

RESEARCH IN PARAPSYCHOLOGY 1978

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Part 1: Symposia

CURRENT DIRECTIONS
IN EUROPEAN PARAPSYCHOLOGY*

GREAT BRITAIN (John Beloff, University of Edinburgh)

This paper will be concerned mainly with the organization, status and funding of parapsychological research in Great Britain rather than with its content. For it is these aspects, I believe, which vary most from one country to another whereas the topics and problems which interest researchers today are more or less universal.

Although the United States still clearly leads the world both in the quantity and quality of published work and as a source of the ideas which dominate parapsychological thinking, the situation in Great Britain is of special interest if only because the British were, by common consent, the pioneers in this field. From the start, parapsychology (or "psychical research" as most people in Britain still prefer to call it) has been closely associated in this country with the Society for Psychical Research of London. The Journal of the Society and its volumes of Proceedings remain the only official organs of British parapsychology and virtually all those who are active in the field are members of the Society. As an institution, it has, regrettably, declined in prestige since its great days before the First World War when its leading investigators included a galaxy of illustrious names and when a number of unusually gifted and cooperative mediums were in full flood. Various causes may be adduced for this decline, not least the rise of the Duke Laboratory and the shift of interest towards laboratory experimentation.

During the 1970s, the SPR, like so many learned societies in Britain, has suffered from the effects of the inflation and economic recession which hit this country with special severity. However, by dint of drastic economies and by raising subscriptions, it survived the crisis and the membership has remained steady at just over the one thousand mark. The research fund of the SPR, together with the Perrott-Warrick fund, a legacy bequeathed to Trinity College Cambridge, represent the main sources in Britain for the funding of parapsychological research. Occasional grants are made by wealthy private individuals but English millionaires have not shown the same readiness to subsidize parapsychology as their American counterparts. As for official government agencies, such as our Social Science Research Council, so far as I know none has ever given

*Chairperson: Martin Johnson, University of Utrecht.

any money for parapsychological research. Perhaps the most significant change that has taken place in the funding of research in this country is that most of such money as is currently available is being devoted to supporting students who have been accepted at a university to work on a parapsychological project for their Ph.D. or other higher degree. A small vanguard of such students are at present installed at Edinburgh, at Cambridge, at Surrey, at the City University of London and perhaps elsewhere and the practice seems to be spreading. The obvious advantages which such students enjoy is that they have access to all the research facilities which a university department can provide and they are in a position to devote their full time to research.

There can be no doubt whatever that the demand exists on the side of the student body. Rarely a week goes by without my receiving inquiries about the possibility of doing postgraduate work in parapsychology in my department. The limitations are in finding the necessary financial support for such applicants and in finding academic staff who are willing and qualified to supervise the work of these students. I think I may say that, thanks to my personal interest in promoting research at the university, Edinburgh now leads the country in this respect but even we do not have the accommodations or facilities to accept more than about five such postgraduate students at any one time. Two so far have gained their Ph.D.'s. Unfortunately, even those who have the will and the ability to gain a Ph.D. for a parapsychological thesis are faced with the lack of further opportunities for research at the postdoctoral level. (Two of my ex-students, I am glad to say, have found a temporary refuge in Martin Johnson's hospitable laboratory in Utrecht but more such openings are desperately needed.)

WEST GERMANY (Hans Bender and Elmar R. Gruber, Institut für Grenzgebiete der Psychologie, Freiburg)

The German scene is characterized by an obvious discrepancy between institutional parapsychology on the one side and the ever-growing public interest in psi on the other side. Freiburg continues to be the center of institutionalized parapsychology. The chair for Psychology and Border Areas of Psychology which was conferred on Bender in 1953 has been occupied since 1975 by J. Mischo. In agreement with Mischo, Bender continues to lecture at the University. Through Mischo's initiative, progress has been made insofar as parapsychology is officially recognized as a voluntary additional subject in new regulations for diploma examinations for students of psychology. Every term the program promises one lecture and one accompanying training course. A close collaboration still exists between the chair and the Institute for Border Areas of Psychology and Mental Hygiene directed by Bender. This independent Institute, the financial backer of which is the Fanny Moser Foundation, has a government paid librarian for its 10,000 volumes, supported by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Foundation).

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Besides the Freiburg center, a Parapsychological Research Group directed by W. Kugel has been integrated into the Department of Informatics at the Technical University of West Berlin.

