

PARAPSYCHOLOGY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: ESSAYS ON THE FUTURE OF PSYCHICAL RESEARCH edited by Michael A. Thalbourne and Lance Storm. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005. Pp. vii + 387. ISBN 0-7864-1938-8

According to its preface, the main purpose of *Parapsychology in the Twenty-First Century* is “to explore future directions of parapsychology” but that declaration is qualified by the statement: “reports of the current status of the field were considered crucial to the overall feel of the book” (p. 5). The preface also states that the book’s advantage is that “it does not present the overarching viewpoint of a single author. Instead, through the wide-ranging interests and expertise of its contributors, it is representative of the field in general” (p. 5). However, even glancing at the table of contents makes it apparent that “the field in general” is far from represented. In addition, it is often unclear exactly how the content relates to “the future directions of parapsychology.”

The book is divided into four sections: general issues, experimental issues, theoretical issues, and sociological and phenomenological issues. There is no thorough discussion, however, of how parapsychology might interact with the fields of medicine, consciousness research, physics, anthropology, or philosophy in the twenty-first century though numerous authors support collaboration and integration with other disciplines. Furthermore, the section discussing experimental issues includes only a technical chapter proposing the use of a specific psi testing procedure (the ball drawing test) and two descriptive chapters on altered states of consciousness and forced-choice ESP tests. There is no discussion in this section regarding the future of parapsychological experiments in micro- or macro-psychokinesis, precognition, clairvoyance, and mediumship and the survival of consciousness, nor any speculation about the empirical evaluation of other topics that may become part of parapsychology in the future.

Some other content lacking in this book was any in-depth discussions regarding (1) possible social, psychological, or medical applications of parapsychological findings for the future and (2) suggestions regarding

the specific goals of parapsychology as a science in this new millennium. At the 50th annual Parapsychological Association (PA) convention, issues including the advancement of parapsychology as a science, the dissemination of parapsychological knowledge, and the integration of parapsychology with other scientific fields were discussed in an assessment of the goals of the PA. Chapters presenting issues such as these in detail would have fit well within this book (though several authors do reference integration with other fields in their chapters).

In addition, the content of some of the chapters is in direct conflict with the information or suggestions presented in other chapters. For example, in chapter 3, William Braud states: "whether psi occurs significantly more frequently or significantly more accurately [during procedures such as the ganzfeld] is not at all clear—due to the typical absence of appropriate contrast or control conditions with which these ostensible psi-facilitators could be compared" (p. 48). Then, in the very next chapter, Adrian Parker repeatedly references (but does not cite) the work of Braud but, in the words of the editors, "describes in detail the so-called Real-Time Digital Ganzfeld Technique (RTDGT)," concludes that "altered states are psi-conducive," and "argues cogently for the RTDGT to become widely available to researchers" (p. 65) even though Parker's extensive description of the RTDGT methodology does not include any of the "appropriate contrast or control conditions" suggested by Braud in the previous chapter.

Despite these limitations, many of the individual chapters that are included in this text contain interesting and informative reports on the current state of affairs in parapsychology and numerous predictions, suggestions, and warnings regarding its future as a scientific discipline.

Several of the authors provide an optimistic view of parapsychology's potential. Dean Radin speculates about the integration of parapsychology into mainstream fields such as physics, medicine, biology, and consciousness research, and perhaps even religion in an "era of para-integration" (although he also posits that the current time in history may be alternatively deemed "the age of depressing chaos" or "the age of absolute idiocy") (pp. 15–17). Robert Morris shares Radin's optimistic view regarding integration and claims that "before long the term parapsychology will naturally evolve into at least one, and probably several, more precise terms, as we develop the knowledge to inform that evolution" (p. 35).

This collection of essays also includes several more pessimistic yet clever analogies regarding the current state and future of parapsychology. Fiona Steinkamp states that "...parapsychology has grown from a baby to a toddler. It has grasped the methodology of walking, but it has yet to learn how to walk in a specific direction. There is no view of a goal or of the quickest and easiest way to get to that goal" (p. 157), but she goes on to state that "there is room for optimism" (p. 158). Stanley Krippner and Gerd H. Hövelmann maintain that parapsychologists "constantly

carry what most women carry in large purses: much that is useless, a few absolutely essential items, and then, for good measure, a great number of items that fall in between. Parapsychologists' greatest difficulty lies in establishing which is which" (p. 168). James McClenon has an even darker opinion: "The field's deviant status suggests that future claims of replicability will be treated skeptically and that parapsychology will not gain acceptance in the near future" (p. 338). A review of the specific chapter content follows below.

Chapter 1 of the General Issues section contains a revision of the Presidential Address Dean Radin gave to the PA in 1999 and includes two historical tales about parapsychology's struggle with skepticism and Radin's views on what the future holds (some optimistic and some not, as stated above). The second chapter, by Robert Morris, was originally published by the *Journal of Parapsychology* and is specifically titled "Parapsychology in the Twenty-First Century." Morris details "10 areas of potential difficulties facing parapsychology" and "offers six strategies for parapsychology to adopt as it enters the twenty-first century" (p. 22).

