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GUEST COLUMN: PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH AND ITS ALLEGED STAGNATION

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Many reflections and criticisms have been published in parapsychological journals about the alleged unscientific character of parapsychology: the best review in my opinion was the enormous article (100 pages) in the excellent journal *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* (BBS) in 1988, which included contributions from about fifty authors both pros and cons of parapsychology. Other articles in following years are, in my opinion, mere repetitions of the BBS arguments. The discussion was opened by Rao and Palmer in "The Anomaly Called *Psi*"; their opponent was Alcock in "Parapsychology: Science of the Anomalous or Search for the Soul?" Despite the exhaustive arguments by pros and cons, it seems to me that the authors forgot some essential points which I would like to present.

Classical Objections and Responses

Nobody will be too surprised to learn that the pros and cons kept their previous positions; but I, myself, was surprised to see that the pros and especially the cons knew the material fairly well, which is rare. A number of main conclusions or principal objections can be drawn.

1) The fraud — a classical objection (by subjects, experimenters, or both) was only briefly evoked, I am happy to say. Alleged fraud is not a real objection for it to be unscientific in Popper's sense. Neither the researcher nor his subjects are cheaters.
2) There is a way to force a fact to be accepted as scientific, if it can be repeated. Some people are convinced that *psi* experiments are repeatable. Others say no. There is perhaps a way to reconcile the opponents. In fact, *psi* experiments are repeatable, *but not easily.* After a three-month stay in Rhine's laboratory, I was able to repeat his experiments. I had wonderful subjects — children (my nephews and nieces aged 9 to 14, and members of their band) completely indifferent to parapsychology but not to a box full of candy. They were allowed to have some after a successful test. Nevertheless, three years were necessary to repeat

Rhine's principal experiments. Two children were extraordinary, the others were unusually successful.

3) But a great difficulty, badly understood by some BBS contributors, was that success is dependent not only on subjects but also on the experimenters. Adversaries of parapsychology react strongly and not amiably to such an assertion. This, they say, is just a subterfuge to explain all experimental failures. Nevertheless, this difficulty is well-known to all practitioners of parapsychology, and some eminent parapsychologists were definitely unable to perform even one experiment with success! Some persons, as well known as physicist Pauli, created by the very fact of their presence, only a lot of failures in various physical experiments. We face an interesting but unexplored problem. Is there an anti-*psi* ability?

4) That leads us to another problem. This is the general *psi* subjects' inability to demonstrate their talent in public, especially in front of declared skeptics, in spite of rewards offered by skeptics' organizations. A serious subject knows perfectly well that *psi* appears only in conditions with a relaxed environment, certainly not in front of skeptics. That is not a phenomenon reserved for parapsychologists only. Do you believe that a violinist will play the same way in front of friends, as he will in front of declared enemies? It would be the same for actors, or perhaps some government members!

   Of course, certain exceptional subjects, such as Home or Palladino, were able to produce stupendous phenomena, but as we shall see later, exceptional subjects are very different from ordinary subjects which we study in our laboratories. By the way, I draw your attention to the fact that Palladino for example was studied by professional conjurors with cinemagraphic recordings. As Braude says in the BBS article, this is perhaps more important, and of another nature, than the small effects elicited with great pain in our laboratories.

5) *A fundamental divergence.* As a number of BBS contributors have pointed out, the nexus of discussion will not be found in a simple question: *psi* or not *psi*? Probably many authors are only concerned with another problem: materialism *vs.* spiritualism. Alcock expressed it without ambiguity: for him *psi* workers are only in search of soul, as opposed to matter.

He is not completely wrong. Rhine was frankly a spiritualist. For him, *psi* was a way to prove that spirit was different from matter. But a recent inquiry among parapsychological association members showed that only a minority followed Rhine in this regard. Others are only looking for an anomaly in cerebral function without addressing issues of spirit and matter.

But, after all, it is impossible to fight against fanatics (the pros) with reasonable arguments. I believe this is the main conclusion to be drawn after the copious BBS publication.

