characters are not real persons. Yet, Roberts lamented, all too many naive sensitives are unwilling or unable to acknowledge that the data obtained from their psi perceptions require the same type of discernment between the literal and the symbolic. Consequently, they are liable to fall into the perilous trap of a blind, unthinking literalism indistinguishable from the fundamentalist mindset — and perhaps even from the substantive metaphysical beliefs — of the Old Time Religions:

But we must stop automatically taking such information at face value, translating it automatically through ancient beliefs. We must look at our own experience again — and learn to trust it. We must be our own psychic naturalists, combining reason and intuition. We

must refuse to let old theories define our realities for us, limiting and distorting the very scope of our lives. (Roberts, 1981, p. 256)

Ironically, Roberts wrote these words at the very moment that the blurring of genre boundaries — especially the categories of fact and fiction — was becoming intellectually and culturally fashionable. This lack of discrimination was an outgrowth of the postmodernist rejection of the real, with its “old-fashioned” concepts like objective truth and meaning, correspondence with reality, and the nature of things. Thus the white laboratory rat of “fact” was slowly swallowed by the python of “fiction.” This philosophical development was reflected in popular culture as the mass media sought to reduce hard news to soft entertainment, thus conflating reality with fantasy. The 1980s and 1990s saw the birth of the new hybrid television genre of “infotainment.” The Gulf War became a blast-'em-up video game, the impeachment of a president a tacky soap opera, and so on.

More recently, a well-known investigator of the near-death experience (NDE) has argued that accounts of the paranormal in general, and the NDE in part can be best understood as entertaining tales of wonder rather than as ostensibly factual reports of an “afterlife” (Moody, 1999). Unlike the postmodernists, though, this investigator (who also happens to hold a Ph.D. in academic philosophy) does not reject outright the very idea of “hard” fact. But, according to his revisionist view, paranormal stories are not factually meaningful because the language of the paranormal is literally nonsensical and purely figurative (Moody, 1999, pp. 68-69). Psi accounts “cast an irresistible spell, weave an inescapable magic” (Moody, 1999, p. 193), but tell us nothing about how the world goes.

Do these recent trends suggest that talented sensitives (like Roberts) — to the extent that they think philosophically at all — make very bad philosophers indeed?

Such a question seems tacitly to presuppose that there is some necessary connection between thinking fashionably and thinking soundly. But this seems a grossly gratuitous, if not ludicrous supposition. The real questions are: “Is postmodernism indeed sound?” and correlatively, “Does the view of the paranormal as pure entertainment hold water?”

I would argue that the notion of any sort of “pure” language-game or mode of discourse is a chimera. The symbolic and the literal are inseparable, but distinct and mutually irreducible aspects of all forms of language. Even the wildest fantasy has some distant, but necessary, basis in fact (Collingwood, 1924), and the hardest of data has a significance that goes beyond its literal, factual meaning. A pink elephant crawling

up the wall may be a “mere hallucination,” but for the prior experiences of seeing elephants and the color pink, it would not exist. Conversely, mathematics, the language of the hard sciences, does more than communicate sheer quantity. As Jung and his progeny have pointed out (Von Franz, 1980, pp. 74-83), numbers have an irreducibly qualitative aspect — an archetypal meaning or symbolic significance — that transcends their utilitarian function as mere counters. These meanings may be lost to the conscious mind, but they nevertheless resonate with the unconscious. The number mysticism of Pythagoras, Plato, the Kabbalists, and the Taoists bear testimony to these deeper qualitative associations.

Those actively involved in psi research and practical applications of psi can testify to the importance of discriminating between the symbolic and the literal elements of psi data. Both are typically present, and neither can be eliminated or ignored without inviting distortion. According to Dale Graff (2000), the physicist and former director of Project Stargate, while those “unfamiliar with psi data usually interpret it [purely] literally ...” (p. 82), “... the basic psi information is usually presented to our consciousness, whether awake or in a dream, in terms of our individual memories and associations. These impressions can be very accurate, approximate or symbolic” (p. 10).

