

ESSAY REVIEW

On First Volumes and Beginnings in the Study of Psychic Phenomena: Varieties of Investigative Approaches

Revue Spirite: Journal d'Études Psychologiques, 1858, Volume 1. CreateSpace, 2010 (paperback). 356 pp. Free at <http://books.google.com/>

Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, 1882–1883, Volume 1. 336 pp. Free at <http://books.google.com/>

Journal of Parapsychology, 1937, Volume 1. 307 pp. Lexscien online subscription. <http://www.lexscien.org/>

Much has been written about the various existing research styles and approaches in science. An example is Alistair Crombie's *Styles of Scientific Thinking in the European Tradition* (1994), in which the author presented a widely cited classification that included axiomatic, experimental, and taxonomic approaches to the study of nature, among others (see also Kwa 2005/2011). Similarly, many approaches coexisted during the Nineteenth Century in the study of the human experience, as seen in the field of psychology. This brought debates and conflicts between case and experimental studies, as seen in the German and French traditions, respectively (Carroy & Schmidgen 2006), and between the use of introspection and studies based on the study of observable phenomena (Brooks 1998). As Danzinger (1990) has argued, the situation was not simply one of differing approaches, but also one of different assumptions and different social research styles and practices.

A similar situation and the topic of this Essay Review is the different approaches in the study of psychic phenomena over time. The purpose of this Essay Review is to introduce to modern readers some of these approaches in the forms of summaries of the contents of three different journals from the past. These are comments about the first volumes of influential publications concerned with the study of psychic phenomena that are probably not familiar to current students of psychic phenomena. Consequently, I hope this Essay Review will inform *JSE* readers about aspects of the beginnings of these publications and about the beginnings of specific research styles, thus providing a more complete historical perspective of the history of research of psychic phenomena that is generally lacking in non-specialists.

To accomplish this I could have selected a variety of journals representing different methodological approaches to psychic phenomena, some of which have been discussed elsewhere (Alvarado, Biondi, & Kramer 2006). I have focused only on three for two main reasons. First, and for practical considerations, this Review would be too long if other journals—publications such as *Annales des Sciences Psychiques*, *Journal of the American Society for Psychological Research*, *Light, Luce e Ombra*, *Psychische Studien*, or the *Revue Métopsychnique*—had been included. Second, I feel that the publications I review below—the *Revue Spirite*, the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychological Research*, and the *Journal of Parapsychology*—represent well the various approaches to the study of psychic phenomena. These were foundational journals that clearly articulated the approaches discussed below, and which influence comes to our own time, although the latter topic is not discussed in any detail.

As mentioned before, my comments are limited to the beginnings of the journals and not to their development, nor to their content and philosophy in later years. Rather than a general study of the journals in question, I am merely presenting some comments about what they represented when they started.

Revue Spirite: Journal d'Études Psychologiques

“It is a ‘sign of the times . . .,’” wrote an anonymous author in *The Spectator*, published in London, “that a ‘Revue Spirite’, containing reports of table-turning, spirit-rapping, and other like manifestations, has been recently established at Paris” (Anonymous 1859). The *Revue Spirite: Journal d'Études Psychologiques* was founded by the French educator Hippolyte Léon Dénizard Rivail (1804–1869), better known by his pseudonym Allan Kardec, to help spread the movement of spiritism, which has received some scholarly attention in recent decades.¹ Together with several books that were reprinted many times (e.g., Kardec 1857, 1861), the *Revue* allowed Kardec to organize spiritism in France and to develop its basic tenets. This took place through the publication of multiple topics such as mediumistic communications and through discussions of phenomena, their cause, and the progress and development of the movement.

Kardec explained in his “Introduction” (pp. 1–6) to the volume why the expression *psychological studies* was part of the title of the *Revue*:

Our scope . . . includes everything connected to knowledge about the metaphysical part of man; we will study it in its present state and in its future state, because studying the nature of Spirits, is to study man, since one day he will form part of the world of Spirits: This is why we have added to

our main title the one of *journal of psychological studies* so as to include the whole range. (p. 6, this and other translations are mine)

This grandiose view of spiritism, an overall philosophy of life and death, was elaborated on by others, including an author who wrote years later:

What is Spiritism? It is the revelation of the history of man, with its relations to various elements of creation; it is the justification of the place that the Creator has impressed on the chain of beings; it is psychology illuminated by revelation. Philosophy directs us to Spiritism, and Spiritism brings us back to philosophy. (Bonnamy 1868:1)

The title of the journal also illustrated how spiritists during the Nineteenth Century and later used the terms *psychology* and *psychological* to refer to spiritism (e.g., Kardec 1857:79; see also the use of *physiological psychology* and *experimental psychology* by Delanne 1897, 1901). This usage represented many things, among them attempts to expand the scope of psychology, to bring spiritism into the academic disciplines that studied human beings, and to legitimize the topic.

Kardec stated in his Introduction that spiritism was not an empirical science in the same way that other disciplines used the term, but that it was a science more in the philosophical sense. The movement, he wrote, had the beginnings of a science in its attempts to deduce explanatory principles. After all, Kardec stated, facts alone do not form a science, “science is born from the coordination and the logical deduction of facts” (p. 3). The main deduction and the most important implications of the phenomena were for Kardec “the communication that men can establish with beings of an incorporeal world” (p. 4). But he also appreciated the philosophical and moral consequences of the movement. In his view spiritist doctrine presented humankind with the “only possible and rational solution of a multitude of moral and anthropological phenomena which we witness daily . . .” (p. 5).

