

## REPLY TO ED KELLY

By Doug Stokes

I will reply to Kelly's points in roughly chronological order. He states that Sursem subscribes to the filter, transmission, and permission models of mind-brain interaction. These three doctrines are not equivalent. My objections to those doctrines are spelled out in my review and I will not repeat them here.

With regard to our mutual embrace of panpsychism in its various forms, I would urge the adoption of the terms “pandeism” and “panendeism” in preference to the more widely used terms “pantheism” and “panentheism” in order to avoid the theistic assumptions of the latter two terms (which both Sursem and I reject).

Kelly cites serial position effects, psi missing, grouping of hits, and so forth as supporting the psi hypothesis. Does he seriously think that these effects have given rise to replicable, fecund, and progressive lines of research? He cites Carpenter’s (2012) writings on what he calls first sight to support the existence of psi. However, Carpenter assumes at the outset of his book that the existence of psi has already been proven, which it has not. Rather, he states that rather than presenting an analysis of the reality of psi, his book presumes the reality of psi (p. 6). Then Carpenter proceeds to engage in wild speculation based on this assumption that is not well-grounded empirically.

Many skeptics assume the reverse, that psi has been proven not to exist. In fact, in 2006 the leading skeptical organization changed its name from the delightfully-acronymed Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP, pronounced PSI COP) to the Committee for Scientific Inquiry (CSI, a prosaic acronym already used by far too many TV shows). This name change was prompted by the skeptics’ feeling that criticizing psi research was like flogging a dead horse. They also noted that public interest in psi research has diminished from its heyday in the 1970s and 1980s, when CSICOP was founded. So they have largely abandoned criticisms of psi research in favor of other lines of research that they also regard as pseudoscience and/or controversial.

At this point, it will probably be useful to clarify my own views on whether psi exists or not. I was commissioned to write the “skeptical chapter” for the recently published *Parapsychology: A Handbook for the 21st Century*. I titled this chapter “The Case Against Psi,” and in it I tried to play the devil’s advocate for the anti-psi view. I may have lapsed into the role of the Devil himself (or herself) in places.

I do not believe that the existence of psi has been proven. It can never be proven through meta-analyses based on the unexamined and likely false assumption that none of the experimenters are fraudulent, especially in view of the recently discovered high rates of fraud in related fields such as biomedical and psychological research. Meta-analyses might provide such proof if the experimental designs can be tightened so as to eliminate the opportunity for investigator fraud. The problem of data selection can be addressed through the preregistration of experiments, an advance that parapsychology is quickly adopting. Thus, the field is moving in a direction that might one day result in solid experimental proof of psi. However, if one assumes that fraud and data selection occur at the same rates that have been documented to occur in the wider scientific community and assumes that psi does not exist, one would expect that parapsychological effects found in meta-analyses would be quite small and not easily replicable. Such meta-analyses may, however, show statistically significant overall psi effects.

Some prominent parapsychologists, such as Dean Radin in his book *Supernormal* (Radin, 2013) present an oversimplified version of hypothesis-testing by stating that the null hypothesis in a psi experiment is the hypothesis that psi does not exist (p. 198). Under this interpretation, when one rejects the null hypothesis in a statistical test, one is rejecting the hypothesis that psi does not exist. Ergo, psi must exist. This facile conclusion can be avoided once it is realized that the null hypothesis is much more complicated than this, as discussed in more detail in the next paragraph. Radin, also presents a Bayesian approach, but he mangles that in places. For instance he states that the odds against chance of obtaining an experimental effect that is significant at the .05 level are 20 to 1 (p. 32). In fact they are 19 to 1.

In my view, the existing pattern of psi results is about what one would expect under the hypothesis that psi does not exist. Mainly, one would expect that a few dastardly investigators (of whom there is currently no shortage in the scientific community) will engage in fraud and claim to have obtained spectacular evidence of paranormal wonders. Then the results of these lines of research will decline as more and more honest researchers attempt to replicate these effects. In any psi experiment, indeed in any scientific experiment, there are unstated auxiliary hypotheses lingering within the real null hypothesis. In most psi meta-analyses, such unstated assumptions include the assumptions that none of the experiments are fraudulent, that the experimental apparatus has not malfunctioned during the experiments, and so forth.

If psi does exist, one might reasonably expect that a replicable psi effect might eventually be discovered. Right now, the pattern of results strongly suggests that either psi does not exist or that psi cannot be captured experimentally using current methodology. We have tried a lot of things, and they haven't worked.

Spontaneous cases provide a strong suggestion that psi may exist, but the study of such phenomena is a somewhat neglected area at the present time. Ironically, if psi does not exist, this would only strengthen the existing evidence for personal survival, including that based on apparent memories of past lives, crisis apparitions, and so forth.

With regard to my own work, of which Kelly claims ignorance, I have developed my own models of mind-matter interaction over the course of my three books, *The Nature of Mind* (Stokes, 1997), *The Conscious Mind and the Physical World* (Stokes, 2007), and *Reimagining the Soul* (Stokes, 2014), as well as in numerous earlier articles in the academic journals in parapsychology, going back to the 1980s. As McFarland is arguably the leading publisher of academic books in parapsychology and as these books have been reviewed in all the leading parapsychological journals, my ideas are hard to miss. As the model of reality I have proposed in these works is so close to Sursem's, I was surprised to see no mention of it in either *IM* or *BP*. This may be due to the fact that I argue against the survival of personality traits, which is a substantive difference between Sursem's view and my own. (My reasons for doubting the survival of the personality are set forth in my review of *BP* and set forth in encyclopedic abundance in *MoA*). Sursem's failure to address my work may reflect a general tendency on the part of a substantial minority of parapsychologists to simply ignore criticisms of their work and to continue using their flawed methodology as if the criticisms never happened. A particularly egregious example of such practices may be found in Brenda Dunne's remote viewing research (see my article entitled "The Strange Odyssey of Brenda Dunne," Stokes, 2004).

If the parapsychological community simply ignores both internal and external critics and simply continues current practices while ignoring legitimate criticism, it will produce a recipe for a pseudoscience in the making.

Finally, on a personal note, I take a Fox Mulderian approach to the investigation of psi. I want to believe. Psi phenomena, if they exist, would be the coolest and potentially most important thing in the universe. But we cannot abandon rationality in their pursuit.

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