This squares solidly with Jane Roberts’s reflections on her long experience as an “untrained” sensitive, even if it is not in sync with recent cultural trends. It is Roberts, though, who may have the last laugh. As for the culture at large and the television medium that she employed as the basis of her own epistemological analogy, there is increasing evidence of a popular backlash against the trendy postmodern practice of genre blurring. Recently, for example, it was reported that the Fox television network was prepared to swear off “exploitative reality-based shows altogether” in the wake of the fiasco surrounding the network’s broadcast of *Who Wants to Marry a Multimillionaire*, a game show in which two strangers participated in an on-air marriage ceremony. It turned out that the “bride” had no intention from the outset of staying married to her instant “husband” and had taken part in the show as a publicity stunt. As for the loving “husband,” it was subsequently revealed that he had been accused of using violence against a former fiancée. Alas, so much for indiscriminately mixing reality with fantasy.



Jane Roberts believed that her extraordinary abilities developed as a response to her emotional and intellectual dissatisfaction with the reigning philosophies of mainstream science and religion. Her sensitivity was a living tendril poking its way through the cracks of the dry, lifeless

concrete structures of our dominant cultural ideologies. Like Eileen Garrett, she steadfastly maintained that her explorations beyond the psi portal were a cooperative venture between reason and intuition. In the end, her bold expedition deep into the beating heart of the greater reality succeeded, in her own mind, precisely because it raised so many more philosophical questions than it answered.

Friedrich Nietzsche

Nietzsche's hatred of religion in general, and Christianity in particular, is widely and well-known. The following pungent passage seems to indicate that he would have been no easier on those who claim non-ordinary experiences of a psi kind or an encounter with those bizarre entities (angels, UFO occupants) that today's paranormalists are forced to deal with all the time as a matter of course:

As interpreters of our experiences, one sort of honesty has been alien to all founders of religions and their kind: They have never made their experiences a matter of conscience for knowledge. "What did I really experience? What happened in me and around me at that time? Was my reason bright enough? Was my will opposed to all deceptions of the senses and bold in resisting the fantastic?" None of them has asked such questions, nor do any of our dear religious people ask them even now. On the contrary, they thirst after things that go against reason, and they do not wish to make it too hard for themselves to satisfy it. So they experience "miracles" and "rebirths" and hear the voices of little angels! But we, we others who thirst after reason, are determined to scrutinize our experiences as severely as a scientific experiment — hour after hour, day after day. We ourselves wish to be our experiments and guinea pigs. (Nietzsche, 1887/1974, pp. 253)

Is Nietzsche here suggesting that it is impossible for non-ordinary experiences to survive rational scrutiny? Or, is he merely complaining that religious folk refuse even to undertake such an inquiry (and are thus guilty of bad faith)?

There is certainly evidence aplenty to support the latter. Some of the individuals promoting the angel craze, for example, are clearly religious restorationists bent on using an uncritical approach to genuine paranormal experience as a New Age Trojan Horse with which they can smuggle in the Old Time Religion. Thus, it turns out that Eileen Elias Freeman, the author of several popular books on angels and the head of the "Angel Watch Foundation" is a devout Catholic who holds an M. A. in theology from Notre Dame. She is also a longtime member of a lay order

associated with the Benedictine Monks. To a newspaper reporter, Freeman described the nature and purpose of angels in terms that would satisfy the most theologically conservative members of the Vatican's Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith:

One of the good things I see potentially coming out of this fascination for angels is that people, I hope, will remember angels are not God or freelance operators who go around like fairy godmothers zapping those who summon them. Angels are messengers, servants, ministers of God. Salvation with grace and panache — that's what the angels are after. (Navarra, 1994, p. 10)

Here Nietzsche would doubtless nod in gleeful assent: Case closed.

