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In Memoriam
Rex Stanford (1938–2022): A Personal Tribute to an Intellectual Giant in the Science of Parapsychology

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I was a little surprised and greatly saddened to learn of the sudden passing of my close friend and sometimes professional colleague Rex Stanford. Rex died on May 11, 2022 at Knapp Medical Center in his hometown of Weslaco, Texas, 3½ years after the loss of his beloved wife Birgit, whom he missed greatly.

I first met Rex in the summer of 1965, the second of three summers in which he was a Research Fellow at J. B. Rhine's parapsychology laboratory in Durham, NC, which for the first two years was associated with Duke University, where I was an undergraduate student during the rest of the year (upon Rhine's retirement from Duke in 1966 the lab became the independent Institute for Parapsychology). I was a complete newcomer to the field at the time and didn't contribute much to the day-to-day activities, but I was inspired by and learned a great deal from listening in on intellectually stimulating conversations among the remarkable group of young staff members that Rhine had assembled. In addition to Rex, the group included Jim Carpenter, Charles Honorton, and Bob Morris, all of whom went on to make important contributions to the field of parapsychology, either as professors in major university psychology departments or, in Honorton's case, as director of an independent parapsychology laboratory.

However, it was not until 1967 that I got to know Rex personally. He was in the last year of the Ph.D. program at the University of Texas at Austin, and I was in the first year of that program. I would frequently visit Rex in the evening at his apartment. I was fascinated by stories of adventures he undertook with his psychic twin brother on the fringes of parapsychology, such as hunting for evidence of UFO visits. However, Rex also found a way to conduct original psi experiments with a friend, and it was clear to me from my visits that this is where his heart was.

Upon graduation from Texas, Rex spent two years as a psychology professor at Western Carolina University. Looking to get back into parapsychology, in 1968 he was able to land a job as Research Associate in the Division of Parapsychology at the University of Virginia School of Medicine, working with Ian Stevenson and Gaither Pratt, the latter who for many years had been the chief associate of Rhine at the Institute for Parapsychology. I followed a remarkably similar path following my own graduation from Texas. After I spent two unhappy years teaching psychology courses at a major university in Canada, Rex helped me join him at Virginia in 1971. We were together there for two years, where we both were free

to do our own research in addition to contributing to the research of other staff. In 1975, Rex moved on to join the Department of Psychology at St. John's University. He remained there until he retired in 2007 as a Full Professor. He was able to devote all of his research time to parapsychology projects, but most of his teaching was of psychology courses (which he welcomed, because it made him keep up with what was going on in psychology, knowledge he often applied in his research on parapsychology). After he retired, he and Birgit moved back home to south Texas, where he was able to devote more time to his two "extracurricular" passions: bird watching and opera. (Regarding the latter, I recall a few times when he would spontaneously belt out a brief aria: not bad!) Rex remained active in parapsychology until his death, reviewing journal submissions and writing occasional non-experimental articles.

I saw Rex only occasionally after he left for St. John's, but I was able to visit with him a few times at his apartment when I was in New York on other business. I also would see him every summer at the annual conventions of the Parapsychological Association (PA). Rex was very active in the PA, and he was heavily involved in rewriting the organization's bylaws. As an early indication of his longstanding concern with research ethics and the welfare of research participants, he wrote a set of ethical guidelines for the PA modelled on those of the American Psychological Association. Rex was elected by the membership six times to serve on the Board of Trustees and was elected as President for 1993 and 2007. He was acknowledged for his service to the PA by receiving its Outstanding Contribution Award in 1993.

Throughout his professional career, Rex was very prolific on the publications front. Up to 2012, he was author of 55 journal articles, 25 book chapters, and 23 book reviews. He and I shared a common interest in the application of the methods, theories, and experimental results in psychology to our psi experiments, and I consider him my mentor in the field. In the remainder of this obituary I will describe several of his most important publications, and how several of these studies, along with my conversations with Rex about them, influenced my own thinking about psi.

