

BOOK REVIEWS

TELEPHONE CALLS FROM THE DEAD: A REVISED LOOK AT THE PHENOMENON THIRTY YEARS ON by Callum E. Cooper. Old Portsmouth: Tricorn Books, 2012. Pp. xiii + 193. £8.99 (paperback). ISBN: 978-0-9567597-2-6.

In 1979, parapsychologists D. Scott Rogo and Raymond Bayless published *Phone Calls from the Dead: The Results of a Two-Year Investigation into an Incredible Phenomenon* which addressed “experiences which most parapsychologists have been ignoring for years” (p. 3); that is, anomalous telephone contacts (ATCs) which appear to come from the deceased. Rogo and Bayless asked “Could the telephone ... actually be used on occasion as a channel for psychic communication between the living and the dead?” (p. 3). They reported that “these phone calls actually do occur and are, indeed, probably more common than you might imagine” (p. 3).

Fast forward roughly 30 years and we find Callum Cooper discovering contemporary reports of anomalous telephone phenomena while “trolling the internet” (p. 6). Finding continuing reports of these phenomena inspired Cooper to track down Rogo’s original archives at the California Institute of Integral Studies and begin his own investigation of ATC phenomena.

Cooper discusses the original findings published in 1979 while also providing commentary and including additional material about the back story of the Rogo and Bayless research as well as new analyses of the original cases. In addition, Cooper includes new analyses of previously unpublished cases collected by Rogo and Bayless. With the original Rogo and Bayless volume out of print and both authors deceased, the publication of Cooper’s book makes their original material as well as additional information available to a new generation of researchers. *Telephone Calls from the Dead* serves as a modern collection of spontaneous case reporting.

Cooper seems well suited to address this topic. He holds a BSc (Hons) in psychology from the University of Northampton, an MRes in psychology from Sheffield Hallam University, and is currently pursuing doctoral research in psychology and parapsychology at the University of Northampton. Prior to publication of the book, Cooper had published peer-reviewed articles on the topic.

The writing style of the book is non-technical and conversational. As is common in science writing, Cooper had to find the balance between making the material accessible to a general audience while providing enough details to support his case; this, for the most part, he accomplished successfully.

Although the book is suitable for the general public, one serious limitation of *Telephone Calls from the Dead*, is the lack of a detailed discussion of the methods used to collect and analyze the data. The inclusion of this information would have gone a long way in helping the more technical or skeptical reader better appreciate the significance of the findings and the relevance of the phenomenon. In addition, it is unclear whether Cooper’s analyses include only cases collected by Rogo and Bayless, or if additional cases collected by Cooper were included.

The book contains a Foreword by Elizabeth McAdams, PhD, and ten chapters. In Chapter 1, “Introduction”, Cooper sets the stage by providing a fictional example of an ATC along with a brief discussion of the scope and history of parapsychology. He finishes with a description of an ATC that was reported in the popular media in 2008 which inspired him to examine and expand upon the original work of Rogo and Bayless.

Chapter 2, “The Researchers,” provides details about Rogo and Bayless and includes information “not only [about] the lives of both authors, but also their research, and their friendship” (p. 9).

Chapter 3, “The History of Anomalous Telephone Communication,” covers cases starting with David Wilson and the wireless telegraph (1913) through to Thomas Edison (1920) and then Cooper’s current work on the subject.

In Chapter 4, “The Variety of Phone Call Cases,” Cooper provides descriptions and examples of

the different categories of call cases. These include Apparent Cases (when someone receives a call from someone who is dead); Intention Cases (when a call or message is received which refers to a call the receiver intended to make, but never did); and Answer Cases (calls made by the living and answered by a person who the caller does not know is dead). Cooper then further expands these case categories into five Types: Type 1, Simple Calls (“the dead caller says only a few words and is unresponsive to any questions asked;” p. 47); Type 2, Prolonged Calls (longer calls which include an actual conversation); Type 3, Answer Calls (described above); Type 4, Mixed Calls (a mixture of Type 1 and Type 2); and Type 5, Intention Calls (described above).

In Chapter 5, “Analyzing the Experiences,” Cooper shares the results of his “thematic content analysis to explore re-occurring themes” (p. 80) from 50 cases and includes a frequency breakdown of the call types with Type 1 being the most common ($n = 14$) followed by Types 4 and 5 (each with $n = 6$); Type 2 ($n = 5$); and Type 3 ($n = 1$). The remaining 18 cases are classified as Miscellaneous Accounts (described below). Descriptions of the main characteristics of the five Call Types are also provided which include Audible Anomalies, Anniversary Calls, and Warnings and Emergencies.

Chapter 6, “Miscellaneous Accounts,” offers examples of cases which do not fit into the previously defined Call Types. These cases include Dream Calls, Haunted Telephones, Coincidence Calls, and Voice-mail Messages from the Dead.

In Chapter 7, “Psychology of the Phone Calls,” Cooper reviews responses by Rogo to critiques that phone calls from the dead could be explained by such normal processes as hallucinations, dreams, human error, fraud, expectancy and suggestion. Cooper states that these factors need to be carefully considered and concludes that once

“We can confidently rule out all the possible psychological explanations and technological faults, we may be left with no option but to consider the reality of psychic abilities being involved in these events and even the possibility of communication with the dead.” (p. 128)

Chapter 8, “Theories of the Phone Call Mechanics,” starts with Cooper asking: Are telephone calls from the dead factually possible after all rational explanations have been considered? The chapter then provides a brief overview of telephone technology (including that of mobile phones). Cooper posits that “if these calls are being originated by paranormal means, then it follows that something must be manipulating the system of pulse dialing, transmission of information by radio waves, or the telephone itself in some form” (p. 132). Finally, possible causes for the ATCs including Electronic Voice Phenomena (EVP) and living agent psychokinesis, are considered.

Chapter 9, “Text Messages, Emails and Beyond?” covers several cases of alleged messages from the dead received on modern devices and discusses possible explanations for them.

Chapter 10, “Peer Comments,” includes feedback on this work from experts including John Randall and John Palmer. Randall, when discussing the original Rogo-Bayless text stated, “I felt that all the cases in ‘Phone Calls’ could have alternative explanations, and one shouldn’t claim something is paranormal until you have eliminated all other possibilities” (p. 166) such as user error and hoaxes. Randall also stressed the need to be able to separate paranormal calls from those with non-paranormal explanations. This issue is also raised by Palmer who writes, “The most important question to me about the phone call cases is whether any of them reflect an anomalous process” (p. 169). Palmer continues to make the point that should an anomalous process be identified, it does not necessarily mean that the calls are communication with the dead because we are still left with the classic source of psi problem and the super-psi hypothesis.

Overall, I echo the issues raised by both Randall and Palmer. As an empiricist, I am very interested in these types of spontaneous case catalogs because they allow for hypothesis development and testing regarding the nature of certain phenomena. Additionally, collections of case reports allow not only for analyses of data about a phenomenon but also about the individuals who experience it.

As ATCs from the dead continue to be experienced and reported, *Telephone Calls from the Dead* is a useful review of the phenomenon and of the investigations into it.

Reference

Rogo, D. S., & Bayless, R. (1979). *Phone calls from the dead: The results of a two-year investigation into an incredible phenomenon*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

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