Yet, we might be too hasty were we to conclude from this that Nietzsche would readily dismiss all alleged experiences of the psi portal as mere relics of ancient superstition, or as delicate flowers that would wither under the steady, penetrating gaze of reason. For as Grosso (1998) and Wilson (1956) have pointed out, Nietzsche himself had experiences that could easily be labeled “intuitive,” “inspired,” and perhaps even “mystical.” According to these thinkers, Nietzsche's experiences exercised a considerable influence on the development of his philosophical ideas. Nietzsche himself seemed to suggest (in what could read like a covertly self-referential passage) that the true source of philosophical thinking lay, in effect, in a form of psi: a clairvoyant act of seeing clear through the phenomenal realm to the hidden noumenal reality underneath:

Men of philosophical disposition are known for their constant premonition that our everyday reality, too, is an illusion, hiding another, totally different kind of reality. It was Schopenhauer who considered the ability to view at certain times all men and things as mere phantoms or dream images as the true mark of philosophical talent. (Nietzsche, 1870-1871/1956, p. 20)

Nietzsche's psychological and physical sensitivities and their impact on his work have been amply documented. (He suffered with crippling migraines that sometimes lasted for days.) However, I strongly suspect that his psi sensitivity was no less a factor in his philosophical reflections. Despite his intense antipathy towards the old religious consciousness which sought to censor and control reason, his peek through the psi portal marked him out as an augury of the new.

The End of the Road: Toward a New Mythology of Parapsychology

Grosso (1999) has suggested that mythology is inescapable. “We have to tell stories and make meanings, give things a sense of direction” (1999, p. 246). This is unquestionably so. But the question is, which kinds of stories and what sorts of meanings? From the examples cited above, it is clear that what it is not inevitable is the tendency to succumb to a purely literalistic interpretation of our myths. Religious and scientific fundamentalists are ironically in accord in this crucial respect: Both affirm that if the accounts are literally untrue through and through, they are utterly meaningless.

Thus, what we have today is a (temporary) cultural stalemate. On the one side of the cultural divide, there stands a pugnacious, adolescent scientism that knows it has proved that religion (and therefore parapsychology) is sheer nonsense. On the other side stands a reactionary, infantile religionism that cannot permit the free flow of a genuine rational inquiry to wash away its own rigidly fixed meanings, like so many castles in the sand. Parapsychology has been caught in the middle of this bloody cultural standoff. The hope that the postmodernist reaction might offer a genuine third way is, if my previous analysis is correct, largely illusory. For we have yet to really break free of the rapidly decaying orbit of the old religious consciousness and its constricting habits of thought.

The movement beyond the logjam of the present into the promising future envisioned by James and forecast by Jung will occur only when it is widely recognized that the ancient myths are largely symbolic tales of a natural world that can be investigated empirically and understood philosophically. Not the pseudo-natural world of the reductionist materialists, to be sure, but the real world of nature, a world far more complex and mysterious than either the Enlightenment rationalists or the old-style mythologists ever could have imagined; a world postmodernism churlishly rejects.

Whether it is an insistent philosophical questioning that initially opens the psi portal, or else a spontaneous sensitivity that, once developed, opens up into a fully-flowering philosophical inquiry makes little difference. The time will come when the intuitive and the reflective are fast friends rather than wary antagonists. In the future, parapsychologists will be sensitives who openly and fearlessly plumb the depths of meaning of their own psi experiences. And “they” will be “us.”

Eileen Garrett once said that, “Parapsychology is not even a science, but it may be on the route to revelation” (Garrett, 1969, p. 212). That

route may be a long and winding one. Nevertheless, at the end of the road, who knows? Science and religion may yet meet under better circumstances and decide to settle down and marry after all. That's when the future of parapsychology will truly begin.

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Abstract

This paper argues that parapsychology is suffering from an acute epistemological crisis, uncertain of its identity and future progress. The

early hope of parapsychology, that the adoption of a strictly experimental approach would bring the kind of acceptance mainstream science has denied to psychical research, has proved elusive. In the absence of a scientifically acceptable theory of psi, some researchers have argued that parapsychology should look to traditional religions or postmodernist theory for interpretive models and intellectual acceptance. This paper argues that parapsychology ought rather to insist upon its epistemological autonomy and refuse to subordinate itself to pre-modern religion, modern science, or postmodern philosophy. Thus parapsychology might facilitate the creation of a new, more inclusive form of consciousness in which second-order theoretical reflection is openly and explicitly informed and guided by first-order psi experience. This possibility has been foreshadowed by the dramatic appearance in history of evolutionary mutants — the “sensitive philosophers” and “philosophical sensitives” discussed here.