Theoretical Contributions

Rex's most well-known theoretical contribution to parapsychology was his Psi-Mediated Instrumental Response (PMIR) model. I consider PMIR to be the most important psychology-based theory of psi in the 20th century, and it served as the foundation for Jim Carpenter's (2012) First Sight model, which I consider to be the most important such theory so far in the 21st century. In a nutshell, the PMIR model states that people are continuously and unconsciously scanning the environment for information relevant to their needs, and this information leads them to take actions to fulfill these needs, unaware of what prompted them to take the actions and their real reasons for doing so. The theory was elaborately and skilfully constructed, presented in the form of testable propositions covering specific steps in the PMIR process and factors predicted to determine whether its application is a success (psi-hitting) or a failure (psi-missing).

In the first of two papers, Rex described the role of ESP in PMIR, expressed in the form of nine propositions (Stanford, 1974a). In the second paper, he addressed the role of PK by adding seven new propositions of the same type as the ones for ESP (Stanford, 1974b). After people use their senses or ESP to identify a need-relevant circumstance, they unconsciously and unintentionally use PK to manipulate their physical environment to meet the need—but only if for some reason they unconsciously

consider PK to be a more suitable or effective way to fulfil the need than ordinary physical actions. This PK process is what some of us in parapsychology consider to be going on in poltergeist cases, and this proposition in the PMIR model led me to hypothesize on logical grounds that if real PK is involved in a poltergeist case, there will be "fraudulent" events mixed in with the PK events.

The most important and novel contribution in this second paper concerns the application of PK to biological events, especially mental events. Rex coined the term mental or behavioral influence of an agent (MOBIA) to identify the process. What is interesting here is that he redefines active-agent telepathy—in which the sender implants the message in the brain of the receiver (as opposed to active-percipient telepathy, in which the receiver grabs information from the brain of the sender)—as a form of PK rather than ESP, the category under which telepathy is traditionally subsumed in parapsychology. In another break from the traditional characterization of telepathy dating back to the 19th Century, the recipient of the message is the physical brain rather than the non-physical mind. In a later paper (Stanford, 1977), Rex softened the word "need" by replacing it with "disposition"; instead of acting forthrightly to fulfil a need, a stimulus situation disposes one, or creates a tendency, to act in such a way as to meet a goal.

To me, the most important implication of PMIR is that it laid the foundation for experimenter psi, which I prefer to call (principal) investigator psi, an implication I don't think Rex ever fully appreciated. Up until that time, it had been implicitly assumed by parapsychologists that experimenters could only influence the outcome of a psi experiment if they intentionally tried to do so. The PMIR model and the experiments that support it show that this assumption is incorrect. The clearest example is a REG experiment, where experimenters with some psi ability and a desire to see a positive score can unintentionally and unconsciously use PK to bias the REG output while just sitting next to the participant "twiddling their thumbs." Indeed, one of Rex's PMIR experiments demonstrated just this process (Stanford et al., 1975). In an ESP test, the process would most likely be for the investigator to identify the target by ESP and then use MOBIA to plant this information in the participant's brain, with neither party having any awareness of what is going on.

A year later, Rex published a revision of the model that he considered so fundamental that he gave it a new name, the Conformance Behavior Model (CBM; Stanford, 1978). Two propositions stand out. The first was an elaboration of a proposition already in the PMIR model, namely, the usefulness of drawing an analogy between the brain and a REG. Based on this analogy, ESP is reconceptualized as the brain state being changed such that the resulting imagery matches the target just like the state of the REG changes to match the participant's goal in a PK experiment. The analogy between REGs and brains also reflects a symmetry in their respective behavior: REGs produce events that are random because each PK target is generated independently of previous targets in the string and of any logical principle that would constrain their " choices"; as noted above, spontaneous responses to ESP targets have the same characteristics. Thus, we can say that REGs behave spontaneously, bringing the CBM in line with Rex's generic spontaneity hypothesis. The analogy was further highlighted by parapsychologist William Braud, who adopted the CBM as the basis of his conceptualization of Distant Mental Interaction with Living Systems (DMILs), which became and still is a major research paradigm in parapsychology that includes psychic healing research in its domain (Braud, 1979). Braud further postulated that for a biological process to have the capacity to conform to one's intention, it must be "labile," which means capable of changing easily with minimal force applied, like a REG (Braud, 1980).