Financial support is scarce for the Freiburg chair as well as for the Institute and does not allow more than two assistants for each. Those associated with the chair are only partly engaged in parapsychology. Research funds are so limited that extended programs can only be performed with the financial help of a science foundation. In spite of tax-free arrangements, donors for highly sophisticated and long-term psi research are rare.

The Freiburg Institute would certainly prefer to work in splendid scientific isolation, but the contrary is the case: it has to cope with the ever-growing public interest in psi and its antagonists. By its tradition and its engagement in mental health, it is deeply involved in various, often contradictory, trends in the public "occult wave." In fact, this "occult explosion" gives a more and more ambiguous outlook for parapsychology. Parapsychological "working groups" are emerging everywhere, sponsored by lay initiative and emphasizing subjects which can roughly be denoted as "supernatural beliefs," such as astral projection, contact with beings from other planets, reincarnation, hypnotically-induced regressions, pyramid power, Philippine wonder healers, astrology, and above all, spiritism. It is obvious that this responds to the deep-rooted needs and interests of many people, with hidden religious hopes as the background. In 1976, the so-called Deutsche Gesellschaft für Parapsychologie (German Society for Parapsychology) was founded in Hamburg. The Society presents itself in its journal, Allgemeine Zeitschrift für Parapsychologie (General Journal for Parapsychology) as the representative association for information, research and assistance in problems of life and faith. It has expanded into a network of local groups all over the country. The attitude of this Society is militant spiritism. Sober scientific research becomes a target of animosity which is specially directed against the Freiburg Institute. Mass media, in a sceptical trend, confound parapsychology with these movements and so do the fanatical disbelievers, who continue to organize witch hunts against parapsychology with methods of inquisition the intolerance of which exceeds even that of some members of the American Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal. A considerable amount of the energies of the Freiburg Institute have to be spent in correcting these unreasonable attitudes and in providing the public with balanced information on the present state of psi research and its impact on our understanding of human nature.

An extensive free-of-charge counseling service in regard to personal problems with occultism occupies nearly half of the time of our psychoanalytically-trained collaborator, Dr. Jochen Haas. Widespread activity such as conferences and lectures in the most varied of institutions is conducted by almost all members of the Institute's staff in Germany and surrounding countries.

A special target of the anti-psi witch hunters are poltergeist

cases for the investigation of which the Freiburg Institute is well known. After having tried in vain to reduce the Rosenheim case to influences of defective X-ray equipment, Dr. Schäfer, director of the Criminal Police in Bremen, recently published in the German and international press the "confession" of Heiner, the focal person in the Bremen/Freiburg case (1965-1966) on which J. Mischo, U. Timm and G. Villhjalmsen reported at the 11th Convention of the PA in Freiburg in 1968. Dr. Schäfer succeeded in inducing the now 27-year-old "Bremen boy" to "confess" that he fooled Bender and his collaborators and to "explain" in detail his alleged tricks. It was pure fantasy, what the pseudologue Heiner was shown saying in a television film. The Institute could refute his statements point by point on the basis of original documents, confirmation by the witnesses and experimental checks of the alleged tricks.

We have been engaged once more in investigating a case of recurrent spontaneous psychokinesis. Water splashes have appeared-- even in locked rooms--in connection with a 12-year-old girl in a place in the Black Forest near the Swiss frontier. Gruber cooperated with electronic engineers to check the phenomena and exclude trickery. In collaboration with the University chair, a thorough psychodiagnostic analysis of the group situation and the individuals involved was made and presented as an M. A. thesis.

The main accent of research work in the Freiburg Institute is on psychokinesis. Physicists Klaus Kornwachs and Walter von Lucadou, in collaboration with Eberhard Bauer, continue to develop their theoretical work on quantum theory and theory building in parapsychology. Bauer also generously devotes much time to editing the Zeitschrift für Parapsychologie und Grenzgebiete der Psychologie.

The experimental work with the Berne designer, Silvio M., started by Bender and R. Vandrey in an exploratory phase, was continued by the physicists to check special hypotheses in collaboration with B. Wälti (Berne), whose records were recently published in the Zeitschrift. Kornwachs began a detailed analysis of single shots obtained on film and videotape of PK moving and deforming of objects. A long-term program worked out by von Lucadou currently awaits financial support to get underway.