In chapter 3, "The Farther Reaches of Psi Research: Future Choices and Possibilities," which serves as one of the most useful, practical, and on-task of the chapters, William Braud warns against the continued narrowing of parapsychological research interests as the field becomes "concerned more and more with less and less":

Today, psi research restricts itself almost exclusively to the "big four" phenomena of telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis, with an occasional nod toward survival and afterlife topics. Along with this topical limitation has come a narrowing of its favored research methods, a privileging of contrived quantitative correlational and experimental studies, and a deemphasis of qualitative studies of naturally occurring experiences and phenomena. (p. 40)

Braud goes on to lament the limited number of experimental variations used to study even the "big four" (pp. 40–41) and the "too-narrow range of persons" to whom parapsychologists have been "answerable" including both "those we might serve and those to whom we might look for inspiration and useful ideas" (p. 44). Braud also suggests "increased awareness of fads and wariness of too-limited time frames" and "more careful assessment of our conclusions and assumptions" during future "consolidation, integration, and reconceptualization endeavors" (pp. 44–53).

Braud ends chapter 3 with specific proposals for the future including the expansion of both the content and aims of psi research; the recognition of the role of "nonevident psi" (p. 55); the devotion of more attention

to the effects of the experimenter and the location on study results; the integration of parapsychological phenomena with other processes described in spiritual, esoteric, and wisdom traditions; and the further exploration of the limits of psi and the range of events and systems possibly influenced by it. Braud lists as "the most important and most effective future emphasis" as one in which "all of us become much more intimate and familiar with our subject matter" (p. 58) by preparing for personal psi experiences and recognizing them when they occur.

In the first chapter of the Experimental Issues section, "Psi and Altered States of Consciousness," Adrian Parker describes a series of ESP experiments performed in 1905 by William Barrett utilizing remote viewing and the ganzfeld technique; discusses the historical use of hypnosis and dream states as facilitators of psi; provides descriptions of the history, evolution, and methods used in the ganzfeld technique; and, as stated above, describes in detail the RTDGT as a method for studying "high-quality psi and not just small statistical aberrations" (p. 86).

Parker, however, includes as a limitation of the RTDGT that "in the long run it may be counterproductive to continue to try to strip psi of its magical heritage and study it as a simple ability to be controlled" and suggests that "the greatest hindrance to future research is no longer the replication problem, but the need to produce theories that relate to mainstream psychology" (p. 86). A more detailed discussion by the author of either of these topics seems to be more appropriate for a book about the future of parapsychology than the historical use of purported psi-facilitators and would have been a relevant and welcome addition to the text.

Suitbert Ertel begins chapter 5, "The Ball Drawing Test: Psi from Untrodden Ground," with a section titled "A Deplorable State of the Art" and states that "at the moment, parapsychological experiments are encumbered with problems" (p. 91). The problems Ertel refers to include: too much effort-expenditure, lack of participant motivation, effects that are too small and tend to decline, the dubious nature of positive results, and a lack of focus on process-oriented studies. Ertel suggests that the ball drawing test may mitigate or solve these problems and provides a detailed technical description of the procedure.

The Experimental Issues section is closed with "Forced-Choice ESP Experiments: Their Past and Their Future" by Fiona Steinkamp and includes an extensive 31-page review of the ESP literature available in the Koestler Parapsychology Unit and three pages of text describing parapsychology's current limitations and suggestions for improvement. Again, in a collection of "Essays on the Future of Psychological Research," the number of pages on these two topics may have been more appropriate had they been reversed.

The Theoretical Issues section begins with the aptly titled chapter "The Future of Psi Research: Recommendations in Retrospect" by Stanley

Krippner and Gerd H. Hövelmann. In 1986, Krippner and Hövelmann published 11 well-received recommendations for the future of psi research that were termed "The 11 Commandments" 2 years later by another group of authors acting as "devil's advocates." This current chapter includes Krippner and Hövelmann's responses to each of those 11 criticisms as well as six additional recommendations for psi research in a postmodern age. The authors make it clear that they are not proposing "new models, new paradigms, or new qualitative nor quantitative projects" but rather are calling for "a streamlining of our field that may utilize the available funds and personnel to the maximum advantage" (p. 185).

In chapter 8, "The Theory of Psychopraxia: A Paradigm for the Future?" editor Michael A. Thalbourne discusses "some relevant issues that were not addressed in depth" in a previous monograph. A reader unfamiliar with this monograph published by the Parapsychology Foundation in 2004 is out of luck: Thalbourne makes no effort to summarize its content and rather begins by stating that the word psychopraxia means "something like 'the self achieving goals'" (p. 190) and listing four components central to the theory before indirectly stating that the theory postulates "that there is not a dichotomy [involving ESP and PK] but only one, unitary process by which goals of a variety of sort—mental or physical—are achieved" (p. 190). The remainder of the chapter involves a complicated description of three of the four components central to the theory and an even more complicated review of five experiments performed by the co-editors of the book, Thalbourne and Storm, testing the theory. And although "the future" is referred to in the title of the chapter, the only overt reference to it exists in the second to the last sentence: "The theory of psychopraxia leaves behind many of the problems faced by investigators in the past century, and is therefore a theory very much oriented towards research in the twenty-first century" (p. 203).