The more fundamental revision, which represents rejection of a fundamental proposition of PMIR PK, is that instead of the participant causing a change in the target in the traditional "billiard-ball" sense of cause, the target system simply "conforms" to the "disposition" of the participant. The idea is that the cause is teleological, that somehow the participant's goal, a manifestation of his or her disposition, causes the conformance, seemingly what Aristotle called a "final cause" as opposed to an "efficient cause." This proposition created some confusion in the parapsychology community, with some in the field "accusing" Rex of adopting Jung's acausal synchronicity, which he vehemently denied. After a few years, Rex seemed to back off from the CBM, no longer referring to it in his writings, although he would occasionally refer to PMIR. This apparent attitude is reflected in the attitude of other experimental parapsychologists, who up to the present time have tested hypotheses based explicitly on PMIR, not the CBM.

Before leaving this discussion of Rex's theorizing I should note that although Rex was in the conservative camp of parapsychologists who maintain that only controlled experiments can confirm the existence of psi or the validity of a psi hypothesis, spontaneous cases, even when they are anecdotal, can play an important role by suggesting hypotheses to be tested in experiments (Stanford, 1992). In fact, at the beginning of the first PMIR paper, he recorded several anecdotes, including ones involving himself, that both illustrate the operation of PMIR in the "real world" and inspired him to create the PMIR model.

This seems to be a good place to present my example of a theoretical insight I acquired from an informal conversation with Rex on a topic that neither of us ever published a paper about. We were talking about the process behind psi-mediated aura reading. As a fictitious example of the hypothesized process, consider a psychic named Maria who tries to identify the personality of stranger named Joshua, who is standing in front of her, by reading his aura. Through unconscious ESP she gets information about Joshua, from which she unconsciously infers correctly that he is an extrovert. Because Maria processes information visually rather than verbally whenever possible, her unconscious mind obliges this preference by presenting its conclusion to her conscious mind as a bright red aura. She then consults her memory of a "coding sheet," which she had created based on her own past experience or a trusted book on aura reading, which tells her that a red aura means that Joshua is an extravert. Her unconscious mind hides from her conscious mind that the aura is a hallucination, which allows her to experience the aura as objectively real, supporting her previous belief about the nature of auras. This hypothesis made so much sense to me that I extended it to explain psi-mediated apparitions, including most ostensible materializations, including ones witnessed simultaneously by two or more observers: a sender transmits a telepathic message simultaneously to each observer that contains information sufficient to allow the unconscious mind of the observer to create a sequence of hallucinatory images of a certain being, appropriately attired and occupying a particular location in relation to that observer, which the conscious mind of the observer then projects to the outside world and "perceives" as a physical presence. I hold this explanation, which puts me in the minority among parapsychologists, to the present day.

Methodological Contributions

I consider Rex to have been the best experimental methodologist and methodological critic in parapsychology during the time period he was active in the field, which made him one of my most trusted referees when I was editor of the *JP*. Especially noteworthy were his detections of consequential

