

chological Research (pp. 44–71). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

YUILLE, J. C. (1985). A laboratory-based experimental methodology is inappropriate for the study of mental imagery. *Journal of Mental Imagery*, 9(2), 137–150.

ZANGARI, W., & MACHADO, F. R. (1994). Incidence and social relevance of Brazilian university students' psychic experiences. *Proceedings of Presented Papers: The Parapsychological Association 37th Convention*, pp. 479–488.

ZIMDARS-SWARTZ, S. L. (1991). *Encountering Mary: From La Salette to Medjugorje*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

ZINGRONE, N. L. (1988). Authorship and gender in American parapsychology journals. *Journal of Parapsychology*, 52, 321–343.

ZINGRONE, N. L. (1994). Images of woman as medium: Power, pathology and passivity in the writings of Frederic Marvin and Cesare Lombroso. In L. Coly & R. A. White (Eds.), *Women and Parapsychology* (pp. 90–121). New York: Parapsychology Foundation.

ZORAB, G. (1957). ESP experiments with psychotics. *Journal of the Society for Psychological Research*, 39, 162–164.

Centro de Estudios Integrales de Puerto Rico

P.O. Box 194176

San Juan, Puerto Rico 00919-4176

On Coming to Terms with the Paranormal

JOHN BELOFF

ABSTRACT: Two camps within the parapsychological community are here distinguished: the minimalists and the maximalists. The former concentrate on the so-called weak phenomena and allow for the possibility that these will eventually be absorbed into an expanded scientific worldview. The latter study the strong phenomena whose anarchic nature appears to defy any prospect of their being contained within a rational framework. A plea is made for mutual understanding between the two camps.

Everyone, without exception, is bound to adopt some position with respect to what I am calling the "paranormal." I shall not offer a formal definition of the paranormal, but I think we can all agree that it implies something stronger than a mere anomaly—something, in other words, that is clearly beyond the scope of the prevailing scientific worldview. The position that still prevails among scientists and academics is that, as *no* such entities or phenomena have been shown *conclusively* to exist, they can be safely ignored. If pressed, those who hold this negative position are likely to defend themselves by arguing that until such alleged phenomena can be demonstrated on demand, as would be expected of any other revolutionary claim in science, we are under no obligation even to acknowledge their existence. The possibility that there might be phenomena so inherently capricious or elusive as to defeat all such conventional criteria is dismissed cavalierly as a bad joke.

I would be surprised, however, if any readers fall into this purely negative category. There may well be some who would prefer to keep an open mind, but sitting on the fence is a notoriously unstable position. There are also those who take an interest in psi and do not seek to belittle its importance but who try to appropriate it to the psychology of belief or deal with it under such rubrics as "anomalous psychology." In what follows, however, I shall confine my remarks to those who acknowledge the existence of psi phenomena as a fact because they, after all, still compose the bulk of the parapsychological community.

Among these, however, there is, still a difference of opinion as to *which* paranormal phenomena one should take on board. Broadly speaking, the parapsychology community comprises *two* main camps. I shall call them hereafter the *minimalists* and the *maximalists*. The minimalists concern themselves *only* with such phenomena as can be reliably demonstrated in the laboratory—which is to say mainly statistical-type anomalies. The maximalists, on the other hand, are prepared to pursue an indefinite array

of phenomena that emanate from life at large or from the séance room. These range from macro-PK effects, as in poltergeist outbreaks, to materializations or phantoms. Such phenomena, of course, cannot be elicited to order; they are not replicable in the conventional sense, but assuming that they are genuine, then they are self-evidently *paranormal*. In brief, minimalists concentrate on what, hereafter, we shall call the "weak" phenomena; maximalists embrace the so-called "strong" phenomena. Note that whereas a "weak" phenomenon could conceivably just be a statistical freak, a "strong" phenomenon if not genuine, is spurious, the product of trickery or deceit.

In this paper, I shall consider only the situation as it applies to the parapsychology community. We shall not be concerned here with those who accept the strong phenomena as an adjunct of some faith or creed. Thus we shall exclude, not just the conventionally religious, who accept the supernatural as part of a religious package, but also the followers of cults such as Theosophy, Spiritualism, or any of the various latter-day New Age movements.

To some extent, the distinction I am making corresponds roughly with the division between *parapsychology* in its original sense, as the experimental approach to psi phenomena, and *psychical research*, which historically relied either on fieldwork, in the case of spontaneous phenomena, or on the testing of gifted individual claimants in controlled conditions. J. B. Rhine became the first professional parapsychologist after he abandoned in dismay the testing of flamboyant individuals such as "Margery" and turned, instead, to card-guessing experiments among his Duke University students. Rhine, incidentally, despised maximalists, whom he dismissed as "mystagogues." Today, however, the term "parapsychology" is seldom used in this exclusive sense. Anyone who uses objective methods to examine phenomena that are purportedly paranormal, no matter how unusual or bizarre, now has the right to call him or herself a parapsychologist—always provided, and this is a critical proviso, that he or she uses objective methodology and rational criteria. If Rhine may be taken as the figurehead of the minimalists, we might here propose Jule Eisenbud as the figurehead of the maximalists.

