

## BOOK REVIEWS

**Parapsychology in the Twenty-First Century** edited by Michael A. Thalbourne and Lance Storm. McFarland, 2005. 396 pp. \$45.00 (paper). ISBN 0-7864-1938-5.

With the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century it is right that those involved in "out of culture" science should pause to reflect not so much on the achievements of the past, but how the science may develop in the future.

Parapsychologists are certainly out of culture and thus they suffer from all the criticism that not being a mainstream scientist attracts. But the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a time of rapid change and however much conventional scientists wish to cling to the 20<sup>th</sup> century paradigms, the wash of progress will submerge them.

Let's take the example of medicine. In the 50s and 60s most models of physical illness were organ based, driven by the mechanics of the cell, either invasive in terms of bacteria and viruses, or dysfunctional in terms of genetics, or self-destructive in terms of autoimmune conditions. Mind had little part to play. In the 80s and 90s mind-body medicine took centre stage. What you think profoundly influences your immune system and negative thinking either in the form of depression or anger leads to the development of cancers and cardiovascular disease. This was a huge step forward from the 50s. By the end of the 90s and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, spiritual medicine was taking root in mainstream medical schools. In the 1990s only one or two American schools taught spiritual medicine. By the mid-1990s the number had risen into the 50s and by the turn of the century over 100 medical schools taught the subject. In England two of the major academic institutions, the British Psychological Association and the Royal College of Psychiatrists have special interest groups on spiritual psychology and spiritual psychiatry respectively. The wind of change is blowing strongly now, as the confirmation by double blind randomised controlled trials that prayer works, and that hands on healing is also effective means that we have now entered the era of non-local medicine.

The book *Parapsychology in the Twenty-First Century* is a wonderful book, as it contains chapters by most of the glitterati of the parapsychological stage. I was especially pleased to see an article by Bob Morris written before his untimely and sad death last year, for Bob has been a powerful force for enlightenment in the UK, being the first Professor of Parapsychology in the Koestler Chair in Edinburgh and indeed in the UK. He has encouraged a generation of students to obtain their PhDs in parapsychology and these students have gone on to carry a wider message of the nature of psychology into the ordinary academic world of psychology in the UK. Some of these students are now about to be appointed to professorial chairs in their own right, suggesting that for the 21<sup>st</sup> century parapsychology will have come of age in the UK.

Dean Radin starts the book with the fate of a number of academic departments left money for parapsychology who were quick, when the opportunity arose, to divert the funding away from parapsychology. He quotes Sidgwick in 1883, the first President of the Society for Psychical Research, who states about parapsychology "*Scientific incredulity has been so long in growing and has so many and so strong roots, that we should only kill it, if we are able to kill it at all . . . by burying it alive under a heap of facts.*" The exciting message of this book is that indeed this heap of facts has now grown so high and so wide that the fact that parapsychological phenomena occur is no longer in question. What is now the question is how do we explain parapsychological phenomena with models that truly link it into the centre of our scientific orthodoxy.

The breakdown of the Newtonian model and the rise of quantum mechanics throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century are the obvious way forward for parapsychology and this is validated by many examples in the book. But an interesting article by Robin Wooffitt looks at language and the study of parapsychological phenomena. He notes that parapsychology relies on language, particularly talk-in-interaction; the communicative skills required in conducting experiments demonstrating paranormal powers or making reports of spontaneous experiences. He takes a look at the significance of talk in laboratory practice and raises the question that language and psi functioning may be linked, and wonders whether what he calls 'the spirit' of a parapsychological laboratory may be described in terms of its overall communicative environment. He goes on to discuss the role of spontaneous anomalous phenomena and notes that the proof of special cognitive powers is almost always demonstrated verbally. He argues for conversation analysis and social organisation being important in the understand of accounts of spontaneous experiences. This is an important chapter because it points the way to further understanding of how we pin down the necessary features of subjective experience to make them, through language, into the data of science.

Being a psychiatrist and interested in consciousness and mental states, I found the chapter by James McClenon particularly interesting. He goes into the concept of Shamanic effectiveness and reviews some of the work by those who have looked at primitive societies and healing rituals. He points out that our current scientific support for mind-body medicine is a powerful mechanism for producing healing change in the body of those taking part in the rituals. But he also goes on to raise the question that the altered states of consciousness which arise within the ritual may go beyond that, and perhaps enhance ESP and PK abilities, and indeed suggests a direct evolutionary benefit for these abilities.

In his chapter *A Socio-empirical Perspective* Lance Storm discusses the sociological aspects and the integration of psi phenomena into our culture and how the disbelief of mainstream science can be ameliorated. He discusses in some detail the way the three factors of experience, belief and the scientific method have given shape and form to the field of parapsychology.

It is only right that the problem of mind and matter, and the way that our understanding of this field should evolve should be tackled in this book.

Christine Hardy, using semantic field theory, looks at the importance of consciousness in determining mind/matter theories. She points to the influence of quantum mechanics and that psi points to a whole new dimension not defined by the laws of Newtonian physics. She goes on to look at the hard problem, the difficulty in explaining with our current understanding, the mind/matter gap, and she goes on to see consciousness as a product of emergent self-organisation. It is nice to see a quotation from Sheldrake's work on pets and the anthropological perspective of telepathic communication between animals and animals, and animals and man. She links this into self development and concludes her chapter with the idea that in the future when telepathic phenomena are accepted and we start to practice our telepathic capacity in a more formal and constructed sense, that this will feed back on our sense of honesty and make more transparent our personal relationships with each other.

It is not possible to name every author or every article in the book. Needless to say, chapters by Krippner rub shoulders with those of Thalbourne and Neppe. This book is useful for the ideas about the future evolution of our current ideas about parapsychology. It should be on the bookshelves of all those interested in parapsychology and will be helpful both as a fertile ground for producing stimulating ideas and for the very wide list of references included at the end of each chapter.

Perhaps I can end this review by quoting again from Dean Radin's chapter. "*By the end of the 2050s I suspect that parapsychology will no longer exist, at least not as it has existed in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. I believe that the course of science and society are heading precisely in the direction that will accommodate psi . . . as normal and expected.*"

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**Supernormal Faculties in Man** by Eugene Osty, translated from French by Stanley De Brath. Dutton, New York, 1923.

In the course of a session with Mlle. de Berly, one of the psychics tested by Osty, she exclaimed, "Oh! Peril of death after a while . . . perhaps an accident . . . but you will be saved, your life continues." Two years later, in March, 1911, she said, "Take care, you will soon have a serious accident . . . I hear a violent shock . . . a loud noise . . . you will be very near death . . . what luck! You will take no hurt! I see a man bleeding on the ground; he is moaning, and all around him some things are strewn, I can't say what." On August 15, Osty was driving along with a friend when a horse-driven baker's cart going at a great speed came