

Recent Advances

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A Review of ADVANCES IN PARAPSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH 10, edited by Stanley Krippner, Adam J. Rock, Harris L. Friedman and Nancy L. Zingrone. McFarland, 2021. Pp. 224 (softcover). \$75. ISBN (print) 978-0-7864-7792-0 (ebook \$33.99). ISBN (ebook) 978-1-4766-4118-8

The *Advances in Parapsychological Research* series, edited by Stanley Krippner, have been published since 1977. These important volumes remain the go-to books for anybody interested in the most recent discussions of research advances in psi phenomena. Each of the past volumes contain carefully edited and well researched contributions addressing the various subfields and research approaches in the field of parapsychology. It took impressive persistence to get these volumes published in the face of innumerable obstacles. The tenth volume in the series, dedicated to the work of Charles Tart, contains important and useful chapters covering a range of important topics.

The four editors state in their introduction that “it is arguable that parapsychology is one of the most important sciences” (p. 9), as significant research results in this field have the potential to transform common assumptions in psychology as well as other sciences. In this sense, parapsychology provides a stress test of prevailing research assumptions with the potential of overcoming what arguably are its limitations and blinders. What has been called a crisis of confidence in psychological research manifesting, for example, in issues of replicability may not just be specifically a methodological crisis but also a paradigmatic, ontological, and epistemological crisis. The introduction to the volume explores some of these issues, beginning with the question of what constitutes evidence in parapsychology.

By all appearances, parapsychology has frequently suffered from a hypocritical double standard in the field of psychology, with evidence-based reports on psi phenomena being treated and evaluated differently from research in other subfields. The prevailing natural science model which denies psychology its hybrid status as natural *and* human science, in this reviewer’s opinion, has limited what parapsychology could and should do. Given that parapsychology is so often dismissed or is perceived as controversial, the predominance of the mainstream natural science orientation is understandable. Yet, this epistemological lens has inevitably limited the discoveries created by its methodological approaches.

The editors note the importance of a transdisciplinary framework to do justice to the phenomena parapsychological inquiries are investigating. “Parapsychology has the potential to radically transform the way we conceptualize ourselves as species” – a task that has never been more urgent in the face of

our current socio-political crises. *Advances in Parapsychological Research* is a milestone contribution to counter prejudicial and dismissive attitudes about the field of parapsychology.

The essays in volume 10 of *Advances* address the areas of criticism of the field of psychology, proof-oriented research, process-oriented research, and the efficacy of applied psi.

The first essay in this volume by Bryan J. Williams, "Too Strange to Be True? On Two Recent Efforts to Empirically and Critically Assess Claims of Psychic Phenomena", evaluates Etzel Cardena's (2018) summarizing contribution in the *American Psychologist* and the rebuttal made by Reber & Alcock (2019). Williams expertly, judiciously, and patiently reviews the two opposing stances of these two publications. His essay clearly illustrates the prejudicial nature with which parapsychology is all too often approached, such as Reber & Alcock's statement that "parapsychology's claims cannot be true". Williams demonstrates how Cardena's clear and compelling presentation of evidence was denied by Reber and Alcock with prejudice rather than with an attempt to provide pertinent new data, compelling arguments, or relevant interpretations of existing evidence. Their lack of currency in the literature is appalling and illustrates both the power of bias and a failure to bracket assumptions. In short, Cardena deserves more worthy critics that could catalyze advances in the field. This chapter lends itself to being used in introductory classes of consciousness studies.

Williams' discussion of the long-standing controversy about the reality of psi phenomena is balanced by the chapter "Parapsychology, Quantum Theory and Neuroscience" by Roll, Alexander, Williams, and Persinger. It widens the horizon of paradigmatic assumptions and interpretations of evidence instead of confronting an important but somewhat stale debate (as Williams did) and addresses the important challenge to provide a persuasive theory of psi. Quantum theory - arguably the most significant development in the *hard sciences* - has been around for roughly 100 years, but it has had astonishingly little impact on the field of psychology with notable exceptions occurring in the field of parapsychology, including Radin (2006). This lengthy contribution is refreshing because of the discussion of parapsychology through the lens of quantum theory and neuroscience. The chapter is sadly limited by the passing of two of its authors, Roll in 2012 and Persinger in 2018. The remaining co-authors state that "its content has been preserved as it was when last overseen by Roll". This limitation, however, does not take away from the significance of this review of the literature on psi phenomena in relation to quantum theories and neuroscience; it helps us to look down the road for possible future developments in the field. In this sense I found it to be the most fascinating and significant contribution to this volume.

