

BOOK REVIEW

Las Alas de Psiqué: Extender la Mente Más Allá de los Límites [The Wings of Psyche: Extending the Mind Beyond Limits] by Alejandro Parra. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Antigua, 2014, 2 vols. Vol. 1, 247 pp., Vol. 2, 243 pp. ISBN 978-987-3707-03-2 (for both volumes), Vol. 1: 978-987-3707-04-9, Vol. 2: 978-987-3707-05-6.

In this book, Dr. Alejandro Parra, an Argentinean psychotherapist and parapsychologist, and past President of the Parapsychological Association, presents essays by the author about parapsychological topics that have been published in popular magazines. This is a unique book in that the Spanish language literature presents very few serious discussions of parapsychology by Latin American authors.

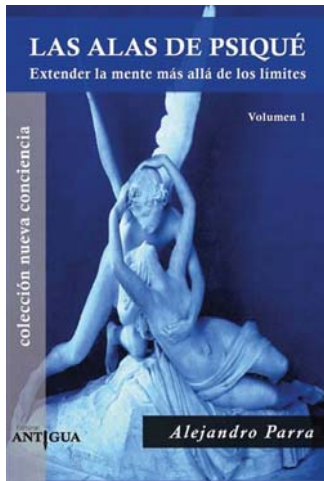
The wings of psyche, the author explains in the first volume, represent the “subtle, transcendent, spiritual and transhuman aspect” (p. 15) of the mind. Parra also states:

Psychic abilities are the wings with which Psyche unfolds to take the challenge of its other nature. This ancient Greek myth represents nothing else than the effort of men of science to defy the limits of their knowledge so as to understand other realities . . . (Vol. 1:15)

In addition to an Introduction and an Epilogue, the first volume has 19 chapters organized in four sections: Doing a Bit of History, Varieties of the Extrasensory Experience, The Power of Mind Over Matter, and Who Is Afraid of the Paranormal? The first chapter takes care of preliminaries, definitions, and the importance of a scientific approach. Parra writes:

It is difficult to predict parapsychological behavior. . . . But in spite of this the crisis of parapsychology is but a disguise of its change toward better understandable forms of observation aimed at enlarging this reality, keeping in mind that psychology in general has as many ‘dark spots’ in the scientific study of consciousness as parapsychology does. (p. 22)

There are too many chapters in this first volume to list them all. Some of the ones I find more interesting are On Spirits and Mediums in Ibero America, Exceptional Psychics and Seers: Ingo Swann and Eileen Garrett, Light Buds: The Experience of Seeing the Aura, Online Minds: The Unity



of Consciousness to Modify Reality, Is there a ‘Global Consciousness’ to Avoid Catastrophes?: The Psi Effect of September 11, and ‘Not All Gifts are Blessings’: Analyzing the Movie *The Sixth Sense*.

The second volume also has 19 chapters, not counting an Introduction and an Epilogue. Like volume 1, it has sections about The Variety of Spontaneous Experiences (e.g., influence of early childhood on psychic experiences, an interview with Larry Dossey about precognitive experiences) and The Power of Mind Over Matter (e.g., phenomena with St. Giovanni Bosco and with medium Eusapia Palladino). The rest of the chapters are in the section Death Is

Not the End. The latter includes near-death experiences, materializations, experiences associated with organ transplants, and children who remember previous lives. The second volume ends with an interview with Charles Tart.

Some unique aspects of both volumes are the combination of experimental and non-experimental work, and the discussion of unusual and controversial phenomena. This includes topics such as materializations, spontaneous combustion, appearance and disappearance of objects, raps, mediumistic art, and the bleeding of an image of Christ. The authors of most modern overviews of parapsychology rarely discuss these phenomena, but they are still reported. I also enjoyed the chapter about mediums in Ibero America, which includes mention of cases in Brazil and Argentina.