methodological flaws in psi experiments beyond the standard ones parapsychologists routinely check for. A good example is a review of 25 ESP studies comparing a hypnosis condition with a waking-state control condition (Stanford & Stein, 1994). Rex limited his sample in this way, because being a strong advocate of process-oriented research, he only considered worthy of review those studies from which it was possible to conclude that the cause of significant psi results under hypnosis was actually the hypnotic induction. He began with a standard meta-analysis of the 25 studies, which yielded overall significant psi-hitting in the amalgamated hypnosis conditions and chance results in the control conditions. Many researchers would immediately conclude that this result showed that the induction caused the hitting. But Rex looked deeper. Noting significantly high variability in the results of individual experiments, he then applied traditional statistical methods to identify variables responsible for this variability, as meta-analysis is not well suited to measuring such secondary effects. Two findings stand out. The first is an investigator effect, in that, for whatever reasons, some of the 11 principal investigators (not necessarily the experimenters who tested the subjects) obtained reliably higher ESP scores than others across the two conditions. This raises the possibility that the real cause of the hitting was investigator psi, as the principal investigators got the results they presumably wanted, although Rex did not explicitly refer to experimenter/investigator psi in his paper. The second finding highlights the important methodological point that if a researcher chooses a within-subjects design, in which each participant experiences both conditions, it is imperative to check for order effects, which was not done in the original studies. When Rex looked into this matter by assessing the hypnosis-by-order interaction, he found (a) that ESP scores in the two conditions differed significantly only when the control condition came first and (b) the significance with this order was due to psi-missing in the control condition, which is not what one should find if the difference was due to the hypnotic induction in the hypnosis condition. Investigator psi, on the other hand, would be expected to affect ESP scores in both conditions, in opposite directions, so as to maximize the crucial difference between the two. Be that as it may, by exposing a methodological flaw Rex demonstrated that the results do not mean what the original investigators thought they meant, and what a meta-analysis by itself seemed to confirm.

My second example has more direct relevance to experimenter (investigator) psi. Although Rex never attached the primacy to the experimenter psi problem that I and a few other parapsychologists have done, he recognized the need for researchers to do what they can to eliminate it, at least in process-oriented studies where the investigator cares about who produced the result and how they did it. In an important methodological paper (Stanford, 1981), Rex stressed the need for researchers to select targets and assign participants to experimental conditions in a way that strongly reduces and preferably eliminates entirely unconscious psi influence on the selection process. The worst choice is a hardware REG.

Research Contributions

I turn now to Rex's experimental research. In preparing this obituary I noticed that a common theme expressed in Rex's research throughout his career, even before he developed PMIR and the CBM, is spontaneity. Thus, I decided to focus my review on those studies that are related to this concept. Each study Rex conducted to test the spontaneity hypothesis reflected the methodological zeitgeist of parapsychology in the period in which the research was conducted. In the 1960s and early 1970s

when forced-choice ESP testing was in vogue, Rex focused his attention on the sequence of responses to targets in the run. He formulated the response bias hypothesis, drawing on the well-known fact that when people are asked to, say, guess the sequence of cards in a well-shuffled deck, they do not do so randomly but in a sequence that follows some logical principle that they erroneously think at some level will help their score, e.g., guessing each target alternative an equal number of times. The prediction was that ESP success would be greatest on those trials in which the percipient makes a counter-bias response, one that goes against the bias. The idea is that responses on these trials are not influenced by logic and thus are more spontaneous.

Rex initially tested and confirmed the response bias (RB) hypothesis in several forced-choice ESP experiments using a variation of the standard card-guessing test (e.g., Stanford, 1967). Later he tested the RB hypothesis using a much different procedure. In a later study designed primarily to determine if unconscious psi could influence memory, participants were asked to remember the content of a supposed dream report and then complete a questionnaire asking them whether specific statements accurately or inaccurately reflected the content of the dream (Stanford, 1970). Following a methodological paradigm Rex would use frequently in future experiments, answers to certain items were selected randomly as ESP-correct and recorded on a sheet the participants never saw nor were told about. The influence hypothesis was confirmed in that there were far more counter-story responses when the ESP-correct and story-correct targets were different than when they were the same. The RB hypothesis was confirmed by the finding that significantly and substantially more counter-story (i.e., counter-bias) responses were ESP-correct than pro-story responses.

