

## EDITORIAL

## WHITHER PARAPSYCHOLOGY?

By Etzel Cardeña

In a supplement to this journal celebrating its 75th anniversary, various authors gave their sense of where they think the field will be in 25 years (Palmer, 2012). Most contributors were optimistic but also somewhat uncertain as to the exact shape of parapsychology in the future, and with good reason. The scientific study of parapsychological (psi) phenomena has never been an easy task, surviving, sometimes barely, a perfect storm of opposing forces: the seeming fitfulness of the phenomena, an organized and sometimes nasty movement to prohibit their mere study, and, on the other extreme, the uncritical acceptance of various evidence-free and self-contradictory beliefs (Cardeña, 2011, 2015b). During my lifetime I have witnessed cycles in which parapsychology seemed to be on the verge of becoming accepted by mainstream science to then fall and seem to be gasping for air.

I accepted the kind invitations of the previous *Journal of Parapsychology* Editor, John Palmer, and of John Kruth, Executive Director of the Rhine Research Center, to become the new editor of the *Journal*, not without some trepidation. I have always had the good fortune (others might describe it as a curse) to be interested in areas that are complex and fascinating, including the implications of hypnotic phenomena for human potentials, and pathological and non-pathological anomalous experiences and alterations of consciousness. Recognition of the intrinsic value of these areas to our understanding of the mind has been hard-fought and hard-won, but the case for psi phenomena remains in contention, at least as far as an open embrace by mainstream science. I wrote “open” advisedly because I, as well as other researchers in the field, have met many scientists who usually remain mute about the topic but then approach me and tell me in a hush-hush tone that they have personally experienced a psi event. So where does parapsychology stand currently?

There are various supportive indicators including:

- a) publications in top-ranked journals of various disciplines (e.g., Bem, 2011. Radin, Michel, & Delorme, 2016; Storm, Tressoldi, & Di Risio, 2010),
- b) various meta-analyses supporting the psi hypothesis (Cardeña, Palmer, & Marcusson-Clavertz, 2015),
- c) the increasing academic recognition of parapsychology and related topics in the UK (Luke, 2012) and perhaps in other places,
- d) the rediscovery of anomalous experiences, which have been associated with psi phenomena, as a legitimate area of scientific inquiry (Cardeña, Lynn, & Krippner, 2017),
- e) the endorsement of continued psi research by mainstream past and current eminent scientists in various fields (Cardeña, 2014, 2015a),
- f) a general interest in various aspects of psi represented by close to 1,500 publications in various disciplines, as evidenced in bibliographies prepared by Gerd Hövelmann for close to 10 years for the bulletin of the Parapsychological Association *Mindfield*.

But other indicators should temper any undue optimism. As compared with other topics, psi research suffers from:

- a) few incoming or established researchers and centers of research throughout the world,
- b) very little research funding and academic recognition,
- c) a dispersal of the limited input of publications into new journals, some of them with questionable quality control,
- d) an organized opposition to any support for psi, most obvious in wikipedia entries, and a more general uninformed bias against psi in other publications (Roe, 2015).

And then there is the mixed blessing, brought about to a large degree by the innovative work of Daryl Bem (2011), in which reasonable commentators remarked that his work was every bit as good as that accepted in other areas of psychology to then conclude that this *must* imply that there is something wrong in how research in other areas is conducted, evading the considerable support for psi in the research by Bem and many others.

As the incoming editor (John Palmer was the editor for all other items in this issue), I have a number of aims for my tenure:

1) “Mainstream” more the study of psi research by having a multidisciplinary editorial board holding different but informed views on the phenomena.

2) Expand the remit of the *Journal of Parapsychology* to include related areas such as anomalous experiences and states of consciousness in general, as the founders of the Society for Psychical Research had in mind for the then budding field.

3) Open the *Journal* even more to other research approaches than experimental, quantitative ones, since any method has particular strengths and weaknesses, which can be supplemented by other approaches.

4) Encourage contributions from various disciplines, including those not often represented in the *Journal* such as anthropology and the humanities.

5) Expand its international outreach by including reviews of books published in other languages than English.

6) Bring the journal up to date to the standards of other academic journals by, for instance, using digital object identifier system, or dois, and exploring the possibility of providing open access options to authors.

7) And, of course, maintain the level achieved by the *Journal* throughout its nearly 80 years of existence as the most important forum for psi research.

If the *Journal* can meet these goals, I hope that it will also gain a broader hearing by the scientific community at large, although I do not expect that anti-psi zealots of the past or the present will be persuaded. It has been very instructive for me to find out from journal reviewers and my own students that the psi community should reply when necessary but not focus on these critics because the silent majority does not hold their views. To accomplish all of these goals I will require the contribution of some of you who are reading these lines and will send your papers to the *Journal*. If the next editor can take for granted my list of wishes and then add some other ones, I will consider my (our) work done.

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