The author avoids controversies and does not actively endorse many of the phenomena discussed, limiting himself mainly to presenting the topic. This can be seen throughout the book, examples being the chapters about raps and previous lives (Vol. 2). In the case of mediumistic paintings, Parra alludes to the difficulties of deciding on explanations dealing with discarnate agency and the subconscious abilities of mediums. He writes that the issue is a “question that will remain as open and unsolved as the philosophical debate carried on by monists–dualists, believers–atheists, and spiritualists–materialists” (Vol. 2:184). But Parra also presents conventional explanations suggested for some phenomena, as seen in his chapter about orbs in the second volume.

In other instances, the author presents critiques made by researchers about explanations and phenomena. For example, in the chapter about

the controversial materialization medium Kai Muegge he cites the worries of some researchers, but does not presents the specific objections of either Stephen Braude or Michael Nahm—perhaps this book was in press when the papers of these researchers were published in the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*. Interestingly, Parra does not include his own observations of the phenomena which took place in conditions he could not control and that were reported elsewhere.

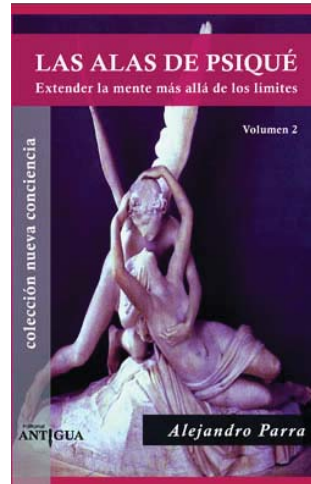
On other occasions Parra includes some of his own work in the discussion. This is the case in the discussions of auras (Vol. 1:130) and of psychomantheum research (Vol. 2:167–168, 170–171). In the chapter about the disappearance of objects, he writes that he surveyed 560 psychology students, to whom he asked in a questionnaire:

Have you had the experience of having left an object (e.g., a key ring or a watch) in a particular place and when you looked for it later you could not find it? But some time after you found it in the same place where you left it, even though you had checked the place several times? (Vol. 2:88)

He found that 46% of the respondents had the experience, that 47% found nothing unusual about the event, and that the rest considered the whole thing unexplainable. Only 5% considered a possible paranormal explanation.

In the above-mentioned discussion of the psychomantheum, based on Raymond Moody's research, Parra summarizes research he conducted with his colleague Jorge Villanueva in which he tested for ESP in psychomantheum vs. no psychomantheum conditions. Each of their subjects went through both conditions. It was found that there were more ESP hits in the psychomantheum (looking at a mirror while a target was being sent) than in the non-psychomantheum condition. However, the reason for the difference is not clear in the sense of actual cognitive effects produced by the psychomantheum, or its possible expectation effects.

Some of Parra's opinions are presented in the Epilogue to the first volume entitled *The Era of the Consciousness Revolution Has Arrived*. He presents overviews of development in recent decades, including work with the ganzfeld and geomagnetic activity. Parra clearly believes that parapsychology has shown the existence of ESP and PK, and is in the



forefront of thought regarding important questions. In his view this research may lead us to a situation in which “science must admit that it should enlarge its conception (maybe spiritual, maybe non-physical) of the nature of man” (Vol. 1:241). Parapsychology, Parra states, can have profound implications for other sciences, and may also change our ideas about human beings and their lives.

One general problem with the book is that the author mentions many investigators and investigations, and presents quotes, but generally does not provide references, something that would assist those interested in learning more about the topic by studying the literature themselves. This applies to his own studies mentioned throughout the book. There is a bibliography of books at the end of each volume (the same list in both), but it would have been better to provide the primary source articles for the research mentioned. While the book may be addressed to the general public, there are always intelligent and inquisitive individuals who may benefit from these sources if they want to pursue the topic in more depth.

Las Alas de Psiqué is an interesting collection of essays on a wide range of topics. It is written in a serious, yet non-technical, way, that brings information to the general intelligent public from international parapsychological research. This, as pointed out before, is not common in the Spanish-language literature, something that increases the value of Parra’s contribution.

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