The chapter following Thalbourne's is a critique of the theory of psychopraxia by co-editor Lance Storm including another discussion of the three components central to the theory: the self, the pro attitude, and necessary conditions. Storm closes by stating that partial experimental evidence exists for two of the theory's propositions (pro attitude and necessary conditions) and then discusses them further with suggestions for their role in future experimental design.

In chapter 10, "Tackling the Mind-Matter Problem from a Consciousness Perspective," Christine Hardy discusses the law of connective-dynamic emergence, a component of semantic fields theory, and how it addresses the mystery of the interaction between the mind and the brain. This theory proposes that "two systems may interact and influence each other, whether or not they are of a similar structural or organizational type" (p. 231) which "solves the gap problem between mind and matter" (p. 232). Hardy also discusses the evolution of the capacity for psi in humans and suggests that it can be directed by intention, "the setting of an aim and a

proactive behavior” to fulfill it (p. 234), in order to address threats to our survival. Hardy states:

Such an evolutionary possibility would make sense in terms of the survival of our species and Earth. The dangers facing the human species, the quick extinction of thousands of human cultures, as well as animal and flora species, the ecological disaster looming over our planet—all of them mostly due to crass ignorance of ecological interconnected dynamics, and to a lack of planetary consciousness—all of this could trigger the frantic search for solutions by the collective unconscious, or Gaia consciousness. (p. 236)

Hardy concludes with the optimistic and heartwarming speculation that as psi abilities in humans become more widespread, it will lead people to develop a greater personal integrity, to pay more attention to their behaviors, to acknowledge their own shortcomings, to be less inclined to manipulate others, and to welcome the “richness of a world of divergent outlooks and perspectives” (p. 238).

In chapter 11, “Subjective Anomalous Events: Perspectives for the Future, Voices from the Past,” Vernon M. Neppe and John Palmer make a case for the importance of subjective experiences, stating that “it is clear to us that the future of parapsychology requires a classification system for anomalous events and that the human sciences must also be involved” (p. 243). This latter point should involve, the authors propose, the education of psychiatrists and psychologists about the basic approaches to parapsychology, the reestablishment of diagnostic nomenclature, and a narrowing of what is regarded as abnormal. Neppe and Palmer describe several examples, both psychiatric and parapsychological, of subjective paranormal/psi experiences (SPEs) including hallucinations, delusions, out-of-body experiences, and near-death experiences. The authors’ suggestions for the future integrate the analysis of subjective experiences with those occurring in an objective lab setting.

The Sociological and Phenomenological Issues section begins with another chapter from co-editor Lance Storm in which Storm describes parapsychology’s specification and replication problems; discusses the roles of experience, belief, and statistics in scientific paradigm construction; and provides a socioempirical analysis of the skepticism about psi. Storm closes with: “Parapsychology must not resist the forces of social change, but must yield to them as part of an ongoing natural process that extends into the future” (p. 300).

In chapter 13, Robin Wooffitt proposes that the future of parapsychology should include an emphasis on the communication that takes place between all study participants, specifically through the use of conversation analysis. James McClenon, similarly to Christine Hardy in the

previous section, discusses the evolution of psi abilities and experiences in chapter 14: "The Ritual Healing Theory: Hypotheses for Psychological Research." This theory

argues that genes related to dissociation increased in frequency among ancient hominids since dissociation alleviated negative impacts of trauma. Hominids devised therapeutic rituals based on these dissociative capacities and practiced rituals for many millennia, further increasing the frequency of dissociative genotypes. (p. 338)

McClenon posits that the theory "provides hypotheses testable within the fields of psychical research, anthropology, social psychology of religion, folklore, history, physiology, and medicine" (p. 354).

In the last chapter, "Experiential Research: Unveiling Psi Through Phenomenological Enquiry," Pamela Rae Heath asserts that the phenomenological analysis of subjective anomalous experiences (which are actually normal but usually weak or latent) can "lead to new insights not only about the experience itself, but also how one might better approach the topic using qualitative and quantitative methods" (p. 362). Heath discusses the history of phenomenology as a research tool and reviews how it has been used to analyze experiences of synchronicity; channeling, including the experiences of the mediums as well as the source entities; the near-death state; ESP; PK; and exceptional performance in sports. She closes by identifying several potential uses for this methodology in the future including the analysis of numerous manifestations of psi; elucidating the difference, if one exists, between ESP and PK; and determining the cause(s) of psi inhibition.

Overall, this book contains several relevant and useful chapters for a reader interested in the possibilities regarding, and suggestions for, the future of psychical research, but it also contains several chapters which do not address those topics specifically. The recurrent themes proposed by several of the authors regarding the future of this field include predictions of integration with other scientific disciplines, a move away from proof-oriented research and toward a more process-oriented approach, and the recognition that most experiences with the paranormal are actually more normal than previously believed.

JULIE BEISCHEL

Windbridge Institute
for Applied Research in Human Potential
PO Box 31468
Tucson, AZ 85751-1468
beischel@windbridge.org