In the final test of the RB hypothesis, Rex measured ESP using an adaptation of the standard test in psychology for word association, which was the topic of his doctoral dissertation (Stanford,1973). In a word association test, the participant is typically asked to respond to a stimulus word with the first word that comes to mind. Research has shown that for a given stimulus word, people respond the great majority of the time with one or two specific words from a list of words ranked according to their frequency of use, forming a response hierarchy. Data-based hierarchies for words used in standard word association tests are available to researchers. The most frequent response is called the primary response, and the second most frequent is called the secondary response. For instance, the primary response to "dog" might be "cat" and the secondary response "pet." It has also been found that primary responses are uttered more quickly than secondary responses, i.e., they have a faster reaction time (RT). The idea is that a high rank in the hierarchy reflects a built-in predisposition to respond in that way, in other words, a response bias. Thus, it is easy to see that word association is a natural way to test the RB hypothesis in an ESP experiment, and I wouldn't be surprised if this background led Rex to come up with the spontaneity hypotheses as a major focus of his psi research. In the present experiment, Rex combined a word-association test with the methodology of the previous experiment by randomly selecting for each trial either the primary or the secondary response as ESP-correct. As predicted by the RB hypothesis, the higher the percentage of primary responses in the whole test and the faster the average RT (i.e., the greater the participant's response bias), the higher the ESP score on trials in which the participant gave a secondary (counter-bias) response. Finally, it was found that ESP scores were higher on trials for which participants gave a primary than a secondary response, confirming a hypothesis from his soon to be published PMIR model that ESP often operates by triggering preconscious memories.

Rex employed a variation of this same methodology to test ESP hypotheses derived from the PMIR model after its publication. He randomly pre-selected one trial in the run as the ESP target. When participants had their fastest or slowest RT (depending on the study) to the stimulus word in that trial, they were rewarded for this ESP hit by getting to engage in a pleasant task after the test. If the ESP response was a miss, they were punished by having to engage in a tedious, boring task afterwards. Experimental hypotheses derived from PMIR were confirmed two times out of four in these studies (Stanford & Associates, 1976; Stanford & Stio, 1976). In the one PK study (Stanford et al. 1975), participants were relieved from an unpleasant task lasting up to 45 minutes and transferred to a pleasant task when and if a REG secretly generating targets in another room produced 7 or more hits in a block of 10 trials (P = .17). Significantly more participants than expected by chance escaped the unpleasant task before it was scheduled to end.

Starting in the mid-1970's following the breakaway from Rhine's laboratory, there was a paradigm shift in parapsychology in which forced-choice tests of ESP were largely replaced by free-response tests. Instead of having to choose a response from a fixed set of alternatives (e.g., the suits in a deck of playing cards), participants are free to say anything that comes to mind over a period of say half an hour, hoping that their imagery is relevant to a more complex target, such as a movie clip, that they had no sensory contact with. The most dominant research design quickly became the ganzfeld experiment, in which the participants give a running account of their imagery in a quasi-sensory deprivation environment that eliminates patterned sensory input. The effect is achieved by having them look through halved ping-pong balls into a red light and listen to a tape of pink noise (a more pleasant variant of white noise) while seated in a comfortable padded chair. The idea is to create a psi-conducive altered state of consciousness (ASC). Several meta-analyses of large numbers of ganzfeld studies demonstrate to the satisfaction of most parapsychologists that the ganzfeld procedure yields good ESP scores, but Rex, being of a process-oriented bent, was more interested in learning why it does so.

He conducted several experiments in an effort to answer this question. Most of these involved isolating the pink noise component of the ganzfeld procedure to determine its independent effect, both directly and interacting with personality variables, on how participants cognitively process information in this environment. Two of these were relevant to the spontaneity hypothesis in that they tested the effect of noise versus silence on a measure of ESP as well a measure of cognitively constrained thought processes in Rex's covert word-association test. Two experiments confirmed the hypothesis (Stanford & Roig, 1982) and one did not (Stanford et al., 1985).

However, I restrict further discussion to two studies in which Rex sought to compare the spontaneity hypothesis with other proposed hypotheses of cognitive mediation of the effect of the ganzfeld induction on ESP performance. I consider these studies to provide one of the best examples in the parapsychology literature of how process-oriented experimental research is supposed to be conducted.