I would like to discuss another point, where *psi* and anti-*psi* make an interesting remark. *Why is progress in parapsychology so slow, after 100 years of effort?* They are both perfectly right; but they forget to include in their remarks that *general psychology is in precisely the same situation.*

Difficulties of Behaviorism, Psychology, and Parapsychology

Thomson's criticism in his critical review of behaviorism was this: "Since Watson's invention of behaviorism, sixty years ago, a number of behaviorists whose intelligence and abilities cannot be questioned, have studied learning problems." During the same period, other specialists dissected atoms, deciphered the DNA code, invented a pill to inhibit conception, cloned vertebrate cells, and traveled to the moon's surface, to name only a few scientific accomplishments. During the same period, not one important discovery was made by behaviorists.

Perhaps the critics could be directed not only toward behaviorists but also toward general psychology. This last science would look just like medicine if it was amputated from physiology, biological chemistry, and pharmacology, and could be said to be stalled in Hippocrates' time (except that Hippocrates was not ignorant of pharamacology).

Where are discoveries hidden in an ocean of psychology publications. Sure, Freud produced a genial description of phenomena supposed to act in the spirit; but what about psychoanalysis? When a cure is several years long, which is the part of natural healing in its evolution? Everybody knows American experiments where a lot of patients were divided in two groups: the first one treated with non-directional conversation, the second one submitted to a typical Freudian treatment. After some months, the same amelioration percentage was observed in the two groups

We will not discuss Freudianism further. Everybody knows that in a number of cases, a drug in a syringe gives a much more rapid result than a lot of psychological therapy. But it is well-known that other specialties such as social psychology do not seem to have passed to an initial development phase.

Psychology and Ethology

These two sciences have not had, since their beginning, very good relations. (Lorenz ignored and felt some detestation about experimental psychology). It seems to me I am able to understand what happened. There is, in fact, a science of human and animal societies whose name is "ethology." There is also a human ethology. Eibl Eibesfeldt wrote about this in his enormous treatise "Human Ethology." The author, who began his career under Lorenz'

patronage, was not especially interested in what humans say, *but in what they do.* His inquiry extended to a lot of people among the world, to conclude that there is almost no relation between saying and doing. Now, psychology is especially concerned with "saying." It would be unjust, however, not to recognize the very significant and curious work of some psychologists who studied human behavior, to show us the degree to which some human mysteries were neglected until now. I will quote only *gestics,* the science of human gestures (brilliantly studied also by Eibesfeldt); *proxemics,* studies on distance kept between congeners, in animal and human societies; the *MacClintock effect* or action of unknown substances emitted by some girls that induces their neighbors to have their menstruation at the same moment. There are a lot of other examples I cannot quote here which demonstrate the existence of a special physiology, almost completely ignored a few years ago.

Relations with Psychology

One could ask which relation could exist between these sciences and parapsychology; the answer is: parapsychology committed exactly the same mistakes as behavioral psychology. First, it studied the most difficult subject in nature, man. A lot of experiments easy to do on animals are difficult or impossible with man. Worse than that, parapsychology imitated the grave deficiencies of the behaviorists.

- To introduce subjects into an unusual environment, the laboratory, which stresses more or less all subjects, animal or human.
- Without a necessary familiarization phase, to begin tests not understandable to the subjects and that often appear absurd or childish.
- To repeat them again and again so as to induce an unbearable state of boredom which is probably the principal cause of decline.

For instance, how could subjects understand why they are asked to do absurdities: like divination of cards enclosed in black paper envelopes, when everyday experience says it is impossible?

As Braude noted in the BBS article, that also explains why the mediums of the past gave such extraordinary results. They were asked to perform what seemed possible for them, since they had done more or less the same such performances outside the laboratory.

It explains also why modern parapsychological results are so poor, especially in front of hostile onlookers. It is probable that in such strange conditions even a white rat would be unable to run a maze.