MINIMALISM

As we would expect, the motivation and outlook of the minimalists tends to differ markedly from that of the maximalists. By and large, the minimalists are anxious to gain acceptance by the scientific community. Although, *by definition*, psi phenomena lie outside the *existing* scientific paradigm, the question as to whether this must always be so remains open. Skeptics often say that to acknowledge psi phenomena would mean rewriting all the fundamental laws of physics and must therefore be regarded as a desperate last resort. Minimalists, however, take their cue from the profound paradigm shift that *has already* arisen within physics with the

advent of quantum theory. This, they insist, already licenses us to invoke "mind" as a factor in the objective world in a way that was not possible within classical physics. "Observational Theory," as developed by Helmut Schmidt, Evan Walker, R. D. Mattuck, and others, represents the most ambitious attempt so far to narrow the gap between orthodox science and parapsychology. The argument, briefly, amounts to this. In the orthodox Copenhagen Interpretation of quantum theory, an observation is presupposed before one can say of a given particle that it *has a* definite position or velocity. Prior to that observation it exists in a strictly indeterminate state. However, whereas in orthodox quantum theory, it always remains a matter of pure chance *which* values the particle then assumes, in Observational Theory, if the observer in question happens to be a "psi source," certain values may become more probable than others. Observational theorists claim that all psi phenomena, or at any rate all such as minimalists would acknowledge, can thus be satisfactorily accounted for in terms of Observational Theory.

Observational Theory was greeted with enthusiasm by many experimental parapsychologists (especially in the Netherlands), and it has inspired some very striking experiments. For example, Helmut Schmidt's experiments with pre-recorded digits fit nicely in such a paradigm and would, indeed, be hard to explain on any other. On the other hand, as far as I am aware, it has not as yet made any impact on orthodox physics, despite the fact that if valid, it would have important practical consequences for physics research, especially where one is dealing with marginal effects. Certainly it has so far failed to break down the barrier between conventional science and parapsychology as minimalists have hoped. However, Schmidt himself remains hopeful. Although he admits that the modifications of quantum theory so far proposed by Observational Theorists are "clumsy and arbitrary when compared to the beautiful and simple original quantum formalism," he takes heart from the thought that "as soon as a larger number of clever theorists become aware of the existence of psi and its quite real challenge to current physics, the outlook may brighten" (Schmidt, 1993, p. 129). Minimalist aspirations are nicely summed up in the following statement in which Schmidt concludes:

From the view of the optimistic physicist psi should be explainable in terms of some yet unrecognized law of nature applicable to animate and inanimate nature alike. The basic structure of this law should be mathematically simple so that observed complexities result from a combination of basically simple laws and a practically very complex brain structure. (p. 131)

Schmidt, then, is clearly aiming at a reconciliation between physics and parapsychology. But what should be our verdict on Observational Theory? The most one can say, I submit, is that it has given us a handle on such PK experiments as are based on random event generators. Its extension to guessing experiments, whether of the forced or free-response variety, is much more tortuous and problematic, and it is so blatantly inadequate to

account for any of the strong phenomena that Observational Theorists are mostly driven to deny that there *are* any such phenomena worth bothering about.

Although Observational Theory has given a boost to the minimalist program, a minimalist is not by any means necessarily committed to Observational Theory. Other options remain open. The official hand-out giving the aims of the Koestler Chair Unit at the University of Edinburgh could, I believe, be used as a minimalist manifesto. "We define parapsychology," it says with commendable restraint, "as 'the study of apparent new means of communication, or exchange of influence, between organisms and environment'. Their existence is taken as a working hypothesis" (Morris, 1994, p. 1). And, in its Conclusion, it very properly points out:

Unfortunately, parapsychology has been associated with socially problematic situations. It has been seen as threatening to major belief systems, both theistic and secular, about the way the world works. It has been linked to deception, exploitation and mental health problems. Consequently it has been held up to ridicule, often by threatened or inadequately informed people. For these and other reasons, it has largely been ignored by members of the scientific community who prefer safer pursuits. (Morris, 1994, p. 17)

It is, of course, the strong phenomena that are at issue in this debasement of parapsychology that is rightly here deplored. The policy of the Koestler Chair has therefore been to cultivate replicable and process-oriented experiments using volunteer participants. Special subjects, since they tend to be publicity seekers, are avoided (though this is nowhere made explicit); and a knowledge of deception and conjuring tricks is trusted to keep at bay any suspicious strong phenomena that may arise in the public domain, although I am assured by Professor Morris that the Koestler Chair would not turn a blind eye to any such phenomena if they truly merited attention.

