

'For analysis purposes we have created little pigeonholes, but psi refuses to be pigeonholed. Its quicksilver process evades our analysis as we reach for it and desperately try to grasp it. Like the chain that bound the Norse god Loki it is invisible yet a bond of steel. And in its grip we are as baffled as he.' As a statement of our predicament it would be hard to improve on that.

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ESP AND PARAPSYCHOLOGY: A CRITICAL RE-EVALUATION. By C. E. M. Hansel, Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books 1980. 325 pp. Index.

For all its blatant bias, this updated version of a book first published in 1966 (*ESP: A Scientific Evaluation*) is more scholarly than many of the attacks on psychical research that appear from time to time. The attempt to demolish the paranormal completely may appear irritating and exaggerated, but Professor Hansel does have some comments of substance which challenge any complacency one might feel about standards of evidence in our subject.

What is needed, of course, both to further knowledge and to convince scientists, is some straightforward and potentially repeatable psi effect that can be obtained by any competent and diligent worker. Some people believe that this is about to be achieved, by the Ganzfeld technique in ESP tests (1) or by the implantation of strain gauges in metals for PK testing (2). Hansel mentions neither of these topics. Instead, he concentrates on criticizing a selection of famous researches and is able to demonstrate that the perfect case, or the definitive experimental demonstration, which will prove the existence of psi for all time, does not exist. This is no surprise. So long as the only available evidence depends upon some particular event or experimental set up that cannot be duplicated the sceptic can always fall back, as Hansel does, on the possibility of fraud.

In some of his examples (e.g. Smith and Blackburn, the Creery sisters) fraud was established, in some (e.g. the Soal-Shackleton series) there was strong evidence of falsifications, in others (e.g. Pearce-Pratt distance tests) Professor Hansel can produce no more than unsubstantiated, and some may think implausible, suspicions. Even within the restricted context of a review of the more celebrated experiments Hansel's selective approach gives a poor impression of the true strength of that kind of evidence. Several notable examples, such as the work with the gifted subjects Harribance and Delmore (both of which are listed by Francis Hitching in his recent SPR pamphlet on *Psi in the Laboratory: 12 Crucial Findings*) receive no mention.

Some of the criticisms of the methodology of particular experiments, such as the Targ-Puthoff remote viewing research, Brugman's pioneering chequer board experiment and the early dice throwing at Duke, are certainly justified, and indeed have been made by other parapsychologists. Hansel does not, however, always give proper consideration to the answers to criticisms that have been made, for example, by Targ and Puthoff. A particularly glaring instance is his repetition of criticisms of work with the special subject Pavel Stepanic which appear without reference to Pratt's replies (3). He also implies (p. 271), wrongly, that Stepanec's results depended upon Pratt's presence. It would be profitless, and require much more effort than I could give, to produce a detailed critical

evaluation of all Hansel's comments. One can readily admit that the flawless experiment does not exist.

What I think Professor Hansel does do successfully is to point out that parapsychologists have not always been as careful as they should, and that in the past experiments have been accepted much too readily as being virtually fraud proof or evidentially incontrovertible. The Soal *debacle* provides a striking example, but there are many other less dramatic instances. The Pearce-Pratt distance tests, one of the 12 'crucial' experiments cited by Hitching, was never reported in adequate detail at the time it was carried out, and Hansel has a fine time listing all the discrepancies between the various descriptions of these experiments published over the years by Rhine and Pratt, which apparently extend even to some doubt as to the actual scores and number of runs.

The weakest point about the Pearce-Pratt series and other similar demonstrations is the impossibility of repetition. Pearce was reported to have lost his powers almost immediately after the experiment. As Hansel is at pains to point out, failure to repeat is more suspicious in its implications if the subject is still supposed to retain psi powers. At the Stanford Research Institute Uri Geller is reported to have been successful in every one of eight attempts to specify the uppermost face of a die concealed in a metal box. Hansel comments: 'Since it is incomprehensible that, after this result, the experiment should be dropped completely it would appear likely that Geller refused to participate in any further tests.'

Subjects other than experimental ESP are dealt with only briefly, but here again Hansel finds examples of cases frequently cited and widely accepted as well substantiated which no longer appear so when original sources are critically examined. For instance, in checking up on one of the cases in which Gerard Croiset was said to have applied his clairvoyant faculty to good effect in helping the Dutch police with their detective work, Hansel shows that in actuality the performance was much less remarkable than was suggested by the reports published by Tenhaeff and Pollack.

Provided his wilder pronouncements and sweeping denunciations can be ignored, Professor Hansel can be credited with giving us good cause to reflect on our standards for evaluating evidence.

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#### REFERENCES

- (1) Sargent, C. (1980) *Exploring Psi in the Ganzfeld*. New York: Parapsychology Foundation.
- (2) Hasted, J. *et al* (1979). The detail of paranormal metal bending. *Journal S.P.R.* **50**, 9-20.
- (3) Pratt, J. G. (1973). A decade of research with a selected ESP subject *Proceedings American S.P.R.* **30**, 1-78.

WATER WITCHING USA. By Evon Z. Vogt and Ray Hyman. University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London. Second Edition, 1979 (First Edition, 1959), 260 pp.

The authors of this book are sceptics and argue their case powerfully though unfanatically, for example quoting with approval the work of Francis Hitching, although his position and viewpoint are very different from theirs, and fairly