The prevailing explanation of this cognitive mediation at the time was Honorton's "internal attention state" hypothesis, which maintains that the elimination of distractions from the external environment caused by the sensory deprivation of the ganzfeld allows participants to focus their attention more fully on their internal environment (their mind) and thus detect subtle psi-carrying imagery that they would

not be able to detect in a normal external environment. On the other hand, Rex's spontaneity hypothesis maintains that the altered state imposed by the ganzfeld creates less linear thought processes that lead participants away from the kind of imagery that naturally follows from such thinking and toward imagery that is more likely to come "out of the blue," not linked to prior expectations or to previous imagery in the stream of consciousness. He chose to test the two hypotheses by examining the structural characteristics of participants' mentation reports during the ganzfeld session. In the first paper, he reported experiments that identified and validated distinct structural markers of the two hypothesized processes, while finding that the marker for spontaneity was present more in the noise condition than the silence condition (Stanford et al., 1989a). In the second paper, he reported a ganzfeld experiment in which he scored the mentation reports for each of these markers (Stanford et al., 1989b). He predicted that if the spontaneity hypothesis is correct, high ESP scores would be associated with high variability in the length of sentences or comparable units of meaning across the session; he predicted if the internal attention state hypothesis is correct, high ESP scores would be associated with a low number of words per minute at the beginning and end of the session and a large number of words per minute in the middle. Only the spontaneity hypothesis was supported by the data. However, a strict replication attempt failed to produce any significant ESP results at all (Stanford & Frank, 1991). One of many factors he noted as possibly causing the failure to replicate was that the participants seemed disinterested in the study and thus unlikely to have entered the altered state necessary to test any of the hypotheses. In privately discussing the study with me later, he confided that in his opinion this participant attitude, which different markedly from what he had become accustomed to in his many years of research at St. John's, was the primary cause of the failure, and he seemed quite upset by it. He attributed this attitude change to some social factor (I don't recall what) affecting the broader student population at the university that had nothing to do with his experiment. I suspect this experience explains why this replication attempt was the last psi experiment Rex conducted, or at least reported, during his tenure at St. John's.

To properly assess the evidential status of the spontaneity hypothesis one must consider the total body of Rex's research on the topic. I have shown above that he achieved a high proportion of successful psi results in well controlled experiments using a wide range of different psi tasks with an equally wide range of operational definitions of the spontaneity construct. Although the validity of the spontaneity hypothesis has not been established conclusively, and like the great majority of hypotheses in the psychological sciences probably never will be, the probability that the hypothesis is valid is high enough that it should be accepted as a guidepost for future research that over time should give us a sufficiently thorough understanding of how psi information is cognitively processed to allow parapsychologists to develop ways to reliably bring it to consciousness without distortion in a controlled environment. The point here is that Rex made an important contribution to parapsychology by bringing us to this point, not to mention his equally important contribution of the PMIR model to our understanding of the psychology of psi.

Concluding Remarks

Looking back at Rex's career as a whole, I am struck by the observation that it provides an excellent model for students to follow who seek to make an important scientific contribution to parapsychology in their lifetime. To wit, Rex (a) got a Ph.D. in a mainstream scientific field that interested him

(psychology); (b) got a job at a traditional university that allowed and supported him to do the kind of research he wanted to do (St. Johns); (c) conducted psi experiments that used the standard methods in the mainstream field and generated new knowledge about variables of interest to scientists in that field (e.g., predictors of the prevalence of nonlinear thinking), and (d) chose at the beginning of his appointment a research question he wanted to answer and single-mindedly pursued the answer through research and theory construction continually until his retirement (What kinds of cognitive processing lead to success on psi tasks?). The greatest hurdle Rex had to overcome was finding the right university, and parapsychology owes a debt of gratitude to the Department of Psychology at St. John's University for supporting Rex in conducting his chosen research projects for 27 years.

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