

## BOOK REVIEW

**First Sight: ESP and Parapsychology in Everyday Life** by James C. Carpenter. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012. 487 pp. \$49.95 (hardcover). ISBN 978-1442213906.

In *First Sight* Jim Carpenter presents a model and a set of theoretical ideas about psi. The model offers a new understanding of what psi is. It proposes that psi is carried out continuously and almost entirely unconsciously. According to Carpenter, “Everyone swims in an extrasensory sea, but accesses it and responds to it differently depending on unconscious intention.” A board-certified clinical psychologist with more than 40 years of active experience as a psychotherapist, educator, and researcher, Carpenter’s involvement in parapsychology began in the mid-1960s when he became associated with the Duke Parapsychology Laboratory.

After conducting extensive research in parapsychology from the perspective of a clinical psychologist, it’s not surprising that Carpenter believes that “parapsychology belongs to general psychology.” Unfortunately, most contemporary psychologists don’t share that perspective. But I believe that Carpenter’s elucidation of psi’s functioning in terms of long-established psychological constructs, such as cognitive and dynamic psychology, will not only further demystify the mechanisms of psi, but build a traversable bridge to conventional psychological thinking.

Carpenter makes the point very early in this book, however, that it’s not his intention to debate the reality or validity of psi. Rather, he operates on a proposition similar to other well-respected psi researchers such as Dean Radin. Their position is that the evidence for psi phenomena is sufficiently established, and that psi research today is less concerned with experiments that prove psi than with questions such as: What influences psi performance? and How does it work?

First Sight theory sets out to do exactly that. Carpenter undertakes the challenge in 25 chapters spread over 6 sections. One key point he makes in the first section is that his theory can normalize psi by showing how it runs smoothly along with other mental functions such as memory, perception, motivation, and creativity. He also establishes some basic premises such as “organisms are psychologically unbounded,” and “unconscious intention is the primary guide that is used by unconscious thought in constructing experience and action.” In this initial section Carpenter also elaborates on the

First Sight model by providing a list of 12 corollaries in which he employs familiar psychological thinking to better understand psi functioning. For instance, his Integration Corollary suggests that psi—along with other preconscious processes such as motives, values, and subliminal sensory information—contribute to the formation of experience.

Similarly, his Weighing and Signing corollary draws upon concepts used by cognitive theorists. He explains how the unconscious mind “weighs” the information that is picked up, then “signs” it as either negative or positive. Based upon that determination, it either elects to include or exclude that information in developing experience or action.

In the Intentional Corollary, Carpenter employs notions analogous to what cognitive psychologists refer to as “priming.” Here it is with regard to how the unconscious mind will utilize implicit psi material that it registers. He suggests the unconscious mind will either assimilate it or dis-assimilate it (i.e. either engage in positive or negative priming).

Section II further develops his ideas, reiterating early on that his First Sight theory is a psychological model, not a physical or neurobiological one. Scattered through the chapters in this section, Carpenter provides additional premises that underlie his theory. One is that “the mind thinks unconsciously as well as consciously,” and predicated upon that premise, he adopts a kind of “psychological determinism” (i.e. that experiences and behaviors are caused by unconscious processes).

Also within this section, he explores psi and consciousness, stating that “consciousness begins unconsciously.” Carpenter emphasizes that it’s a misnomer to use the term “subliminal perception” to explain how unconscious impressions work their way to conscious experience, because, he says, “truly subliminal perceptions are not conscious,” so it is not accurate to speak of them as perceptions at all. Rather, he prefers to use a term first offered by Alfred Whitehead North: prehensions.

Prehensions “get hold of things,” he states, and “unconscious prehensions get hold of things unconsciously.” Later, employing this preferred term, Carpenter integrates it into a fuller picture of how the mind employs psi information, saying, “At the leading edge of perception, psi prehensions arouse an anticipational nexus of meanings” contributing to a “preparatory process that helps the mind make the best use of its sensory experience.”

Lastly, in this section, Carpenter lists some precursors to his model. He acknowledges how Freud’s theories of the dynamic unconscious and psychological determinism inform his theory. He integrates certain Jungian concepts, including the idea that the primary function of the psyche is to create consciousness and meaning. Contributions of psychical pioneer

Frederick Myers are incorporated, particularly those that relate psi and the subliminal unconscious. And he draws upon the empirical research of J. B. Rhine, Gertrude Schmeidler, and the closely related theory of Rex Stanford known as Psi Mediated Instrumental Response (PMIR).

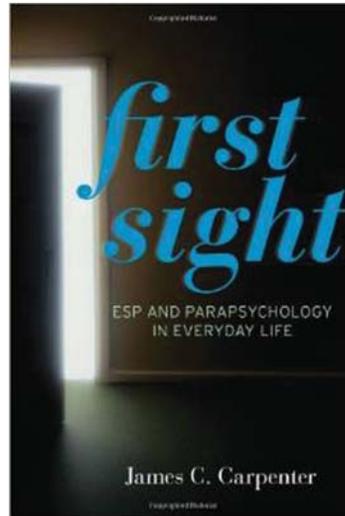
With regard to PMIR, however, Carpenter distinguishes his model from Stanford's. Where Stanford suggests that we occasionally access psi-mediated input only when it is instrumental to serving our needs, Carpenter believes that this process goes on continuously, that we select or deselect psi information in making decisions and carrying out actions.

