

A SURVEY OF REPORTED PREMONITIONS AND OF THOSE WHO HAVE THEM

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ABSTRACT

Questionnaire data, personality information, and reports of ostensible premonitions (foreknowledge of unexpected events) were obtained from 88 persons (of 127 selected from 450) who responded to a request published in a national newspaper. Collations and analyses of data are presented with a categorization of premonitions and stated examples.

It was observed particularly that (a) the overwhelming number of replies were from females, (b) most premonitions concerned death or unpleasant happenings, and (c) a significant negative correlation emerged between age at first premonition and number of offspring. It is speculatively proposed that those findings in conjunction suggest that premonitions are an evolutionary development in the human species. Premonitions might provide functional fore-warnings of disasters, mediated principally through females and resulting in the replenishment of numbers as quickly as possible after losses. Various ways of inducing further premonitions in gifted subjects may be feasible.

Subjects were revealed to be more neurotic than the normal population ($p < 0.001$), but did not differ on Extraversion/introversion scores. The EPI lie-scale correlated positively with both reported accuracy and percentage of correct premonitions. The mean score was significantly higher than in the normal population ($p < 0.001$). Caution is therefore expressed about the reliability of some accounts.

The results tend not to support the following explanations of premonitions: chance-coincidence, the 'death wish' or 'psychobolie', and telepathy.

Thanks are due to Robert Wilson, Features Editor of the *Sunday Mirror*, for making this research possible.

METHOD

A footnote to a newspaper article (published in the *Sunday Mirror* on January 31st 1982) about the author's research into premonitions^{11,12,13} appealed to readers to write in with their own accounts. Some 450 letters were received in total. The overwhelming majority reported having experienced more than one premonition. The most impressive multiple-report cases (totalling 127) were chosen for further study. Those subjects were sent: a questionnaire concerning their premonitions the Eysenck Personality Inventory¹⁴.

It was intended to: collate the questionnaire data; perform correlational analyses; analyse a large sample of premonition accounts in order to categorize the reports; search for any consistencies in the premonitions or percipients. In this nomothetic study, individual cases would not be investigated for accuracy or veracity, but would be taken at face value.

RESULTS:

A. Questionnaire data.

Eight-eight of the 127 persons who were sent questionnaires responded—giving a good return of 69.3 per cent. About nine out of ten (89.8 per cent) of the

subjects were female. Ages ranged ($N = 86$) from 23 to 80 years (mean: 46.4), and the largest decade group was people in their thirties. Half the subjects were in employment, the other half consisted of housewives, unemployed, and retired persons. Almost three-quarters (72.3 per cent) of the sample ($N = 83$) were married, 6 per cent single, and 21.7 per cent divorced, separated or widowed.

Forty-four per cent of subjects ($N = 84$) reported that they had experienced, in all, between 2 and 10 premonitions; 34.6 per cent stated between 10 and 50; and 21.4 per cent estimated that the total exceeded 50. The age at which the first premonition was noticed by the subjects ($N = 80$) varied from 3 to 64 years (mean: 18.13), but the peak modal age-range was between 10 and 15 years of age.

Asked to estimate the frequency of premonitions ($N = 88$), 43.2 per cent reported that they happened once a year or longer, 38.6 per cent stated a matter of months, 9.1 per cent thought it was one or more a week, and a further 9.1 per cent indicated that the frequency varied. A little over half the sample (55.3 per cent) considered that their premonitions tended to occur in batches, whereas 35.3 per cent thought they did not, and 9.4 per cent did not know ($N = 85$).

Many subjects (52.9 per cent) reported experiencing more than one type of premonition at different times ($N = 87$, 154 cases). The largest category of premonition-forms was dreams (44.2 per cent), followed by waking-thoughts (33.8 per cent), waking-imagery (12.3 per cent), and hypnagogic imagery (9.7 per cent). When asked to judge what percentage of their premonitions came true ($N = 81$, 83 cases), subjects declared that 47 per cent were 90–100 per cent fulfilled, 32.5 per cent were 70–90 per cent fulfilled, and the rest (20.5 per cent) came true less than 70 per cent of the time. The latency period between premonition and fulfilment was, in descending order of frequency ($N = 86$, 158 cases): days, 28.5 per cent of cases; weeks, 26.6 per cent; months, 21.5 per cent; hours, 18.4 per cent; years, 4.4 per cent; over 10 years, 0.6 per cent. Almost 60 per cent of subjects (59.3 per cent) had at some time warned someone in connection with a premonition ($N = 86$).