One way in which spiritism was not like the sciences was the sources of information used. While Nineteenth Century science, like all science, was not based solely on facts, it had a strong component of work based on observations of the natural world, as seen in astronomy and geology, and on experiment, as seen in physics. But spiritism, as presented in the first volume of the *Revue*, and elsewhere, was based on revelatory “truth” coming from the spirits. That is, most of Kardec’s efforts were in organizing knowledge given by mediums, as opposed to the more direct observations of nature used by others. A good part of his work was the compilation of the

teachings of the spirits, many of which consisted of answers to questions presented to and answered by mediums.

The way this was done was briefly described in Kardec's *Le Livre des Esprits* (1857), which first edition appeared before the *Revue* was published. Kardec stated in the book that the principles discussed came from the spirits in answer to questions, or from spontaneously given communications. Furthermore, Kardec wrote: "Everything was coordinated so as to present a regular and methodical ensemble and has been made public after having been carefully reviewed many times and corrected by the spirits themselves" (Kardec 1857:31). The topic was briefly discussed in the *Revue* in an article entitled "Différents Ordres d'Esprits" (Different Orders of Spirits, pp. 37–44), which, like most articles in the journal, did not have a particular author. Here it was stated that the work reported in the *Revue* was done following the classification approaches of Linnaeus and others. We are told that spirits were not invented, but that their messages were classified by their similarities (p. 38).

The definition of *empirical* in the *Revue* comes from the fact that information was taken from the above-mentioned sources, but it did not carry any systematic verification. The volume of the *Revue* is full of non-evidential communications that will not impress most serious students of psychical research. Examples of this throughout the volume were communications from St. Louis (pp. 55–56), potter and ceramicist Bernard Palissy (pp. 108–114), Pasha Mehmet-Ali (pp. 114–117), Mozart (pp. 137–142), Louis XI (pp. 144–145), St. Vincent of Paul (pp. 215–218), as well as from an executed murderer (pp. 79–81), an insane person (pp. 164–166), and a suicide (pp. 166–168).

Almost all of these communications referred to spiritual, philosophical, and moral issues. Two examples were those received through Ermance Dufaux (b. 1841), a young medium who specialized in evoking famous historical figures (Dufaux 1855). The *Revue* contains transcriptions of her written communications about topics such as avarice (pp. 55–56) and pride (pp. 132–133). There were also summaries of Dufaux's writings conveying messages from Jeanne d'Arc (ca 1412–1431, p. 32) and King Louis XI (1423–1483, pp. 73–75).

An example of a communication appeared in "Entretiens d'Outre-Tombe" (Interviews from Beyond the Grave, pp. 57–58). The communicating spirit, frequently evoked by her family, was Miss Clary D., who died in 1850 when she was 13 years old. In a séance dated January 12, 1857, they communicated with her through her medium brother. The following is part of the transcribed proceedings (p. 57). Q. and R. stand for question and reply:

- Q. Do you have a precise recollection of your corporeal existence?
 R. The spirit sees the present, the past, and a little of the future depending on its perfection and its closeness to God.
- Q. This condition of perfection is only about the future, or does this also relate to the present and to the past?
 R. The spirit sees the future more clearly as it gets closer to God. After death the soul's sight is embraced by a glance at all its past *emigrations*, but she cannot see what God has prepared . . .
- Q. Do you know when you will reincarnate?
 R. In 10 years or in 100 years.
- Q. Will it be on this earth?
 R. In another world.

As mentioned before, some communications were valued for their content with no external verification other than similarities in content between communications. In a two-page paper entitled “Utilité de Certaines Évocations Particulières” (Utility of Some Particular Evocations, pp. 77–78), it was stated that these messages were valuable because the spirits in question “have acquired a high degree of perfection” (p. 77) that allowed them to “penetrate the mysteries that exceed the vulgar reach of humanity. . . .” (p. 78).

There are also some interesting discussions of spirit life on other planets that illuminate the degree of critical spirit prevalent in this publication.² In one article entitled “Des Habitations de la Planète Jupiter” (Dwellings on Planet Jupiter, pp. 223–232), playwright Victorien Sardou (1831–1908) mentioned communications and drawings he received from Bernard Palissy (1510–1590) and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791), who were supposed to live on Jupiter. In addition he had several other things to say as communicated by spirits. This included the fact that Jupiter had many highly evolved spirits, that the bodies of the habitants had a light density, and that they also had animals there.³

This was preceded by an article entitled “Jupiter et Quelques Autres Mondes” (Jupiter and Some Other Worlds, pp. 67–73) in which readers were told in all seriousness, and based on spirit communications, that spirits of different spiritual advancement lived on different planets and that Jupiter was the one with the most advanced inhabitants. The author of the article also stated that the residents of Jupiter had a longer lifespan and grew faster than earthlings. In addition, two other things were published in the first volume of the *Revue* about Jupiter. One was a communication from Palissy about Jupiter (pp. 108–114) that had an introductory editorial note saying that the content of the message was similar to those received before. Those similarities were said to be a “remarkable fact that at the very least is a

presumption of exactitude” (p. 108). Probably anticipating incredulity, a note was inserted entitled “Observation à Propos de Dessins de Jupiter” (Observations Regarding the Jupiter Drawings, p. 222), which reminded the reader that the purpose of the *Revue* was the study of all phenomena and that nothing should be neglected. Readers were told that even assuming that the drawings were the product of a spirit’s fantasy they were worth studying, but the possibility that the communications were produced by the medium’s imagination was not discussed, which was consistent with the belief system presented in the *Revue*.⁴