Résumé

L'auteur de cet article soutient que la parapsychologie souffre d'une crise épistémologique aiguë, doutant de son identité et de ses développements à venir. Le tout premier espoir de la parapsychologie, à savoir que le recours à une approche strictement expérimentale lui apporterait la sorte de reconnaissance que la science officielle avait refusé à la recherche psychique, s'est révélé vain. En l'absence d'une théorie du psi scientifiquement acceptable, certains chercheurs ont affirmé que la parapsychologie devait se tourner vers les religions traditionnelles ou vers une théorie post-moderniste pour des modèles interprétatifs et une reconnaissance intellectuelle. Cet article soutient que la parapsychologie devrait plutôt insister sur son autonomie épistémologique et refuser de se subordonner à une religion pré-moderne, à la science moderne, ou à la philosophie post-moderne. Ainsi la parapsychologie pourrait faciliter l'émergence d'une nouvelle forme de conscience plus globale, dans laquelle la réflexion théorique est ouvertement et explicitement nourrie et étayée par l'expérience psi. Cette possibilité a été occultée par l'apparition dramatique, dans l'histoire de mutants évolutionnistes-les “philosophes sensitifs” et les “sensitifs-philosophiques” - dont il est débattu ici.

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Aufsatz behauptet, daß die Parapsychologie an einer akuten erkenntnistheoretischen Krise leidet, ihrer Identität und des zukünftigen Fortschritts ungewiß. Die zu frühe Hoffnung der Parapsychologie, daß die Übernahme eines strikt experimentellen Zugangs jene Akzeptanz bringen würde, welche die etablierte Wissenschaft der „Psychischen Forschung“ verweigert hatte, hat sich als trügerisch erwiesen. Aufgrund des Mangels einer wissenschaftlich akzeptablen Theorie für Psi haben sich einige Forscher dafür ausgesprochen, daß die Parapsychologie hinsichtlich interpretativer Modelle und intellektueller Akzeptanz auf die traditionellen Religionen oder auf die postmodernistische Theorie

achten solle. Dieser Aufsatz spricht sich dafür aus, daß die Parapsychologie eher auf ihrer erkenntnistheoretischen Autonomie bestehen und sich weigern sollte, sich vor-moderner Religion, moderner Wissenschaft oder post-moderner Philosophie zu unterwerfen. Dadurch mag die Parapsychologie die Schaffung einer neuen, umfassenderen Form von Bewußtsein ermöglichen, in welcher sekundäre theoretische Reflexion offenkundig und explizit durch primäre Psi-Erfahrung unterrichtet und geleitet wird. Eine Vorahnung dieser Möglichkeit liegt in der dramatischen Erscheinung von evolutionären Mutanten in der Geschichte - den „sensitiven Philosophen“ und „philosophischen Sensitiven“, die im vorliegenden Aufsatz diskutiert werden.

抄 録

本稿では、超心理学が、アイデンティティや将来の進歩が不明な、深刻な認識論的危機に陥っている現状が論じられる。超心理学の黎明期には、厳密な実験的方法を採用すれば、心霊研究が主流科学に受け入れてもらえるという希望があったが、それは容易には叶えられないことが、今や明らかになった。科学的に受け入れられるサイ理論が存在しない現状では、超心理学は、伝統的宗教やポストモダニズム理論に目を向け、その説明の仕方をモデルにし、知的に受容されている理由を参考にすべきだとする研究者も一部にある。本稿の論点は、超心理学はむしろ、その認識論的自律を主張すべきであって、前近代的宗教や現代科学やポストモダン哲学への従属は拒絶すべきだとしている点にある。かくして超心理学は、一次的なサイ体験により二次的な理論的考察が明らかに形成、誘導される、より包括的な新しい意識形態を生み出すことになるかもしれない。この可能性が浮上したのは、突然変異体——“敏感な哲学者”と“哲学的敏感者”——が歴史に劇的に登場したためである。