Fortunately, parapsychology has not followed such a strict behaviorist credo, and therefore very interesting and important results have been found. For instance, at the Maimonides Dream Laboratory, in the Honorton ganzfeld techniques, in remote viewing studies by Targ and Puthoff, subjects were asked to do what makes sense for them under natural conditions.

The Absence of a *Psi* Physiology

But what has seriously blocked *psi* development for a lot of years, was the complete absence of a "*psi* psychology," which was perfectly possible. I will choose the simplest experiments *which were done and then forgotten;* some experimenters in fact tried to follow the most promising direction, succeeded, and without exception abandoned them for reasons unknown to me. Perhaps they were biological experiments, and it seems to me that biologists were and are very rare in the Parapsychological Association. Rhine himself had as far as I know, little interest in animal biology, and I never saw experiments of this type in his laboratory.

But let's take some examples beginning with the oldest and perhaps the most interesting. Between 1960 and 1970 Justa Schmidt studied the effect of laying on of hands on trypsine activity digesting proteins. These experiments were successful. Rein, who tested Manning, who did laying on of hands on blood monoamine oxydase, also had success. However, after this, Rein had failure with laying on of hands experiments. Experimenters went on to something different. Do you agree that given the stupendous advances of molecular biology, one could exactly understand what laying on of hands does on enzyme mechanisms? And let's mention Bernard Grad's experiments on plant growth which is half-forgotten now. However, there are easier subjects than plants for *psi* research. If *psi* were present, as it seems, Grad and others opened the way.

In the excellent *Wolman's Handbook of Psychology* (967 pages), I counted only 10 pages and about 20 references to *psi* experiments on animals and plants. Many were inconclusive, but a biologist would not be surprised, knowing the particular difficulties of animal manipulation and training. A specialist in experimentation on human subjects is not exactly qualified for this business. But very recently, tychoscope experiments (Pe'och) opened in my opinion an easier way to do animal *psi* experimentation.

Conclusion

I think that the slow progress of both psychology and parapsychology depend upon common causes: 1) in part on too exclusive use of the most difficult and complicated subjects, humans; 2) and especially on narrow and artificial conceptions of laboratory experiments; 3) and last but not least on forgetting that the animal model has to be considered *not after but before* imagining experiments on humans. This last point was considered by ethology and physiology. Both quickly opened new and important ways for our knowledge, because their starting point was the right one.

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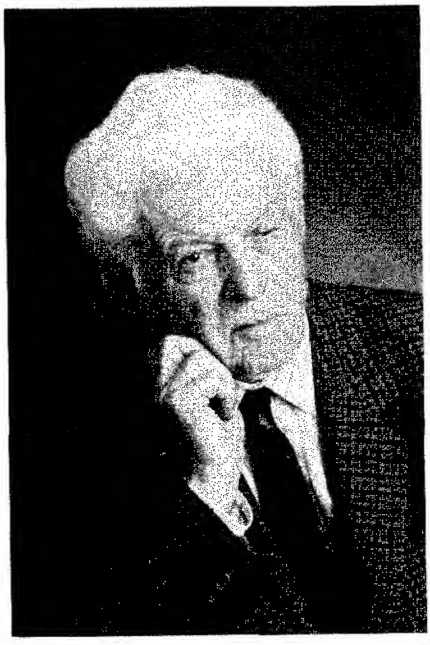

Chauvin, born 1913, is a biologist specialized in animal behavior, especially social insects; he obtained a doctorate from Sorbonne in 1941; took the direction of several laboratories in the following years in Strasbourg University, then in Sorbonne (animal sociology). He has written about 200 papers on animal behavior and physiology; and 47 books on the same topic; especially "Physiologie de l'insecte" (500 pages), in 1959; and "Traité de biologie de l'abeille" (2000 pages with thirty collaborators). Some books were translated in 13 languages including English of course, German, Spanish, Italian, Iranian, Japanese, and Russian. Chauvin, especially interested in parapsychology, was a collaborator and friend of Dr. Rhine at Duke University. He has written two books in French on parapsychology.