In Section III, Carpenter digs in even further to substantiate his theory, and it becomes all the more evident at this point in the book that this is no light laymen reading. It's dense and comprehensive—and it needs to be. His model is complex and requires thorough theoretical substantiation and empirical support. He provides it in painstaking detail.

Acknowledging the extent of those details, (particularly those provided in Sections III and IV), Carpenter gives readers permission to skim the "Nitty Gritty" if they don't wish to explore them quite to the extent that they are offered. For those less interested in research design and interpretation, he suggests one can still follow the central ideas by reading the beginning and ending of each chapter. But I personally think it would be a mistake to not thoroughly peruse what he has compiled, because it is in those finer points that we gain a fuller appreciation for the workings of his model.

The First Sight model gets fleshed out in his detailed examination of unconscious processes, memory, creativity, fear, and extraversion. All are examined in light of his theory. This not only provides increased understanding of their effects on psi, but is evidence of just how deeply Carpenter has dug to assure a solid foundation for his model's explanatory value.

In this regard, a major foundational premise of his theory is that psi functions in an extended universe that goes beyond our physical boundaries of time and space. Therefore, it is important to cite and explain the details of research that provide the empirical evidence for that claim. Also, while he states in one of his earlier corollaries that an individual's unconscious



intention is critical in explaining why certain psi impressions get registered, at this point in the book he delves into it further.

For example, he details research outcomes that result in psi-missing. Psi-missing occurs when in a controlled parapsychological experiment, a given subject generates better than chance results in the opposite direction of that which is overtly intended. First Sight theory explains this as evidence of the effect of an individual's unconscious biased intentions. The individual isn't oblivious to the available extrasensory information, but registers it and avoids expressing it to a significant extent in the opposite direction. This is one of many excellent examples where Carpenter states, "The First Sight model accounts for a great many findings involving ESP and memory and makes them understandable in a common set of terms."

In the last two sections of the book, Carpenter explains how psi may manifest in everyday life. He suggests that when many people are first confronted with what may be the evidence of ESP, their "common sense becomes offended." He elaborates about how fear of psi can lead to its being prematurely designated as a form of psychopathology. This is of significant importance to me, because when I function in my role as a clinician, it is a challenge to discriminate between what may be a legitimate paranormal experience, one alleged to be paranormal but is actually a symptom of pathology, and certain cases where there can be a co-mingling of both.

By reading this book, conventional clinicians who are occasionally faced with such a unique presenting problem in psychotherapy can now be better prepared for that challenge. Carpenter's use of familiar psychological concepts not only helps the uninformed clinician understand how psi functions, but alerts them to the type of client who may be most inclined to present such anomalies. He also elucidates how psi may manifest in the consulting room, speaks to the qualities of therapists who may be most likely to perceive it, and even addresses therapist characteristics that may facilitate its expression.

In addition to providing information that can be helpful to unwitting professionals in the consulting room, these later chapters also provide some interesting examples of how psi works in certain gifted individuals. Their stories further normalize psi, and, as the subheading of the book indicates, shows how ESP and parapsychology manifest in the lives of everyday people. However, I was a little confused by a couple of points Carpenter raises in this regard. One that he reiterates a few times is that, "Psi is not an ability," and the other is, "Psi is not a trait."

His position is that psi not only belongs to everyone, but is going on within all of us all of the time whether we are aware of it or not. At the same time, toward the end of the book, he describes those individuals who clearly

have raised their awareness to what he calls the “inadvertent indications of psi phenomena.” He notes the gifted remote viewer Joe McMoneagle as one example.

McMoneagle has a great deal of natural talent, but I know that he also diligently worked to further develop that skill. In light of this, I struggled to reconcile Carpenter’s points.

As I tossed this conundrum around in my head, I sought a parallel analogy. I tried to think of one that might relate to how psi can be both available to everyone, and how some people may be better able to employ and improve its functioning. The analogy I came up with is our relationship to feelings.

We all have feelings. They come with being human. However, my personal experience and years of working as a clinician have shown me that we are not necessarily always aware of our feelings. Some of them may be unfamiliar, others easily identified and expressed, and some can remain largely unconscious. I have had a number of clients who have been significantly unaware of most of their feelings, and in some cases even deny having them. And sadly, I’ve worked with some people who are completely emotionally shut down.

Like the occasional inadvertent manifestations of psi, many of these emotionally out of touch individuals might be surprised by a random eruption of sadness, fear, or anger. But depending on their level of comfort with emotions (or what they may believe about them), they may distance themselves from some feelings, seeing them as having no place in their day-to-day experience.

Much of my work as a clinical psychologist is helping people understand their feelings. I assist them in becoming more aware when they are having feelings; teach them to gain comfort with actually experiencing them; learn to trust modulating their expression; employ them as a form of guidance; and how to empathically acknowledge and compassionately respond to the feelings of others.

Like this process of expanding our emotional consciousness, I believe psi can also be brought into consciousness. And I know from personal correspondence that Carpenter shares this belief. As a part of all of our overall evolution of consciousness, it is my contention that we can come to better understand the workings of psi, normalize its functioning, and become conscious of it in our everyday lives. First Sight theory helps put a definable handle on this particular aspect of our consciousness.

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