Another dominant aspect of the Institute's research is precognition. The "observation in expectancy" of the dreams of Mrs. Christine Mylius, which proved partly to be precognitive, has been continued. Gruber enlarged this very significant research program by a new series provided by another person, Mrs. Hella Nagel, which will be evaluated independently. An outstanding case of political prophecy--two letters written in August 1914 by a Bavarian soldier to his family which contain exact prophecies of World War I, Hitler's fascism, and World War II--was thoroughly investigated by Bender who first reported on his documentation of the authenticity of the letters at the second Conference of the Society for Psychical Research in Cambridge, March 1978.

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The Freiburg Institute has close relations with French parapsychology and collaborated with Prof. de Argumosa (Madrid), in the establishment of Spanish parapsychology.

FRANCE (Yvonne Duplessis, Paris)

In France parapsychological research is particularly concerned with psychokinesis. The effects produced by Jean-Pierre Girard are investigated; new random generators have been built by Yves Lignon of the Faculty of Sciences of Toulouse-le-Mirail and by the engineer, Pierre Janin.

I have engaged in research on dermo-optical perception. This is awareness of non-visual impressions produced by colored stimuli or graphic forms placed close to the subject's palm. The subject is not permitted to look at the stimuli and no guessing or visualization are involved. The first investigation of this phenomenon was developed in France, in 1920, by Jules Romain.

The best explanation of dermo-optical perception is a physical one. It was first developed in the U.S.S.R. by B. Constantinov, then in the U.S.A. by W. L. Makous. C. B. Nash demonstrated statistically that dermo-optical perception is different from ESP. According to this hypothesis, infra-red emitted by the colors and by the hands produce differential impressions and reactions. Systematic investigation of this phenomenon is now being carried out in the U.S.S.R. by A. S. Novomeysky, and in France by me, with the support of the Parapsychology Foundation.

Concerning the methods used I shall deal here only with the measurement of unconscious dermo-optical sensitivity reactions. The procedure, termed passive, is used by Novomeysky for the thermoscopic method. It not only permits objective heat measurements of dermo-optical reactions but demonstrates the sensitivity of the hand to colors placed under metallic screens. It demonstrates also that in general reactions produced by colors vary according to lighting conditions: daylight, electric light, dusk or darkness.

The other procedures are termed active. In 1971 I started to use a method adapted from the dynamometric method, developed by the French physiologist, Ch. Féré. The muscular reaction produced by the subject while holding a piece of colored paper in one hand is recorded by a dynamometer held in the other. It is significant that statistical analyses show the pressures induced by red to be greater than those induced by green. However, in electric light the subjects holding the green squeeze the dynamometer harder than do those holding colors at the end of the spectrum, blue and red. These dynamometric curves confirm that we are not dealing with ESP but with a physical phenomenon.

We now come to the regrouping method devised by Novomey-

sky. It consists of having children regroup squares and rectangles of cardboard on aluminum sheets under which either black or yellow papers have been randomly placed. The average speed of regrouping, by daylight, is slower with black than with yellow paper. These different effects of black and yellow vary according to the "degree of blackness," in the physical sense of the term, and appear to confirm the thermodynamic hypothesis suggested by the thermoscopic and the dynamometric methods.

The thermal exchanges are obvious in the results of my recent tests with liquid crystal sheets. If the sheets are placed over contrasting colors, or over black and white graphic forms, even under thin aluminum sheets, they register differences.

Now we come to the method of writing and reading texts in Braille. I used this method to discover whether blind subjects write or read Braille at different speeds depending upon the color of the papers they punch or read with their hands. It appears that differences in speed not only were due to differences in the colors of the papers used but also were influenced by different types of lighting. For instance, writing speed decreased, in daylight, from green to red; reading speed accelerated maximally, in electric light, on red paper and was slowest on yellow.

Pedagogically the importance of these methods, both in schools and in the rehabilitation of the blind, is obvious.

Some parapsychological aspects are open to question since the domain of dermo-optical perception has been broadened to include the study of stimuli under opaque screens. It appears that some experiments in clairvoyance of guessing hidden stimuli are simply based on dermo-optical exchange reactions between stimuli and subject. Thus, according to the French tradition originated by C. Richet, Nobel prize winner in physiology, phenomena which were first scoffed at have been found to be susceptible to explanations based on the laws of physics and physiology.

SCANDINAVIA (Rolf Ejvegaard, Swedish Society for Psychical Research)

Interest in parapsychological research has existed for quite some time in Scandinavia. The Danish Society for Psychical Research (DSPR) was founded in 1905; the Norwegian Society (NSPR), in 1917 and the Swedish (SSPR), in 1947. During the first decade of this century, parapsychology experienced difficult times with constant attacks from almost everyone. Better times were enjoyed during and immediately after World War I. Unfortunately, this encouraging interest gradually waned and difficulties arose anew during the thirties.