Concerning the accuracy of subject's premonitions ($N = 86$, 100 cases), 60 per cent were self-judged to be very accurate, 26 per cent moderately accurate, 10 per cent had some points correct, and in 4 per cent of cases there were slight associations between premonition and event. About a quarter (26.5 per cent) of the sample ($N = 83$) indicated that their premonitions tended to be on the same theme (e.g. family misfortunes), whereas 72.3 per cent reported different themes, and 1.2 per cent didn't know. Most subjects (53.5 per cent) were neutral in their attitude to having premonitions, while 34.9 per cent were unhappy and 11.6 per cent pleased ($N = 86$). Most of the sample believed in life after death (62.5 per cent), but 34.1 per cent were uncertain, and 3.4 per cent disavowed that notion ($N = 88$). Only 1 (1.1 per cent) of the subjects ($N = 88$) stated that she was a member of a Spiritualist church.

Subjects did not always answer all the questions, hence the different N s, and some indicated more than 1 category, hence higher case numbers than N s.

Regarding other members of the subject's direct family who also experienced premonitions (so far as was known), of those who reported ($N = 47$): 48.9 per cent of subjects reported that their mother also had premonitions. In 8.5 per cent of subjects the maternal grandmother—and in 4.2 per cent of cases the maternal

grandfather—also experienced them. The maternal grandmother, but not the subject's mother, had premonitions in 17 per cent of cases. The subject's father had premonitions in 19.1 per cent of the 47 reports and in 2 of those (4.3 per cent) the paternal grandmother also foresaw events. The paternal grandmother, but not the subject's father, had premonitions in 6.3 per cent of cases. Both father and mother were reported to experience them in 10.6 per cent of subjects. In 29.7 per cent of subjects, the daughter(s) had premonitions, and the son(s) had the reported ability in 25.5 per cent of subjects.

Looking at the medical background of the respondents, 43.2 per cent reported that they had suffered some form of serious illness at one time or another, and 36.4 per cent stated that they were currently taking medication (mild or powerful). One subject volunteered the information that she experienced many premonitions during a mental breakdown, another said that her premonitions started during a period of depression after her divorce. One subject stated that here premonitions declined dramatically after an operation for breast cancer, and another mentioned that her premonitions also reduced after she broke her ankle in an accident.

Most of the subjects (70.1 per cent) reported having good visual imagery ($N = 87$). It was moderately good for 16.1 per cent, fair for 4.6 per cent, not good for 2.3 per cent and non-existent in 6.9 per cent. Dream recall was generally good ($N = 82$, 88 cases), with 34 per cent of cases categorizing dream-recall each morning, 33 per cent recalling a dream once every few days, 10.2 per cent once a week. The other cases were of poor recall and included a category (6.1 per cent) reporting total non-recall of dreams.

In response to a question about any link between stress and premonitions, 57 per cent of subjects ($N = 86$) stated that life was not stressful at those times, 29.1 per cent thought it was, and 13.9 per cent did not know. Nearly all the subjects (98.8 per cent) could not see any links between their premonitions and specific childhood events ($N = 83$). About half the subjects (53.4 per cent) reported that they had at some time had an out-of-the-body experience, 31.8 per cent had not, and 14.8 per cent did not know. Also, approximately half (49.4 per cent) the sample ($N = 87$) considered that they were telepathic, 21.7 per cent thought they were not, and 29.9 per cent did not know.

B. Personality data.

Eight-five of the 88 subjects returned the completed Eysenck Personality Inventory—Form A.¹⁴ There were 77 females and 8 males. The mean Extraversion/introversion score was 11.89, Standard Deviation: 4.2; the mean Neuroticism score was 12.09, S.D. 5.26; and the mean Lie-scale score was 3.65, S.D. 1.78.

Subjects were, overall, significantly more neurotic than the Normal Population ($N = 2000$) described in the EPI manual ($t = 5.3$; D.F. = 84; $P < 0.001$), and scored higher on the Lie-scale than 651 subjects in the EPI manual ($t = 7.18$; D.F. = 84; $P < 0.001$). The sample was not significantly different from the EPI population on the Extraversion/introversion measure ($t = 0.39$).