Spirit communications were also used to develop explanations for the phenomena, as seen in a two-part article entitled “Théorie des Manifestations Physiques” (Theory of Physical Manifestations, pp. 121–125, 149–153), presumably authored by Kardec. According to the spirits, physical phenomena were produced by the perispirit, a semi-physical principle separate from the spirit and the physical body that acted following the will of the spirit. Some apparitions and materializations consisted of the spirit surrounded by its semi-physical envelope, which could assume material properties: “The condensation may reach the point of producing resistance and tangibility; . . . but the condensation . . . or better, a solidification of ethereal matter, is not in its normal state, it is but temporary. . . .” (pp. 123–124). It was argued that explanations of physical phenomena were based on “the observation and on a logical deduction of facts: We have concluded from what we saw” (p. 149). But it is evident from the article that instead of observing, Kardec and his followers listened and read the words of the presumed spirits.

Many articles are accounts of cases, mainly taken from the press or from other sources. Examples include “Visions” (pp. 24–26), “Le Revenant de Mademoiselle Clairon” (The Ghost of Miss Clairon, pp. 44–48), “L’Esprit Frappeur de Dibbelsdorf—Basse-Saxe” (The Rapping Spirit of Dibbelsdorf—Lower Saxony), pp. 219–222), and “Phénomène d’Apparition” (Apparition Phenomena, pp. 291–292). These were not original case investigations, but reprints of accounts from other publications that were accompanied by commentary. In addition, there are many other articles about such varied topics as “Différent Ordres d’Esprits” (Different Types of Spirits, pp. 37–44), “Le Magnétisme et le Spiritisme” (Magnetism and Spiritism, pp. 91–92), “Propagation du Spiritisme” (The Spread of Spiritism, pp. 237–243), and “De la Pluralité des Existences Corporelles” (On the Plurality of Corporal Existences, pp. 295–302). The *Revue* also carried articles about medium D. D. Home (1833–1886, pp. 59–3, 88–91, 117–119), spirit photography (pp. 180–183), spirit obsession (pp. 265–276), clairvoyance in somnambules (pp. 313–315), apparitions (pp. 321–324),

and “bicorporeity” (on the separation of the soul and apparitions of the living, pp. 328–331).

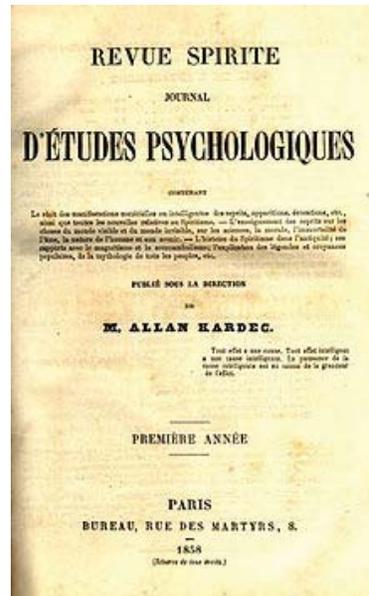
Although I am focusing my comments on only the first issue of the *Revue*, there is no question that historically this was an important journal and one that articulated the philosophy of spiritism. In later years the journal continued to feature Kardec’s initial teachings and inspired many other generations.⁵ The *Revue* was important in spreading the movement, and has continued to our day after many changes and after having suspended publication for a period.

The *Revue*, according to an anonymous critic, “seems to provide us with good buffoonery” (Anonymous 1858:235). I would not put it in these

terms, but more in terms of another contemporary of Kardec, André Saturnin Morin (1807–1888), who argued that Kardec was not critical enough in his evaluation of the truthfulness and identity of his communicators (Morin 1858). Leaving aside the historical perspective, many of us interested in the systematic and scientific study of psychic phenomena cannot see the *Revue* as a good start for what later became psychical research, other than publicizing the existence of psychic phenomena and inspiring a positive attitude toward the topic.

Furthermore, there was no serious consideration in the first volume of the *Revue* of the possibility that the communications were imaginary, or the possibility that they were influenced in various ways, such as through knowledge of other communications obtained by the mediums who were active in spiritist meetings and presumably read the literature. Admittedly, this is speculation, but not farfetched considering what we have learned over the years about the indirect influence of suggestion and the expectations of groups, not to mention the theoretical possibility of personation.⁶ This possibility renders the use of mediumistic communications, at best, a problematic way of obtaining knowledge.

In addition, to consider the content of the *Revue*, and Kardec’s work, as a scientific research program (Moreira-Almeida 2008) begs the question of what science is. It is one thing to observe nature and develop hypotheses



Revue Spirite cover, 1858

based on observed patterns, or to be tested by further observations or actual experimentation, and another thing to use communications through seances, which source is uncertain, as shown in this volume of the *Revue*, to get teachings and answers to questions about the nature of topics such as the workings of psychic phenomena and a variety of moral and philosophical issues. Similarly, it is one thing to report on non-evidential spirit communications and on cases of apparitions and other phenomena discussed in the press and other sources, and it is another to study these phenomena with attention to evidence.