World War II did not, as many had thought, stir up new

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interest in parapsychology. Not until the end of the forties and during the fifties did interest begin slowly to grow again. The development from the fifties continued on into the sixties, a flourishing period for parapsychology. The seventies culminated with a boom in interest in the occult. Whether it has been for better or for worse for parapsychology is a question that cannot yet be answered.

Scientists of all categories during the sixties appeared to have a rough idea of what parapsychology was, but one is more hesitant to make this statement about scientists of today. Persons involved with astrology, biorhythm, flying saucers and so on often call themselves parapsychologists. As far as I am concerned, most of these people are in no way connected with parapsychology. The societies for physical research in Scandinavia have tried to withstand this stream of occultism but they have not been equally successful. Until recently all three societies had restricted membership policies and a scientific outlook was a requirement for membership. The number of members in each society had always been around 100.

In 1973 the DSPR could not resist outer pressure any longer. An alliance was formed with an occult magazine and the membership was immediately increased by tenfold to 1,000. The NSPR and the SSPR are still closed, with memberships of slightly more than 100 each.

Because of a lack of resources, very little scientific work has been carried out in Scandinavia. The societies have mainly had to follow the research abroad and report back to members and others interested. Guest speakers to the societies have on many occasions been from abroad. Noted among them are William Roll, Montague Ullman, and Stanley Krippner. Krippner spoke to the SSPR in early 1978. The tenth volume of the proceedings of the SSPR, containing a study of precognition, was published in 1978.

So far I have talked predominately of the scientific societies and it was not just by coincidence I did so. It is basically within these societies and through them that interest in parapsychology has been channeled. Universities and other institutions have offered few possibilities for studying parapsychology.

For quite some time the University of Lund was the only institution of higher learning in Sweden that sponsored work in parapsychology. We have also during the seventies received research papers presented at the graduate schools of administration and social work of Örebro and Stockholm. In all these universities it has been the psychology departments that have opened the doors to parapsychology.

By and large I have stressed that parapsychology in Sweden and in all Scandinavia is extremely limited. Only a radical change in available economic resources will alter this situation.

ICELAND (Erlendur Haraldsson, University of Iceland)

At the present time, as I see it, there is no particular "European type" of parapsychology. Research methods used in Europe and topics or problems studied are more or less the same as in the United States. In Iceland some psychical research was conducted early this century and then there came a long period of no activity. My first major project after I started research at the University of Iceland some five years ago was a national sample survey of psychic experiences and attitudes toward the paranormal which I reported on at the PA convention in 1976. This was an extensive national survey in which over 900 persons (80 per cent of the sample) returned their questionnaires. I have compared our results with surveys done in other countries and found that the frequency of reported psychic experiences differs considerably among countries.

In Iceland 64 per cent claimed a psychic experience of some kind. In 1957 only 11 per cent did so in Denmark and only 19 per cent in Germany. Only a few surveys have been conducted in Europe but so far all show a much lower frequency of reported psychic phenomena than we found in Iceland. In the United States, on the other hand, we also have a high percentage of reported psychic phenomena as shown in the national survey of Greeley and McCready and also in the Palmer and Dennis community survey in Charlottesville, where at least half the sample claimed a psychic experience. The Icelanders and the Americans have thus a similar frequency of reported psychic phenomena which is much higher than percentages so far reported by continental Europeans. Some of the attitudes show similar national differences. Belief in survival is shared by the great majority in Iceland and the United States, but is considerably lower in Europe; at least in northern Europe. Parapsychological research may not differ much from one country to another but reported psychic experiences do and also some attitudes of interest to parapsychologists.

After studying this survey material I have wondered if we should begin talking about sheep and goat nations, and if this has perhaps something to do with possibly different rates of significant and non-significant results of experiments conducted in various countries.

Since the original survey, I have with some of my students conducted three follow-up surveys. First of these was an interview survey of respondents reporting experiences with deceased persons (apparitions of the dead); a surprising 31 per cent of our original respondents reported such experiences. In this follow-up study we wanted to test some hypotheses regarding the nature of these experiences, such as Gardner Murphy's dissociation theory of apparitional experiences, the effect of grief on them and also if some crisis apparitions were to be found among these reported cases. More or less simultaneously we have worked on two further follow-up surveys, again with personal interviews based on detailed ques-

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tionnaires. These have been on mental healing and out-of-body experiences. The data are in from both these surveys and we are now working on the evaluation.