C. Premonitions information.

Many of the 88 subjects had sent in more than one premonition-report. 'Best' cases were selected from each subject to constitute a body of data for analysis.

The total sample consisted of 165 accounts, made up of: one case from 31 subjects, two from 38, three from 18, and four from 1 subject. The forms of premonition in this sample were: dreams (62.4 per cent), waking thought (17.0 per cent), waking imagery (15.2 per cent), hypnagogic imagery (3.6 per cent) and 'newscasts' (1.8 per cent).

On inspection, it became obvious that four basic themes could be readily identified: death (52.7 per cent of premonitions, 56.3 per cent of later associated events), unpleasant happenings (32.1 per cent/28.5 per cent), pleasant events (8.5 per cent/8.5 per cent), and neutral things (6.7 per cent/6.7 per cent). In addition, the 'victims' in premonitions could be categorized as: (K) persons (or in 1 or 2 cases pet animals) known to the percipient (44.2 per cent/47.3 per cent); (U) persons unknown to the percipient (30.3 per cent/24.2 per cent); (N) persons named, but not known personally by the percipient (18.2 per cent/21.2 per cent); (S) the percipient (self) (5.5 per cent/5.5 per cent); (0) an object—e.g. the Crystal Palace (1.8 per cent/1.8 per cent).

Table 1 lists the frequencies of themes and victims in both premonition and later associated event. The information is also displayed in Fig. 1. The data from premonitions and later events are shown together for completeness. The small discrepancies are due to errors in the premonitions concerning certain aspects e.g. a fore-seen injury (U) may relate in fact to a subsequent death (D).

The following are single examples from each of the reported theme/victim categories:

D-K: Marjorie, 31 y.o. female

'In a dream I saw my uncle in a taxi cab. The next thing I knew my uncle had been crushed to death inside the taxi. Two weeks later I did something very unusual for me—I went into the front room and switched on the TV to watch 'Calendar'. Within a minute it showed a railway line and gave out the grim news that my uncle had been killed on the line. I went to pieces and dashed into my neighbours home.'

D-U: Doreen, 40 y.o. female

'In my dream I was standing at my front door, looking towards the school, waiting for my daughter to come home for her dinner (in real-life I was working and my daughter stayed for school dinners). I saw this small aeroplane circling the school and then it seemed to dive straight at the school. It pulled round at the last minute and crashed into an alleyway just in front of me. There was nothing anyone could do. I woke up with sweat pouring from me, and crying. I had to wake my husband up—it was still in the middle of the night. About 5 months later an aircraft did just miss the school at lunchtime and crashed into some houses further to the left than in my dream, and 3 young children were killed as well as the pilot and co-pilot.'

D-N: Janet, female

'I saw a 'News-flash' on television in 1963 that President Kennedy had been assassinated. It was a Friday evening at about 8 p.m. I told my husband and son in the next room, and waited for the 9 p.m. news to verify (nothing). Nothing in the daily papers, so thought I was going round the bend—but exactly one week later it happened.'

U-K: Kath, 42 y.o. female

'I had a premonition that my mother would be brought home to my house after being taken ill at work. In the car which would be a red mini would be a man wearing glasses and he would be the driver. Also, there would be a lady in the front passenger seat. My mother would be lying down on the back seat. This came true exactly as I had seen it.'

U-U: Carol, 33 y.o. female

'I dreamt one night I was on a farm. I saw two planes collide, but only wreckage from one came down. I was holding my arms over my head to protect myself. Then I saw the pilot bale out. I watched him descend. I told my husband next day and my workmates and within 24 hours the incident occurred just as I had witnessed it.'

U-N: (concerning a dreamed news-item on the radio) Frank, 53 y.o. male

'In December last, one Thursday, 7 a.m. news item concerned a little boy Naweed Alam who had lost an arm in a mincer in Blackburn. It was an awful thing not forgotten, as our doctor is Alam. Nothing appeared in the press or radio until the local news the next morning—but they simply said 'a boy'. The name was only released in that day's local paper headline story. It happened at 4.30 p.m. on the Thursday.'

