

In Memoriam Donald J. West, M. D., D. litt., FRCPsych (1924-2020)

Donald West, Emeritus Professor of Clinical Criminology and Fellow of Darwin College at Cambridge University, had a long and distinguished career in psychology and psychiatry. The world at large will remember him for his wide-ranging contributions in these areas, perhaps particularly to the cause of decriminalizing homosexuality.

His contributions to the world of parapsychology were no less wide-ranging and significant. Having joined the Society for Psychical Research in 1941, he served the Society in many roles, including membership of the Management Committee of the Perrott-Warrick Fund at Trinity College, Cambridge. He was elected SPR's President more than once, and his contributions to the subject were recognized by the McDougall Award in 1958, and the SPR's Myers Memorial Medal in 1997. His first official role was as Society's Research Officer (1946-49) and he continued to be involved in research throughout his life, organizing surveys and experiments, and critically examining the evidence for spontaneous cases. The first article he published in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* in 1941 dealt with his own experiments in telepathy, but perhaps his best-known experimental contribution involved a series of tests for clairvoyance using clock-face cards with participants based at home. Experimenting as a team (West & Fiske, 1953), he and G. W. Fisk prepared half the targets each but only Fisk obtained significant results while West's targets came in at chance, even though Fisk was the only one to communicate with the participants (by post). Since West did not have any contact with those involved, this has been seen as an early example of experimenter psi. Yet this evidence of negative influence did not match his attitude to the subject; those who knew him and worked with him, myself included, could testify that he was genuinely positive about it.



Another valuable contribution to the field was his modified replication of the SPR's famous Census of Hallucination from 1894 (West 1990), which obtained, on a much smaller scale, results in some ways similar to the original census. Alongside his many publications on criminology and psychiatry, he published many articles and book reviews in parapsychology periodicals. His books relating to parapsychology included *Tests for Extrasensory Perception: An Introductory Guide* (1954), *Eleven Lourdes Miracles* (1957), and *Psychical Research Today* (1954, revised 1962). His last book-length contribution, a critical re-examination of the work of Soal (West & Markwick 2018), has the same characteristics as all of his publications over a period of nearly 80 years: an unflinching but fair and clearly thought-out probing of

evidence for weak spots, presented in a most readable manner. A skeptic in the best sense of the word, he was a most likeable, helpful person with an impish sense of humor and, it seemed to me, hopeful that one day the evidence would measure up to the standard he set for it.

References

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