In some ways psychical research was developed to do better than this. It was not only a response to crises of faith and the search for alternate worldviews, but also an attempt to be empirical without depending on difficult-to-interpret revelations from “spiritual” sources. As Frederic W. H. Myers (1843–1901) stated about the approach of British psychical researchers: “We endeavour to approach the problems of that [spiritual] world by careful collection, scrutiny, testing, of particular facts” (Myers 1900a:117). Neither the first volume of the *Revue*, nor later ones, achieved this agenda. It is true that there was an empirical spirit in the journal in terms of breaking with metaphysics and religion, and in collecting information (Chibeni 2014). But the collection of cases was anything but “careful,” there was little “scrutiny” (if any) and no “testing” to speak of unless one considers that asking questions of mediums and selecting and arranging communications was akin to scrutiny and testing in the conventional way. Such an approach was developed in the next publication reviewed here.

Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research

The four reports of the Society for psychical research which have been issued at intervals during 1882 and 1883 have now appeared in the form of a handsome volume, and it cannot be denied that they constitute a formidable body of evidence in favor of certain beliefs that have hitherto been looked upon with peculiar suspicion and distrust. (Anonymous 1884:40)

These were comments appearing in the journal *Science*, which, with some exceptions, became less positive toward the contents of the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research (PSPR)* in later years.

The *PSPR* was the main organ of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), which was of basic importance for the development of parapsychology. Its work, conducted by figures such as the above-mentioned Myers, by the Society’s President Henry Sidgwick (1838–1900), and by others such as Eleanor Sidgwick (1845–1936), Edmund Gurney (1847–1888), and William F. Barrett (1844–1925), systematized research into psychic phenomena in

England, but it was also influential in other countries.⁷ The first volume of the *PSPR* bears witness to this.

The volume opens with the “Objects of the Society” (pp. 3–6), in which the purpose of the SPR was stated to be to make “an organised and systematic attempt to investigate that large group of debatable phenomena designated by such terms as mesmeric, psychical, and Spiritualistic” (p. 3), topics referred to as “residual phenomena” (p. 3).⁸ These phenomena and associated matters were entrusted to committees responsible for:

1. An examination of the nature and extent of any influence which may be exerted by one mind upon another, apart from any generally recognised mode of perception.
2. The study of hypnotism, and the forms of so-called mesmeric trance, with its alleged insensibility to pain; clairvoyance, and other allied phenomena.
3. A critical revision of Reichenbach’s researches with certain organisations called “sensitive;” and an inquiry whether such organisations possess any power of perception beyond a highly exalted sensibility of the recognised sensory organs.⁹
4. A careful investigation of any reports, resting on strong testimony, regarding apparitions at the moment of death, or otherwise, or regarding disturbances in houses reputed to be haunted.
5. An inquiry into the various physical phenomena commonly called Spiritualistic; with an attempt to discover their causes and general laws.
6. The collection and collation of existing materials bearing on the history of these subjects. (pp. 3–4)

The tone was set with Henry Sidgwick’s Presidential Address (pp. 7–12) delivered at the first general meeting of the Society held on July 17, 1882. He reminded members that their work “should be carried on with a single-minded desire to ascertain the facts, and without any foregone conclusion as to their nature” (p. 8), acknowledging that different positions were allowed within the Society, including skepticism. In addition to recognizing previous efforts, Sidgwick clearly stated that more evidence was needed to convince the scientific world. Their main task, he said, was to “carefully sift the evidence, and guard against the danger of illusion or deception . . . and then, when the evidence has been sifted by accumulation of personal experiments, make it more available for the purpose of producing general conviction” (p. 11). But he was aware of the incredulity they would have to fight. As he put it: “We have done all that we can when the critic has nothing left to allege except that the investigator is in the trick. But when he has nothing else left to allege he will allege that” (p. 12).

The first volume, containing four issues appearing in 1882 and 1883,

was formed of papers reporting on the collection and analysis of evidence for psychic phenomena coming from accounts and from experiments. Some of these were reports of the above-mentioned committees, among them Barrett, Gurney, and Myers' "First Report of the Committee on Thought-Reading" (1882, pp. 13–34) and Gurney, Myers, and Barrett's "Second Report of the Committee on Thought-Transference" (1882, pp. 70–97), which dealt mainly with experimental studies of the Creery sisters. Reverend Creery informed the SPR of cases of thought-transference observed in his family. According to the first report:

He has a family of five girls, ranging now between the ages of ten and seventeen. . . . The father stated that any one of these children (except the youngest), as well as a young servant-girl who had lived with the family for two years, was frequently able to designate correctly, without contact or sign, a card or other object fixed on in the child's absence. (p. 20)

Several tests were done, many with positive results. Unfortunately in later tests with cards, two of the girls, "acting as 'agent' and 'percipient,' were detected in the use of a code of signals; and a third has confessed to a certain amount of signalling in the earlier series to which reference has been made" (Gurney 1888:269). However, even though it was decided not to continue to use work with the Creery sisters in support of telepathy, we must notice the precautions taken by the investigators and mentioned in the original report, some of which included means to prevent the sisters, or other members of her family, from having knowledge of the target material.