U-S: Sylvia, 38 y.o. female

'One evening my husband and myself were travelling to town when I knew there was a tree across the road. On this occasion I was able to tell my husband, and sure enough around the bend was a man swinging a red light. He said we would have to go another way as the road was blocked by a tree.'

U-O: Doris, 68 y.o. female

'I saw the Crystal Palace burn down a week before it happened, in a dream.'

P-K: Eileen, 57 y.o. female

'My husband and I were in the Odeon cinema, Kingston and (when the lights went up during the interval) I told him that he would have a small win on the football pools and told him the amount of money that he would win—the following Thursday he received a cheque for exactly the amount I had prophesied!'

P-N: Dorothy, 63 y.o. female

'I dreamt I was with 3 horses that were being groomed. One was called Fats Waller, the other called Duke Ellington, and the third Count Basie. The next morning I looked in the paper and saw that they were to run in a race that afternoon. I backed all three. Fats Waller came first, Duke Ellington second, and Count Basie third. You can imagine my amazement.'

P-S: Carol, 33 y.o. female

'I was just going to sleep when I saw loads of money falling on my head. The next evening I won £500 at bingo.'

N-K: Stephanie, 35 y.o. female

'My first dream premonition told me that my sister in law, who was my child-minder, would be moving house and I would have to make other

arrangements. There seemed to be no reason for this—the family appeared to be settled. But not long after, they did move and in the same direction as they had in my dream.’

N–N: Yvonne, 28 y.o. female

‘I was vacuuming one Wednesday at noon when I saw my cousin in hospital. She had just had a baby boy. It was very clear—as if I had just seen a photo of it. I told my husband about it. I visited my mother the next day. I asked her if she knew if Linda had had her baby yet. She did not know. The next day she phoned to tell me she had seen my aunt and that my cousin had had a baby boy the lunch-time of the Wednesday I had seen her in my thoughts.’

N–S: Edith, 69 y.o. female

‘In later years I applied for a job and found that the house and grounds were exactly as I had seen in a dream.’

Table 1. Frequencies of themes and victims in premonitions and events (165 cases from 88 subjects)

Theme	Premonition					Totals	%	Actual event					Totals	%
	K	U	N 'victim'	S	O			K	U	N 'victim'	S	O		
Death	36	33	18	0	0	87	52.7	40	33	20	0	0	93	56.3
Unpleasant	27	13	6	4	3	53	32.1	27	7	6	4	3	47	28.5
Pleasant	7	0	4	3	0	14	8.5	7	0	4	3	0	14	8.5
Neutral	3	4	2	2	0	11	6.7	4	0	5	2	0	11	6.7
Totals:	73	50	30	9	3	165		78	40	35	9	3	165	
	44.2%	30.3%	18.2%	5.5%	1.8%			47.3%	24.2%	21.2%	5.5%	1.8%		

Key: K = Known to percipient (includes pet animals).

U = Unknown to percipient.

N = Named person, not known personally by percipient.

S = Self (percipient).

O = Object (e.g. Crystal Palace).

D. Correlation findings. (Spearman's rho)

The reported number of premonitions from subjects correlated not unexpectedly, with reported frequency ($r = 0.73$; $N = 80$; $P < 0.001$) and age at first premonition ($r = -0.55$; $N = 78$; $P < 0.001$). The last item however was found to be negatively associated with the percipients' number of children ($r = -0.38$; $N = 44$; $P < 0.01$), using subjects past the usual child-bearing ages. Significance was almost attained between number of premonitions and (a) latency ($r = -0.20$; $N = 83$; $P < 0.07$) i.e. period between premonition and event, (b) neuroticism ($r = -0.19$; $N = 83$; $P < 0.07$). Neuroticism approached correlation significance with accuracy ($r = 0.20$; $N = 84$; $P < 0.06$). The EPI lie-scale correlated positively with both accuracy ($r = 0.21$; $N = 84$; $P < 0.05$) and per cent correct ($r = 0.25$; $N = 78$; $P < 0.03$). The last item was positively associated with both age ($r = 0.36$; $N = 79$; $P < 0.001$) and dream-recall ($r = 0.30$; $N = 76$; $P = 0.008$).

DISCUSSION

It must be noted that the reports of premonitions have necessarily been taken at face value in this broad approach to the topic. The author has contacted a small number of subjects who provided some of the more striking accounts, and these people have supplied names and addresses of witnesses. It is intended to investigate these cases thoroughly for a later paper. It may be the case that some respondents fabricated or elaborated their reports, but clearly many went to much trouble to assist the experimenter in an area which from their experiences they felt urgently needed research.