Apart from these field studies we have conducted a few experiments on dream recall, dream content, the sheep-goat variable and personality variables, all in relation to ESP performance. Last year we replicated successfully Martin Johnson's finding of the rather close relationship between ESP scores and scores on the Defense Mechanism Test (DMT). This relationship has shown a remarkable degree of replicability so far. For this experiment, and one more ESP-DMT experiment not yet evaluated, Martin Johnson was kind enough to come and work with us in Iceland.

Facilities and funding for research in Iceland have been liberal and I have no complaints in that direction. For the last few years I have been able to have a full-time research assistant at least six months of the year.

THE NETHERLANDS (Martin Johnson, University of Utrecht)

Parapsychology has a long history in the Netherlands. The first laboratory for the scientific study of the paranormal was established in Amsterdam in 1907. With some justification it can be said that one of the cradles of experimental parapsychology was at the University of Groningen where pioneering work was carried out by Heymans and Brugmans. The Dutch SPR played an important role in furthering interest in parapsychology and initiating research.

In the early fifties, Utrecht became the natural center for parapsychological research. In 1953, W. H. C. Tenhaeff was nominated "special" professor of parapsychology at the State University of Utrecht, a chair financed by the Dutch SPR, and in the same year the first International Annual Conference for Parapsychological Studies was held in Utrecht, sponsored by the newly-founded Parapsychology Foundation. Tenhaeff has become internationally recognized for his pioneering work with "paragnosts" and on the home front for his active stimulation of public interest in the field.

In 1966 the Psychological Laboratory of the Faculty of Social Sciences appointed a staff member, Sybo A. Schouten, to promote experimental investigations of paranormal phenomena.

In 1974, the Parapsychology Laboratory was established in connection with the inception of the first "regular" chair in parapsychology in Europe. ("Regular" implies that the chair is appointed as well as paid for by the government.) In addition, in April 1978, a continuation of Tenhaeff's chair was secured: the Society appointed H. van Praag, who was approved by the board of the University of Utrecht as a "special professor" of parapsychology.

His appointment is for a limited period of time and present financial limitations dictate that the post is a part-time one.

The task of the Parapsychology Laboratory is to carry out research and to provide a variety of educational programs for Dutch students. Priority is given to experimental work and long-term planning of research projects. The development of sophisticated experimental facilities is considered a "must."

The following research programs are in progress: (1) DMT studies, in which the relationship between subliminal processes and ESP is studied; cooperation with E. Haraldsson in Iceland has been established; (2) psychophysiological work, especially centered around the CNV (a surface negative brain wave) in relation to ESP performance; (3) animal research: the effect of drugs such as librium and amphetamines have been studied in anpsi tests; (4) studies with "paragnosts": studies of alleged "paragnosts" are carried out as a Ph.D. thesis topic, the main aim being to analyze what takes place in a session in which a "paragnost" receives a client and describes the characteristics, behavior or situation either of the client or of a third person in which the client is interested (the study has social and psychological as well as parapsychological aspects); (5) investigations of the so-called "divergence problem": several members of the Laboratory are taking an interest in the so-called "divergence problem"--studies have been carried out and are under way as well.

Twice a year the Laboratory publishes the European Journal of Parapsychology (EJP). A hallmark of the EJP is the attempt to avoid selective reporting. The Laboratory also publishes Research Letters at irregular intervals in which articles that do not fulfill one or more of the requirements of the EJP appear.

Serious research work is also carried out outside Utrecht. In Amsterdam, research is done by the Amsterdamse Parapsychologische Studiekring and by SCEPP (Studiecentrum voor Experimentele Parapsychologie), which cooperates closely with the Utrecht Laboratory in certain areas. The main emphasis has been on healers, workshops on hypnosis, psychophysiology, and problems related to observational theory. Leading research workers are D. Bierman and J. Houtkooper. In Eindhoven, investigations have been reported by H. Breederveld and by J. Jacobs. Their privately-run center is the Institute for Fundamental Studies. PK experiments with dice, in which H. Breederveld usually performs as his own subject, have been reported. Furthermore, studies on a possible influence of birth order on ESP ability have been carried out, as well as studies on ESP in relation to success on a special type of lottery ("Lotto-games").

A proposal has been made to issue an annual project catalog (including listing of useful hardware as well as software) that could be helpful to other research centers, especially in Europe. The idea has also been advanced to form a European regional branch of the Parapsychological Association.