

PARAPSYCHOLOGY AND THE SKEPTICS: A SCIENTIFIC ARGUMENT FOR THE EXISTENCE OF ESP by Chris Carter. Pittsburgh, PA: SterlingHouse, 2007. Pp. xi + 218. \$18.95 (paperback). ISBN 1-58501-108-8

This book ought to be required reading for recalcitrant skeptics who are dead sure that parapsychology is a pseudoscience, or for those who aspire to enter some sort of scientific Shangri-La by mindlessly repeating the skeptic's mantra: "there's not a shred of evidence." Unfortunately, such obstinate folks are unlikely to pick up this book, for all the reasons the book so amply explains: unexamined ideological assumptions, scientific or religious prejudices, and fears of various kinds. Readers of this *Journal* will not find much that is new here, so I suspect this book will be most useful to scientists and scholars who are open-minded about psi but confounded by the controversy and unsure what to make of it. It would also be a good textbook for use in a college class on critical thinking or the sociology of science.

Carter writes well and the book is digestibly compact; I read it in two sittings. Rupert Sheldrake provides a foreword. This is followed by an introduction presenting the nature of the debate; it introduces some of the better known contemporary critics, and it reviews some of the historical evidence. This is followed by three main parts, each answering a question commonly arising in skeptical debates. Part 1 asks if there is conclusive experimental evidence for psi. Carter deduces that the answer is yes after reviewing three classes of psi research: ESP cards, PK with random number generators, and ganzfeld telepathy experiments. Then he adds icing to the cake by examining research by critics Susan Blackmore, Richard Wiseman, and James Randi. He concludes that their oft-cited claims, which are repeated ad nauseam by their devotees, deserve to be regarded with profound skepticism.

A one-page postscript explains why Carter decided to write this book, and in my view it ought to have been the first page and not the last. He explains that one day while surfing the Web he came across a Web site devoted to debunking beliefs in the afterlife. He was "shocked by the crudity of the author's arguments" and his ignorance of relevant evidence, so Carter began an e-mail exchange with that author to explore his position in more detail. Carter soon found what many readers of this *Journal* have undoubtedly encountered—that some skeptics insist on maintaining strongly held positions without benefit of reading the relevant literature, and that they aren't willing or able to question the assumptions that they've wholeheartedly adopted. Carter's surprise at this irrational stance motivated him to write a book explaining how much of the more strident skepticism

one sees on many Web sites and books is fundamentally flawed. The topics he needed to cover rapidly ballooned, so he turned his idea for a book into a planned series of books, this being the first. He concludes his postscript with the promise that his next book will discuss "ancient and modern evidence for the survival [of consciousness after bodily death] hypothesis, and will carefully consider the skeptical objections."

After reading this book, I felt admiration for Carter's effort; his book pokes another hole into a skeptical dike that has been leaking for over a century but is now on the verge of gushing. Of course, when it comes to dissecting skeptical rhetoric (or, to be less charitable, sheer pigheadedness and bald-faced hubris), a nearly identical book could have been written a hundred years ago by Myers or James. What is new today is not merely much more evidence than was available a century ago but new levels of technical and analytical sophistication that have kept pace with developments in mainstream disciplines. And psi effects are not disappearing, as critics would have us believe. This tells me that someday, hopefully soon, books about skepticism and parapsychology will be of interest only to historians.

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