Epistemological and methodological models focused on establishing mono-causality within the representational assumptions of the received view of science have limited a rich contextual understanding of purported psi phenomena as they might be occurring naturally. Quantum theories offer possible ways of overcoming this limitation by reconfiguring psi phenomena as interactional or *intra-actional* phenomena (Barad, 2008). The beginning of the article provides a useful overview of some central concepts in quantum theory, such as complementarity, superposition (the collapse of the quantum wave function), and the observer effect. The authors quote Radin's (2006, 231-232) statement that "quantum theory and a vast body of supporting experiments tell us that *something unaccounted for is connecting otherwise isolated objects*. This is precisely what psi experiences are telling us. The parallels are so striking that it suggests that psi is—literally--the human experience of quantum interconnectedness."

Extant empirical evidence is discussed in the context of quantum entanglement, Josephson's biological version of quantum theory, and complementarity: precognition is interpreted as the collapse of the wave function of a potential event in the future; ESP is interpreted as *psi entanglement*; retro-cognition is interpreted using Bohm's theory of enfoldment (aka entanglement) and the unfolding of traces left with an object, and the interpretation of PK is guided by Wigner's argument that reciprocal to the action of matter on mind there must also exist a direct action of mind upon matter. These interpretations are generative. The authors quote Niels Bohr's seminal statement that "the nature of our consciousness brings about a complementary relationship between ... the psychological and the physical aspects of existence ... which it is not possible to thoroughly understand by one-sided application either of physical or psychological laws". The principle of complementarity, also recently extensively explored in Michael Gazzaniga's *The Consciousness Instinct* (2018), provides a pivot for parapsychological as well as other psychological subfields in the research and interpretation of psychological phenomena in general.

I imagine that the final edit of this lengthy article by Alexander and Williams, in the absence of Roll and Persinger, cannot have been easy. This may explain the lack of discussion of work on distant intentionality (Achterberg et al., 2006; Schlitz & Braud, 1996); the work of Ede Frecska, Stuart Hameroff, Roger Penrose, and others on brain structures; or more recent developments in quantum field theories and neo-materialist approaches (such as Barad, 2010 or her more recent publications); the work of Laughlin et al. (1992) and Winkelman (2010) in neurophenomenology and shamanism; the work of McGilchrist (2019) on hemispheric differences; or Krippner & Friedman (2010) on the neurobiology of psychics and mediums. This interpretive review essay, together with these and other current publications using quantum theories and neuroscientific approaches, deserves careful attention as it presents possibilities of catalyzing expanded understandings of psi phenomena.

The four authors frame the implications of their review of the literature very carefully by asserting that "psi is not an ability that operates outside of physics" and that it "can be made more plausible when considered in the light of quantum physics." They assert that "psi is not incompatible with quantum physics." Their review of the parapsychological literature in light of neuroscientific evidence, the second part of the article, suggests that "psi is not incompatible with the principal finding of neuroscience that many forms of behavior have functional correlates in brain activity". These are carefully framed conclusions that call for further research and integration of extant empirical and theoretical literature.

"A Meta-Analysis of Anomalous Information by Mediums: Assessing the Forced-Choice Design in Mediumship Research, 2000-2020" by Rock, Thorsteinsson, Tressoldi, and Loi is noteworthy since it is only the second published meta-analysis of mediumship. Although limited by the small number of available studies, the authors conclude that anomalous information reception (AIR) "by mediums has not been shown to exist in this analysis based on the aggregate of all available studies spanning two decades of research" (p. 65). The authors did not find support for their central hypothesis that there is significant statistical evidence for an AIR effect in mediumship. In regards to their two additional hypotheses, they interestingly found that proxy sitters yielded a higher effect size (compared to no proxy sitters), while there was no difference between studies in which the sitter was or was not blind to the identity of the medium or vice-versa. The authors conclude that "ultimately, the results of this study fail to support the plausibility of the survival of consciousness and living agent psi" (p. 65).

The final contribution in the volume by Sybo A. Schouten focuses on “Psychics and Police Investigations” and inquires about the usefulness of contributions from psychics in the Netherlands. Given that about one in three police departments has experience with psychics, this is an important topic. Schouten critically reviews a wide range of information and empirical evidence. He describes that experimental studies have not shown that the contribution of psychics enhanced police investigations, yet he questions their ecological validity given the artificial experimental conditions and the difficulty of generalization: “to conclude from these studies that psychics would be unable to provide useful contributions to police investigations in real-life situations would be unjustified”, pointing to the multidimensional context of the occurrence of purported psi phenomena. Schouten notes that there is no evidence that psychics waste valuable police time that could have been used for more traditional methods of investigation. Police said the main negative effect of the involvement of psychics was “the creation of false hope and subsequent disappointment”.

The tenth volume of *Advances in Parapsychological Research* brings together important critical information on central topics in parapsychological research. It is my hope that the next volume will appear sooner rather than later to document advances that have the potential to transform our understanding of psychology and beyond. Given the persistence of hypocritical attitudes toward parapsychology the counterweight of the *Advances* is badly needed and greatly appreciated.

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