Other reports included Barrett, Keep, Massey, Wedgwood, Podmore, and Pease's "First Report of the Committee on 'Haunted Houses'" (1882, pp. 101–115), and Barrett, Massey, Moses, Podmore, Gurney, and Myers' "Report of the Literary Committee" (1882, pp. 116–155). These, and other reports such as Barrett's "On Some Phenomena Associated with Abnormal Conditions of Mind" (1883, pp. 238–244) and Malcolm Guthrie and James Birchall's "Record of Experiments in Thought-Transference, at Liverpool" (1883, pp. 263–283), point to the empirical approach prevalent in the SPR even if such attempts seem methodologically crude by modern standards.

Such standards are illustrated in the above-mentioned "First Report of the Committee on 'Haunted Houses'" (1882, pp. 101–115). Different from brief and secondhand accounts characterizing most older reports of ghosts, the *SPR* researchers acted as follows:

In the first place, we, of course, begin by tracing every story to the fountain-head. But we do not consider that every first-hand narration of the appearance of a ghost, even from a thoroughly trustworthy narrator, gives

us adequate reason for attempting further investigation. On the contrary, our general principle is that the unsupported evidence of a single witness does not constitute sufficient ground for accepting an apparition as having a prima facie claim to objective reality. To distinguish any apparition from an ordinary hallucination . . . it must receive some independent evidence to corroborate it. And this corroboration may be of two kinds; we may have the consentient testimony of several witnesses ; or there may be some point of external agreement and coincidence—*unknown, as such, to the seer at the time*—(e.g., the periodic appearance on a particular anniversary, or the recognition of a peculiar dress), to give to the vision an objective foundation. (pp. 101–102)

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Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research, 1882–1883 Table of Contents

Interestingly, the SPR encouraged the participation of its members in conducting research. In doing so, they both exemplified the less professional nature of the enterprise in those early days and its emphasis on data collection. An example was a circular printed in the *PSPR*: “To Members and Associates of the Society for Psychical Research: Circular No. 1. (*Second Edition*). On the General Work of the Society” (1883, pp. 295–302). But in addition to encouraging research into thought-transference, the circular contained statements about our limited knowledge regarding the phenomena and about some precautions needed in its study:

We must specially urge, however, that those who are willing thus to cooperate with us will accurately record the results of every experiment made; we do not desire *selected* results. . . . If the experiment is made with cards the whole pack should be used, and not a selected portion of it. If with num-

bers, names, &c., the principle on which the selection is made should be indicated (e.g., that the number consists of two figures, or that the name is a Christian name), in order that some estimate may be formed of the chances against success. . . . Absolute silence should be secured during the progress of the experiments. If the first trial is a failure, the percipient should learn that fact from the silence of the experimenter, or "agent," as we prefer to call him. It should further be stated what precautions, if any, have been taken to preclude the possibility of learning the object selected by ordinary means. (pp. 297–298)

This, and other cautionary advice regarding other topics such as physical mediumship, shows how the early SPR did not simply care for "facts." Its members, or at least most of those who conducted the work, were mindful of the way they were collected, of possible artifacts and conventional explanations.

In Henry Sidgwick's first untitled Presidential Address to the SPR (1882, pp. 7–12) he stated that he believed it was a scandal "that the educated world, as a body, should still be simply in the attitude of incredulity" (p. 8) regarding psychic phenomena, and that the main aim of the SPR was to end this situation. He admitted that previous efforts had been valuable but affirmed that more work was necessary, work that would carry conviction in the scientific world. Part of this work, he stated, should be carried out using mediums who do not get money for their performances, a way to control for motives for fraud. Regarding this research, Sidgwick believed that

in a matter so strange to ordinary experience I think we may say that it is only gradually that a man learns the complicated precautions that have to be taken in order to exclude all conceivable possibility of illusion or deception. (p. 11)

In the above-mentioned report of the Literary Committee we find the SPR's early attempts to classify apparitional and other experiences collected by the Society via public appeals. This was an initial attempt to classify the cases, seeing them in terms of thought-transference, an idea they would continue to develop later in the *PSPR* and in the first major publication of the Society (Gurney, Myers, & Podmore 1886). It was stated in the report: "In a chaos such as this subject presents, classification, however rude and provisional, is itself light-bringing; it is at any rate an indispensable pre-requisite of any true analysis" (p. 118). The tentative classification, an attempt to bring order into many confusing cases, included: agent and percipient in a normal condition; percipient in an abnormal condition (exalted perception during sleep; exalted perception during trance; exalted percep-

tion at or during death); agent in an abnormal condition (impression from a person in sleep; impression from a person in a state of trance; impression from a dying person; impression from a person who is excited or in danger); agent and percipient both in an abnormal condition (two persons dying or in peril at the same moment; simultaneous dreams; percipient asleep and agent excited; and percipient asleep and agent dying). The state of the situation regarding the classification, it was stated in the report, was “very much in the position which zoology and botany occupied in the time of Aristotle, or nosology in the time of Hippocrates” (p. 149).

In addition, the authors of the report of the Literary Committee mentioned the problem of chance in relation to dreams. This was consistent with interest in conventional explanations, and with discussions of coincidences regarding psychic dreams found during the Nineteenth Century (Alvarado 2012).