Sommario

Questo lavoro sostiene che la parapsicologia soffre di una crisi epistemologica acuta, nell'incertezza della sua identità e di un progresso futuro. La speranza iniziale della parapsicologia, che l'adozione di un approccio rigidamente sperimentale avrebbe procurato quell'accettazione che la scienza ortodossa ha sempre negato alla ricerca psichica, non è stata appagata. In assenza di una teoria della psi scientificamente accettabile, alcuni ricercatori hanno sostenuto che la parapsicologia dovrebbe rivolgersi alle religioni tradizionali o alla teoria post-modernista per acquisire modelli interpretativi e un'accettazione intellettuale. Questo articolo sostiene la tesi che la parapsicologia dovrebbe invece insistere sulla propria autonomia epistemologica e rifiutare di subordinarsi alla religione pre-moderna, alla scienza moderna o alla filosofia post-moderna. La parapsicologia potrebbe perciò favorire la creazione di una nuova, più ampia forma di coscienza nella quale una riflessione teorica secondaria sia apertamente ed esplicitamente conformata e guidata da

un'esperienza psi primaria. Questa possibilità è stata prefigurata dalla drammatica comparsa nella storia di mutanti evolutivi, i “filosofi sensitivi” e i “sensitivi filosofi” qui discussi.

Resumo

Este artigo discute o fato de a Parapsicologia estar sofrendo uma crise epistemológica aguda, incerta de sua identidade e de seu progresso no futuro. A antiga esperança da Parapsicologia, de que a adoção de uma abordagem estritamente experimental traria o tipo de aceitação que a ciência da mainstream tem negado à pesquisa psíquica, demonstrou-se difícil de se concretizar. Na falta de uma teoria cientificamente aceitável de psi, alguns pesquisadores argumentam que a Parapsicologia deveria olhar atentamente para as religiões tradicionais ou para teorias pós-modernas de modelos interpretativos e de aceitação intelectual. Este artigo defende a idéia de que a Parapsicologia deveria, ao contrário, insistir em sua autonomia epistemológica e recusar subordinar-se à religião pré-moderna, à ciência moderna ou à filosofia pós-moderna. Assim, a Parapsicologia poderia facilitar a criação de uma nova e mais abrangente forma de consciência na qual a reflexão teórica de segunda ordem estaria aberta e explicitamente informada e guiada pela experiência-psi de primeira ordem. Esta possibilidade tem sido prenunciada pelo dramático surgimento na história de mutantes evolutivos — os “filósofos sensitivos” e os “sensitivos filosóficos” aqui discutidos.

Resumen

Se postula que la parapsicología sufre de una crisis epistemológica aguda, sin seguridad de su propia identidad y de su progreso futuro. Las primeras esperanzas de la parapsicología, que la adopción de un acercamiento estrictamente experimental trajera la aceptación que la ciencia le ha negado a la investigación psíquica, ha mostrado ser elusiva. En ausencia de una teoría de psi aceptable científicamente, algunos investigadores proponen que la parapsicología debe buscar modelos explicativos y aceptación intelectual en la religión tradicional o en la teoría postmodernista. En este artículo se discute que la parapsicología debe insistir en su autonomía epistemológica y debe rehusar ser parte de la religión pre-moderna, la ciencia moderna, o la filosofía postmoderna. La parapsicología podría facilitar la creación de una nueva y mas abarcadora forma de conciencia en la cual ideas teóricas de un segundo orden son informadas y guiadas por la experiencia psi primaria. Esta posibilidad ha sido anticipada por la dramática aparición en la historia de mutaciones evolucionarias - los “filósofos sensitivos” y los “sensitivos filosóficos” discutidos en el artículo.