

Models of Extrasensory Perception: A Quantum Mechanical Approach to ESP Phenomenology

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The anomaly called psi: Recent research and criticism

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Abstract: Over the past hundred years, a number of scientific investigators claim to have adduced experimental evidence for "psi" phenomena — that is, the apparent inability to receive information shielded from the senses (ESP) and to influence systems outside the sphere of motor activity (PK). A report of one series of highly significant psi experiments and the objections of critics are discussed in some depth. It is concluded that the possibility of sensory cues, machine bias, cheating by subjects, and experimenter error or incompetence cannot reasonably account for the significant results. In addition, less detailed reviews of the experimental results in several broad areas of psi research indicate that psi results are statistically replicable and that significant patterns exist across a large body of experimental data. For example, a wide range of research seems to converge on the idea that, because ESP "information" seems to behave like a weak signal that has to compete for the information-processing resources of the organism, a reduction of ongoing sensorimotor activity may facilitate ESP detection. Such a meaningful convergence of results suggests that psi phenomena may represent a unitary, coherent process whose nature and compatibility with current physical theory have yet to be determined. The theoretical implications and potential practical applications of psi could be significant, irrespective of the small magnitude of psi effects in laboratory settings.

Keywords: clairvoyance; extrasensory perception (ESP); methodology; parapsychology; psi; psychokinesis (PK); replication; scientific method; telepathy

1. Introduction

There is a large and growing body of experimental literature devoted to the study of certain anomalous interactions that seem to involve psychologically meaningful exchanges of information between living organisms and their environment. We call these interactions *anomalous* because they appear to exceed somehow the capacities of the sensory and motor systems as these are presently understood. These interactions are collectively designated by the term *psi*. *Parapsychology* is that branch of science that makes a systematic study of psi anomalies. In other words, it is the business of parapsychology to find explanations of psi anomalies through scientific inquiry.

Psi is traditionally divided into various subcategories, each of which has been the subject of experimental research. For example, parapsychologists have been testing whether subjects can acquire information that is shielded from their senses (*extrasensory perception*, or ESP) and whether subjects can directly influence external systems that are outside the sphere of their motor activity (*psychokinesis*, or PK). Experimenters have also sought to differentiate forms of ESP, such as "telepathy" (ESP for another's thoughts) and "clairvoyance" (ESP for external objects and events). ESP is sometimes reported to be time-displaced, in that the information may relate to a past event ("retrocognition") or a future event ("precognition"). In practice, it has often proved difficult to isolate these forms of psi experimentally, and nowadays they tend to be defined operationally rather than theoretically (e.g., it is clairvoyance when you do not have someone "sending" the target).

Somewhat contrary to common usage, we are not using the term *psi* to imply that the anomalous interactions are necessarily "paranormal," but rather that no adequate conventional explanation of the interactions has yet been offered. Phrases stating or implying the "existence" of psi will be used somewhat informally to indicate that certain interactions have achieved this status.

The term *paranormal* has been a source of some confusion both within and outside parapsychology, and thus we feel that a few comments on the term are in order. Paranormal was first discussed in relation to psi by the philosopher C. D. Broad (1953, 1962; see also Braude 1979b), who defined psychical research (the earlier term for parapsychology) as "the scientific investigation of ostensibly paranormal phenomena" (Broad 1962, p. 3). Broad was careful to use the term "ostensibly paranormal," by which he meant phenomena that seem *prima facie* to conflict with one or more of what he referred to as the "basic limiting principles" of nature. These are not the same as the laws of nature, but rather a more fundamental set of assumptions that "we unhesitatingly take for granted as the framework within which all our practical activities and our scientific theories are confined" (Broad 1953, p. 7). For example, the assumption that "it is impossible for a person to perceive a physical event or a material thing except by means of sensations which that event or thing produces in his mind" (Broad 1953, p. 10) is a basic limiting principle that governs our way of acquiring knowledge. A case of ESP, therefore, would be *ostensibly* paranormal; it would be *genuinely* paranormal only when and if it could be shown to really conflict with one or more of the basic limiting principles. It is the task

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