Interestingly, there was little in the first volume of the *PSPR* regarding theory. An exception was Barrett’s ideas in his paper “On Some Phenomena Associated with Abnormal Conditions of Mind.” He wrote regarding thought-transference:

The energy of electricity exerts itself in two ways, by transmission along a material conductor and by influence, or induction as it is termed, across space. May not nerve energy, whatever be its nature, also act by influence as well as conduction? (p. 244)

There was more attention to theory in later volumes regarding such topics as telepathic explanations of apparitions, and the ideas of Myers about the subliminal mind.¹⁰ But the publication of the *PSPR*’s initial volume marks an important contribution, an attempt to systematize the study of psychic phenomena that had much impact on the development of psychical research.

As expected, the reception of the *PSPR* varied according to the reviewer. Two contrasting opinions came from American psychologists G. Stanley Hall (1844–1924) and William James (1842–1910). Hall (1887), a skeptic in all things regarding psychic phenomena, was not convinced by the quality of the material. James was more positive and stated that there was a big difference between most of the literature about the “supernormal” and the *PSPR*. In his words, the *PSPR* emphasized quality of evidential material over quantity. “Outside of these ‘Proceedings,’” he wrote, “I know of no systematic attempt to *weigh* the evidence for the supernatural” (James 1892:728–729).

Journal of Parapsychology

While the *PSPR* included some reports of experiments (and this became more frequent in later volumes), this approach was not the main one taken by *SPR* researchers. But it was the research style predominant in the *Journal of Parapsychology*.

Joseph Banks Rhine (1895–1980) promoted in the United States during the 1930s a parapsychological experimental research program. These efforts consisted at first of the now-classic ESP card-guessing studies initially reported in *Extra-Sensory Perception* (Rhine 1934), a tradition that was continued in the *Journal of Parapsychology (JP)*.¹¹

The *JP* was first published in 1937 and was printed by Duke University Press. It was first edited by William McDougall (1871–1938) and Joseph Banks Rhine, with Assistant Editor Charles E. Stuart (1907–1947). It has been argued that: “With the 1937 publication of the first volume of the *Journal of Parapsychology*, a new era of psychical research began” (Tietze 1973:176). Furthermore, the journal has been considered “one of the vehicles through which J. B. Rhine and his associates at Duke University articulated their experimental research program” (Alvarado, Biondi, & Kramer 2006:74–75).

This emphasis was stated in the initial unsigned “Editorial Introduction” (pp. 1–9), which has been attributed to William McDougall (Mauskopf & McVaugh 1980:147). In the Editorial it was stated:

Parapsychology is a word that comes to us from Germany,¹² where for some dozen years past it has been used to denote the stricter inquiries into obscure and questionable forms of mental activity. We think it may well be adopted into the English language to designate the more strictly experimental part of the whole field implied by psychical research as now pretty generally understood. It is these strictly laboratory studies which most need the atmosphere and conditions to be found only in the universities; and it is these which the universities can most properly promote, leaving the extra-academic groups the still-important task of collecting and recording all such reports of phenomena apparently expressive of unusual mental powers as occur spontaneously. . . . We do not claim that any sharp line can be drawn marking off the field of parapsychology within the larger vaguer province of psychical research. Rather, we anticipate that the stricter experimental methods will gradually invade other parts of the province annexing them to their own more special field, until possibly the two shall coincide. But we regard the differentiation of the two terms as useful at the present time; and it is our intention to admit to this journal only contributions that properly fall within the narrower sphere implied by its title; that is to say, reports of experimental studies in the stricter sense and discussions of methods and interpretations of such work. (p. 7)

The experimental emphasis was well-represented in the four issues of the *JP* which appeared in its first volume in 1937. According to my count of types of paper in the first volume, excluding correspondence and notes, there were 16 experimental reports, 4 editorials, 3 reviews of specific topics, 3 summaries and reviews of specific experiments, and 3 discussions of statistical issues.

Examples of experiments include ESP studies such as J. G. Pratt's (1910–1979) "Clairvoyant Blind Matching" (pp. 10–17), J. L. Woodruff and R. W. George's "Experiments in Extra-Sensory Perception" (pp. 18–30), Lucien Warner's "The Role of Luck in ESP Data" (pp. 84–92), and Vernon Sharp and C. C. Clark's "Group Tests for Extra-Sensory Perception" (pp. 123–142).

The experimental approach was not limited to proving the existence of ESP. The *JP* carried interesting experiments to study ESP in relation to other variables, such as J. B. Rhine's "The Effect of Distance in ESP Tests" (pp. 172–184), Margaret H. Pegram's "Some Psychological Relations of Extra-Sensory Perception" (pp. 191–205), and Edmond P. Gibson's "A Study of Comparative Performance in Several ESP Procedures" (pp. 264–275). In addition, several studies were reported about ESP tests with special participants. These were: Louisa E. Rhine's (1891–1983) "Some Stimulus Variations in Extra-Sensory Perception with Child Subjects" (pp. 102–113), Esther May Bond's "General Extra-Sensory Perception With a Group of Fourth and Fifth Grade Retarded Children" (pp. 114–122), Margaret M. Price and Margaret H. Pegram's "Extra-Sensory Perception Among the Blind" (pp. 143–155), and Joseph F. Kubis and Fabian L. Rouke's "An Experimental Investigation of Telepathic Phenomena in Twins" (pp. 163–171).