The outstanding compositional feature of this sample of subjects was the great preponderance of females—which, it seems, exceeded any reporting inhibition effect in males. This link of premonitions with the female gender points to some biological determinant of 'receptivity'. From an evolutionary perspective sensitivity for premonitions, especially in mothers rearing young, would confer a distinct advantage to a species. However, the early age of the first premonition in many subjects indicates that the ability does not depend on sexual maturity. It is therefore presumably an innate characteristic of the female brain and seems not to be hormonally mediated. The data concerning future-seers in subjects' families also demonstrates how the ability is transferred largely via the female line, but it must be noted that almost half the subjects reported no family links. The family data also suggest that the female preponderance is genuine, since subjects reporting unbiasedly about members of their family declared that more females than males experienced premonitions.

In this study the main vehicle for premonitions was ascertained to be the dream state, followed by waking thoughts and waking imagery. Other studies^{9,10} have employed different criteria in selecting cases so a simple comparison is not possible, but the general pattern persists. The heavy bias of dreams may however be misleading in our attempts to understand premonitions. There may not in fact be anything 'special' psychically about the state. A premonition must be based on some novel ungoverned perception or thought. Most people perhaps do not permit themselves, or do not have time, to indulge in day-dreaming. But in dreams, fantasy and creativity abound. It could well be the case that the cultivation of day-dreaming or story-writing could produce premonition material in gifted subjects.

One simple yet potentially meaningful observation is that premonitions are generally confined to the limits of the percipient's world. The foreseen events involve family and friends. The exceptions seem to be where the percipient possibly feels empathy with the victim(s) and virtually takes the events personally.

The EPI results were revealing, but two-edged. The greater neuroticism of the sample over the normal population could perhaps mean that emotionality attunes the organism to receptivity of premonitory information. Indeed, the measure approaches statistical significance with both accuracy and number of premonitions. It might also be argued that the affect laden nature of dreams could encourage premonitions. Certainly, many premonitions seem to have an emotional rather than an intellectual basis. Conceivably, premonitions are mediated at the primitive emotion areas of the brain. To take the notion further, perhaps the intentional production of affect in percipients could actually induce

premonitions. The technique of driving the emotional state may be witnessed in some groups—for instance in voodoo practices for precipitating prophecies. Stevenson⁴ has commented that emotional shock is a factor which tends to facilitate premonitions.

On the other hand, the higher neuroticism of the sample might be said by some to show that the accounts are likely to be exaggerated. They would also point to the higher scores on the lie-scale. The findings do raise some caution and we must recognize that there could well be an element of 'faking good' in subjects' accounts, but the mean score is still within the acceptable range. The lie-scale measure also correlated significantly with both reported accuracy and percentage correct premonitions. The area required meticulous study.

Eysenck's hypothesis¹⁵ that extraverts should do better on psi tests than introverts (since high cortical arousal is assumed to be un conducive to psi and that introverts have higher cortical arousal than extraverts), was not supported in this study. Subjects did not differ from the normal population on the extraversion/introversion measure.

A maturational effect, or instead, a practice effect, was indicated by the positive correlation between percentage correct premonitions and age. The negative association approaching significance between the number of premonitions and latency might represent another practice effect. The implication emerges that short term premonitions are the more difficult to achieve.

The results have a bearing on three theories of premonitions. Firstly, the data suggest that the chance-coincidence hypothesis is inadequate because of the very many premonitions reported by several subjects. All subjects reported multiple premonitions, with approximately one fifth of the sample stating that the figure was over fifty. It is well known that highly unlikely events do happen occasionally by mere chance and that some apparently amazing associations turn out not to be so when analysed mathematically, but the explanation is hard pressed to account for the data obtained in this study. Secondly, the 'death wish' or 'psychobolie' concept seems an unlikely contender since many people could precognize a single disaster. It seems more reasonable to assume that they are sensitive to the premonitory information rather than they should all suddenly choose to cause a particular catastrophe. Thirdly, concerning the contemporaneous telepathy explanation of premonitions, half the subjects stated that they did not consider themselves to be telepathic. If telepathy were involved in all the cases it would presumably be manifested in all the subjects on other occasions, so the telepathy hypothesis tends not to be supported.

