

BOOK REVIEWS

FIRST SIGHT: ESP AND PARAPSYCHOLOGY IN EVERYDAY LIFE by James C. Carpenter. Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield. Pp. xii + 487. \$39.95 (hardcover). ISBN 978-1-4422-1390-6.

The progression of ideas in every scientific field is periodically stimulated by a seminal book or article that propels the field forward in important ways. Some such work takes stock of where the field stands at the present time by reviewing and integrating its core knowledge and pointing the way toward new questions and unresolved issues. Other seminal contributions offer novel theoretical perspectives that shift the ways in which researchers conceptualize and explain key phenomena. Still other work influences the field by demonstrating interdisciplinary connections with theory and research from other areas of investigation. *First Sight: ESP and Parapsychology in Everyday Life* does all of these and, in doing so, is destined to emerge as a centrally important contribution to parapsychology.

The book is undergirded by two assumptions that differ from the way in which psi has typically been viewed by both parapsychologists and the public. The first is that, rather than being an anomalous phenomenon that is experienced at particular times by only certain people with special abilities, psi involves universal, ongoing processes that are always active. The name that Carpenter gives his theoretical perspective—"first sight"—is intended to highlight the fundamental, ongoing nature of psi and to stand in contrast to the folk characterization of psychic experience as "second sight." Rather than being an occasional occurrence that supplements ordinary conscious experience, Carpenter argues that psi operates continuously.

The second assumption is that psi shares many similarities with the nonconscious processes that have drawn considerable attention from cognitive and social psychologists over the last decade. Carpenter proposes that, like nonconscious processes that detect and process the ongoing stream of stimuli that lie below the limits of conscious awareness, psi processes similarly scan the environment for information of which people are not consciously aware. In his view, human consciousness extends beyond the physical body so that information that is distant in space and time can be detected, producing the array of phenomena that fall under the umbrella of parapsychology. Once detected, such information may influence people's feelings, motives, inferences, preferences, and thoughts, just as nonconscious processes do. And, like the effects of nonconscious processes, psi does not usually manifest in the form of coherent conscious thoughts but rather as fleeting feelings, urges, images, and other isolated pieces of information.

After describing his conceptualization of psi, Carpenter offers detailed explanations regarding how he believes the processes operate. The exposition of the First Sight perspective and its corollaries is purposefully formal and detailed in chapter 2. As a result, the reader confronts 17 pages of relatively dense material that may initially lead some to wonder whether the remainder of the book will be equally slow-going. (At this point, I thumbed forward to see whether the readability improved later, which it did.) I pondered whether Carpenter could have presented this core theoretical material in a more accessible and reader-friendly fashion but decided that he could not. A formal theory—whether of psi or any other phenomenon—must necessarily be complete, explicit, and clear, and Carpenter should be commended for the care and precision with which he laid out the theory's core principles. In any case, readers should not be deterred. Once they get through chapter 2, the rest is smooth sailing.

Throughout the rest of the book, Carpenter guides us through the terrain of parapsychology by examining its connections with memory, creativity, fear, personality and attitude variables of various kinds, experimenter effects, and real-life psychic experience. As he confronts each topic, Carpenter systematically presents the assumptions and predictions of First Sight theory and then reviews the existing research literature that bears upon the topic. After surveying the relevant literature, he provides an assessment of the ways in which the available evidence is and is not congruent with the theory's predictions and offers pertinent new questions for future research.

The review of the research literature across various domains of parapsychology is exceptionally impressive. In fact, the book's review of the parapsychological literature and its connections to work in mainline psychology would be a major contribution to the field even without First Sight theory. But the theory provides an organizing perspective for interpreting and integrating the studies' results. Carpenter is an experienced researcher who has been involved in both mainline scientific psychology and parapsychology for many years (not to mention being actively involved with the Rhine Research Center). His command of the research literature, along with his long-standing personal involvement in the field, is obvious at every turn. Carpenter's acumen as a clinical psychologist and behavioral scientist also shines through as he draws upon work in cognitive, social, personality, physiological, and clinical psychology to examine the properties of psi.

The only area in which the book struggles is in its effort to integrate receptive or "afferent" forms of psi (i.e., extrasensory perception or ESP) and motor or "efferent" forms of psi (i.e., psychokinesis or PK) under a single theoretical framework. As the "first sight" moniker suggests, most of the book is about afferent psi (telepathy, precognition, presentience, and remote viewing), and it deals in a less detailed fashion with PK. In part, that's because less research has been conducted on PK than on various

forms of ESP, but it may also reflect the fact that First Sight theory and most of its conclusions apply more easily to ESP than to PK. Although Carpenter suggests that certain processes are involved in both afferent and efferent psi, the mechanisms involved in receiving psychic information and those involved when people psychically influence external events would seem sufficiently different to require somewhat different theories. It's as if one tried to use a theory of visual perception to explain how people use their hands to move an object. Seeing and grasping an object are parts of one perceptual-motor system, yet the afferent and efferent aspects of that system involve somewhat different processes. Similarly, ESP and PK may be different enough to require fundamentally different explanations.

Readers who strongly doubt the existence of psi will not change their minds after reading this book, although they might be convinced that purported psi processes may be less strange and more like "normal" psychological phenomena than they had believed. But even if one concedes that psi may operate much like nonconscious perception, the problem remains of accounting for how information from the future, from distant locations, or from other people's minds gets into the system in the first place. Carpenter's assertion that consciousness extends beyond the body (a notion with a long intellectual history and many adherents in consciousness studies) might well be part of the answer, but until questions about the physical and temporal properties of consciousness are answered scientifically, skeptics are not likely to be convinced.

For readers with a background in parapsychology, *First Sight* not only offers intriguing ideas about the nature of psi and its relationship to basic psychological processes but also provides potential explanations for aspects of parapsychological findings within a formal and parsimonious framework. It also provides a well-researched review of major work in the field. Whether they ultimately agree with the theory, parapsychologists will find this book essential reading.

Perhaps the readership that will be most strongly intrigued by the book are open-minded skeptics with backgrounds in psychology, philosophy, or neuroscience who are not sure what to make of parapsychology. There are large numbers of nonparapsychologists who have great difficulty accepting the notion that psi exists, yet are sufficiently familiar with parapsychological research to believe that they must reserve judgment until more evidence is in. These readers will find *First Sight* theory and the sweeping review of the literature intriguing, whether or not they ultimately agree with either *First Sight* theory or the existence of psi itself.

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