As is common today with much parapsychological research, the early *JP* reports were full of procedural details and statistical analyses. An example was the following excerpt from the above-mentioned Price and Pegram study with blind participants:

Contents	
Editorial Introduction	1
Clairvoyant Blind Matching	10
Experiments in Extra-Sensory Perception	18
An Experiment in Card Gambling	31
Telepathy in the Psychophysical Laboratory	46
Reader vs Extra-Sensory and Sensory Form Perception	53
The Tyrrell Experiments	63
Some Basic Experiments in Extra-Sensory Perception: A Background	70

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For a total of 2,024 runs there were 11,518 correct calls, or a positive deviation of 1,398. This gives an average of 5.69 hits per 25 calls from a mean expectation of 5. This deviation is 16.99 times the standard deviation. The odds against so large a deviation occurring by chance in this number of trials are 1,054 to one. 28 of the entire 66 subjects had individually significant total scores; that is had positive deviations which were at least 2.5 times the standard deviation. (p. 148)

Because Rhine's work was involved in many criticisms from the beginning (Mauskopf & McVaugh 1980), the *JP* included much about methodology and critiques to show the validity of the ESP work. One of these was J. B. Rhine's "The Question of Sensory Cues and the Evidence" (pp. 276–291). Other defenses were about the statistical analyses used. C. E. Stuart and J. A. Greenwood commented in "A Review of Criticisms of the Mathematical Evaluation of ESP Data" (pp. 295–304) that

[critiques] have been irrelevant in regard to the mean chance expectation, mathematically valid but experimentally trivial in regard to the standard deviations, and mathematically and experimentally valid in regard to the probability statements. (p. 304)

Whatever mistakes or problems were pointed out "in no way affect any of the conclusions heretofore established in ESP research" (p. 304).

Also related to statistics was the reprint of a press release by Dr. Burton H. Camp, President of the Institute of Mathematical Statistics, presented in a section about "Notes" (p. 305) in which Camp stated:

Dr. Rhine's investigations have two aspects; experimental and statistical. On the experimental side mathematicians of course have nothing to say. On the statistical side, however, recent mathematical work has established the fact that assuming that the experiments have been properly performed, the statistical analysis is essentially valid. If the Rhine investigation is to be fairly attacked it must be on other than mathematical grounds.

Interestingly, the publication of the *JP* received publicity in prominent publications such as *Science* and the *The New York Times* (Anonymous 1937a, 1937b). The writer of the latter comment summarized the research style of the Duke group, and of the *JP*, in the following words: "We seem to breathe the bracing air of the laboratory rather than the sticky incense of darkened rooms in which frauds hold forth."

Concluding Remarks

The journals discussed here, surrounded by different social and national contexts, started publication in different eras (1858, 1882, and 1937), and they are still published today. All of them had to carve out their own territory, so to speak, when they started. The *Revue* appeared in a context in which mesmerism was better known, a movement that was not always open to spiritism (e.g., Morin 1858). Similarly, to some extent the *PSPR* and the *JP* represented “new” beginnings in terms of spiritualism and psychical research, respectively. However, it would be wrong to reduce everything to breaks and discontinuities. In fairness, the issue was more one of general trends, and it is important to recognize that there were clear conceptual and methodological connections between the movements.

Mediumship was not the sole province of spiritism during the Nineteenth Century, as seen in phenomena that may be termed mediumistic in magnetic somnambules (e.g., Haddock 1851:Chapter 9, Lausanne 1816:12–26).¹³ Similarly, the concern of early psychical research with hauntings and apparitions (not to mention the examinations of mediumship included in later *PSPR* volumes) shows a connection with the interests of spiritualists (e.g., Ambler 1850, Harrison 1879), and Rhine’s parapsychology inherited a previous interest in experiments and statistical evaluation (e.g., Coover 1917, Richet 1884).

While different, the three journals presented in their pages material showing empirical attempts to study psychic phenomena, even though they represent different research styles. Of the three approaches—the teaching of the spirits, the analyses of testimony, and the conducting of experiments—only the last two are still pursued in parapsychology. In fact, I doubt that today many parapsychologists and readers of the *JSE* will consider the use of mediumistically obtained teachings as a reliable approach to study psychic phenomena, although one may argue that it may be useful to generate hypotheses that may be put to test by other means. But leaving aside modern standards and practices, we must admit that Kardec saw his work as empirical, different from faith, an attempt to collect information from the natural world, albeit from an unusual source.

The emphasis of the *Revue* on the teachings of the spirits as a source of knowledge about psychic phenomena was obviously associated with the conviction that the communications came from spirits. Lacking this belief, most psychical researchers, including those convinced of survival, did not pay attention to such sources and placed their efforts on verifiable mediumistic communications and observable phenomena (e.g., Myers 1903:Vol. 2:117–118). This, and the fact that psychical researchers traditionally have taken

the capabilities of the non-conscious level of the mind more seriously than spiritists and spiritualists,¹⁴ led to the rejection, or at least the classification of this material as uncertain. This was not limited to early French spiritism, but applied as well to many other claims associated with unverifiable psychic sources of information, such as descriptions of the afterlife and philosophical and moral communications (e.g., Davis 1867, Moses 1883). In some ways it may be argued that one of the reasons psychical research developed was to be able to study phenomena without depending on such ambiguous sources of information.