Some of the percipients did seem to 'specialize' in one type of premonition, for example, family deaths, fires or plane crashes. Stevenson⁴ reported that percipients sometimes dreamed of things that have particular significance for them. The question about whether the subject could see any links between the premonition and early events in life was included following the noting of a possible link in two cases which were thoroughly investigated by this author.^{9,10} Only two per cent reported positively on the matter.

It is speculatively proposed that certain findings in this research combine to suggest that premonitions do however have an important function, which is to provide forewarnings—particularly for females—in order to confer a survival advantage to the species. Firstly, the overwhelming number of female percipients

suggests that premonitions have a biological link with females, and in some cases the ability appears to be genetically determined. Secondly, the fact that premonitions most frequently seem to warn of death or injury to close ones shows that they are not random glimpses into the future, but useful alarms enabling avoidance behaviour to be initiated. Thirdly, the significant negative correlation between age at first premonition and number of offspring could be interpreted to mean that those gifted percipients who are likely to survive a catastrophe at a young age are in general naturally more fecund than is usual. Therefore, the number of that group would be restored sooner than would otherwise be the case.

However, that is not the whole picture. Figure 9 shows the relationship between age at first premonition and number of children. Looking at these percipients, all over 40 years of age, those who had their first premonition before the age of 21 ($N = 30$) had, on average, 2.9 children (group breeders) whereas those who had their first premonition after 21 ($N = 16$) gave rise to only 1.9 children (group depleters). If the correlation is not spurious, a 'counterbalance' effect is present in numbers of offspring of these two sets of percipients. Although young female percipients (the avoiders of disasters) may be 'breeders', later developing percipients will have had only a very few children although they might possess some status (for example as a 'Seeress') and be capable of influencing the group's behaviour in the light of a premonition. Interacting with a general premonition-ability must be a variable factor which determines when premonitions are first experienced, and which is linked with fecundity. For some reason (perhaps to avoid 'channel crowding') nature does not increase the ratio of percipients and in fact seems actively to reduce some. If the effect is genuine, the following hypothesis suggests itself. The first sign of an impending large scale disaster would be observable 'flight' behaviour, or perhaps symbolic psychosomatic behaviour, in young female percipients. For instance, they might 'go missing' or have accidents. In essence the foregoing observations formulate a 'Group Replenishment Theory'.

A number of fundamental aspects of premonitions require determined investigation in order to formulate a fuller theoretical framework. Some important questions are:

1. Where is the precognitive 'horizon'? i.e. How far into the future can percipients 'see'? Does the distance relate to any other factors?
2. Is there a relationship between accuracy of the premonition and the latency period to fulfilment? i.e. Does the premonition become distorted or degenerated in some way (like memory) over reverse time? Is there a Recency effect?
3. If an event is avoided by deliberate action, does the event become displaced elsewhere by some law of conservation or compensation?
4. Are there cases where many people precognized an unannounced disaster? i.e. Can premonitions occur in the absence of feedback? Are there cases where the percipient had a premonition but died before it was fulfilled? (Long term prophecies such as those of Nostradamus have been too vague, and those associated with rigid belief systems are not reliable.) Assuming that feedback might cease or be interrupted at death, is there a 'pre-death precognitive pause' in gifted subjects which presages death?

5. Are there any links between the percipients when many people precognize an event? Are there say, personality consistencies or are the percipients limited to certain geographical areas?
6. Does the number of percipients depend on the magnitude of the disaster?

In summary, the findings give rise to the speculative idea that premonitions could be an aid to survival in the human species, providing functional forewarnings of disasters, mediated principally through females and resulting in the replenishment of numbers as quickly as possible after losses. Various ways of inducing further premonitions might be feasible in gifted subjects.

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BOOK REVIEWS

THE DEMARCATION BETWEEN SCIENCE AND PSEUDO-SCIENCE. Edited by Rachel Laudan. Working Papers in Science and Technology, volume 2, number 1. Blacksburg, Virginia: Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1983. 200 pp. No price stated.

The ring-folder sent for review contains eight nicely typed 'working papers' on science and its peripheries, written by historians and philosophers of science. Larry Laudan gives the volume an excellent start with a most persuasive