Different from the above, the *PSPR* and the *JP*, not to mention other journals (Alvarado, Biondi, & Kramer 2006), emphasized cases and experiments as the means to generate knowledge for psychical research. Later developments within the SPR and the Duke group, as articulated in the *PSPR* and the *JP*, significantly affected the study of psychic phenomena, transforming it into a more systematic endeavor.¹⁵

While I have written only about the first volume of each of these journals, it is important to remember that they have expanded their coverage over the years. I invite readers to explore these changes to appreciate how the content of the journals and the assumptions behind the content have changed, while, I believe, staying the same in terms of initial purposes.

Notes

- ¹ Some examples of this scholarship, which include information about Kardec, are the works of Edelman (1995), Monroe (2008), and Sharp (2006). The most detailed biographical study of Kardec, although disorganized, is that presented by Wantuil and Thiesen (1984). Moreira-Almeida (2008) has argued that Kardec's work represents a research program into psychic phenomena.
- ² Kardec (1857:37, 159) had discussed before the *Revue* was published the idea that other planets were inhabited, that earthlings could reincarnate on Jupiter, and that spirits from that planet could visit Earth. Previous discussions of planetary topics include the experiences of Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772) with spirits from Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Saturn, and Venus (Swedenborg 1758/1828), and the “trips” of a young somnambulist to places such as Ceres, Mercury, Jupiter, and the Moon (Anonymous 1837).
- ³ Sardou later expressed doubts about the identity of Palissy (Claretie 1897, de P. 1897).
- ⁴ Referring to Sardou's productions, Camille Flammarion (1842–1925) wrote:

At that time we all thought Jupiter was inhabited by a superior race of beings. The spiritistic communications were the reflex of the general ideas in the air. To-day, with our present knowledge of the planets, we should not imagine anything of the kind about that globe. (Flammarion 1907:26)

- ⁵ The movement was very influential in France (e.g., Edelman 1995, Sharp 2006). It spread to countries such as Italy and Brazil (e.g., Biondi 1988, Machado 1983), but much less so to the Anglo–American world. Historically, reticence to accept some of the claims of spiritism can be seen in the writings of some believers in discarnate agency who assumed, without clear evidence, that the communications coming from Kardec’s mediums were affected by his beliefs (e.g., Aksakof 1875, Home 1877: Part 3:Chapter 3, Myers 1903:Vol. 2:135). In addition, several were skeptical about reincarnation, a main tenet of spiritism (e.g., Coleman 1878, Howitt 1876).
- ⁶ See, for example, the later writings of Flournoy (1900), Janet (1889), Myers (1900b), and Sudre (1946) (see also Alvarado 2011a). While such concepts were developed in detail after Kardec’s times, the idea of psychological influences on phenomena traditionally believed to be produced by spirits was around before Kardec started being involved with mediums. Examples include seeing demonopathy as a contagious condition (Calmeil 1845: Vol. 1:86) and hallucinations as manifestations open to be influenced by the “force of example, by a true moral contagion” (Brierre de Boismont 1845:308).
- ⁷ The best source about early SPR developments is still Gauld (1968). Other perspectives appear in Alvarado (2002) and Cerullo (1982). The SPR also published the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, which circulated only among members. The *PSPR* was the public voice of the Society and it soon became well-known and was received by many libraries in various countries. In addition to the individuals mentioned there were many who helped the development of the SPR, among them Vice Presidents Arthur Balfour (1848–1930), William Stainton Moses (1839–1892), and Hensleigh Wedgwood (1803–1891), and Council Members Charles Massey (1828–1907), Frank Podmore (1856–1910), and George Wyld (1821–1906), among others.
- ⁸ In the United States William James (1842–1910) wrote years later about psychic phenomena as an “unclassified residuum” (James 1890:362).
- ⁹ Karl Ludwig von Reichenbach (1788–1869) postulated the existence of Od, a universal force that was seen and perceived in other ways by sensitive people (see Nahm 2012).
- ¹⁰ There were many ideas of forces and waves of different sorts to account for

telepathy during the Nineteenth Century (Alvarado 2008). Two examples before and after Barrett's paper are those of Houston (1892) and Knowles (1869). Examples of later *PSPR* theoretical discussions include Barrett, Massey Moses, Podmore, Gurney, and Myers (1884), and Myers (1884).

- ¹¹ On Rhine, see Berger (1988:194–231), Brian (1982), Mauskopf and McVaugh (1980), and Rao (1982). There are also discussions about different aspects of the *JP* (Alvarado 2011b, Alvarado, Biondi, & Kramer 2006:73–75, Broughton 1987, and Mauskopf 1987).
- ¹² The term *parapsychology* was used in the title of a journal, *Zeitschrift für Parapsychologie* (1926–1934), and in many works, among them those of Oesterreich (1921) and Driesch (1932). For context information, see Sommer (2013).
- ¹³ For discussions of this interesting issue, see Crabtree (1993:196–212) and Crockford (2013).
- ¹⁴ The skeptical attitude of spiritists and spiritualists about the capabilities of the subconscious mind and of dissociation as an explanatory principle of mediumship was evident in several publications (e.g., Delanne 1902), and it continues to our day. The use of the subconscious mind to explain mediumship in the French context has received some scholarly attention (Alvarado 2010, Lachapelle 2011, Le Maléfan 1999, Monroe 2008).
- ¹⁵ While some may see the *PSPR* and the *JP* as examples of methodological progress in the scientific study of psychic phenomena, others may see them as too reductionistic, as having limited too much both the possible methodologies of study as well as the phenomena.

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