MAXIMALISM

The popular writings of Stephen Hawking and his expositors has familiarized us with the phrase "A Theory of Everything." Such a theory, I understand, may be regarded as the end-point or desideratum of science which, once attained, would, at least in principle, explain everything that has ever occurred in the universe from the Big Bang onwards exclusively in terms of fundamental particles and the laws of physics. In his inaugural lecture at Cambridge in 1980, Hawking spoke as follows:

I want to discuss the possibility that the goal of theoretical physics might be achieved in the not-too-distant future: say by the end of the century. By this I mean that we might have a complete, consistent, and unified theory of the physical interactions that would describe all possible observations. (Hawking, 1993, p. 49)

Such a "Theory of Everything" is, of course, predicated on an epiphe-

nomenalist view of mind whereby mental volitions can be disregarded as causal agents. Does it likewise exclude psi phenomena? The question does not worry Hawking who, at the age of 15, was assured by some know-all that Rhine's research was flawed (Ferguson, 1992, p. 34). However, at a stretch, one may envisage that even a "Theory of Everything" could, as Schmidt suggests, encompass the *weak* psi phenomena. It strikes me, at least, as *inconceivable* that it could ever hope to embrace the strong phenomena if, indeed, there are such phenomena.

The decisive step from a guarded, apologetic plea for the recognition of the weak phenomena to an unabashed embracing of the strong phenomena marks the transition between our two camps. By way of illustration, I would like to quote Stephen Braude. Like Julie Eisenbud, to whom he pays tribute, Braude is an outspoken maximalist. As he puts it in his book, *The Limits of Influence* (Braude, 1986, p. 23), a book which could, indeed, be regarded as a manifesto of maximalism:

I see no justification . . . for regarding some particular subset of psi phenomena as being more improbable than another. As a matter of fact, absolutely nothing we know about psi (assuming it exists) indicates that it has any limits at all. (p. 24)

Or, further: "If even modest ESP and PK indicate that the usual constraints on information-acquisition and influence on physical systems may be bypassed, then as far as we know, anything goes" (p. 24). This 'anything goes' could indeed serve as a slogan for maximalism. But is Braude justified in denying that some paranormal phenomena are more improbable than others? If improbability can here be equated with "surprise value," then there is no question that there is a hierarchy of phenomena such that each step of the hierarchy places an ever increasing strain on the credulity of an open-minded inquirer.

In fact, the price one must pay for adopting the maximalist position is, *pace* Braude, far heavier than most maximalists realize or are willing to admit. The Scientific Revolution, after all, enabled us to dispense with magic, undermined revelation and supernaturalist religion, and paved the way for rationalism and enlightenment. If our "strong phenomena" were ever to gain credence among the educated community, much of that ideological legacy of the Scientific Revolution would be at risk. Not only would we have to say good-bye to Hawking's "Theory of Everything," the very hope of ever attaining a rational account of the world we inhabit might, I fear, go by the board. We would once again be plunged into a cosmic anarchy where, at best, we would have to confine fundamental science to the *normal* workings of the physical universe while allowing that there are manifestations of mind that make a mockery of all physical laws and limitations, often in alarming, chaotic, and unpredictable ways. Now this may well, indeed, be the prospect we face, but given the public appetite for the marvelous and the sensational to which the Koestler Chair alluded, given the ignorance, credulity, and superstition all around us,

authenticating strong phenomena risks unleashing a spate of irrationality. Maximalism may well appeal to the odd intellectual anarchist like Stephen Braude, but for those, like the humanists, who put a premium on comprehensibility, it is a prospect to be approached warily.

These, then, for better or worse, are the alternatives before us. The question we now have to decide is: Are we obliged to embrace the strong phenomena or can we still dismiss them as unsubstantiated hearsay? The minimalist would now be in a much stronger position if the much sought after repeatable psi phenomenon had been attained. So far, however, the most one can say is that weak psi phenomena have indeed been repeated, sometimes *ad nauseam*, as the meta-analyses reveal, but this has failed to satisfy those unyielding skeptics who insist upon *repeatability on demand*. Now, such a demand may or may not be reasonable, but as yet it has not been attained; and until it is, the argument for paying attention to the weak phenomena as alone worthy of scientific credence or support is much less persuasive. Let us turn, then, to the case for accepting the strong phenomena.

A book edited by Alexander Imich has appeared with the beguiling title *Incredible Tales of the Paranormal* (Imich, 1995). Each chapter, written by a different author, deals with phenomena of a spectacular nature that have erupted in the different countries during the course of this century. Thus, Larissa Vilenskaya covers parapsychical phenomena in Russia. She mentions, for example, that when she visited Moscow in the fall of 1991, she was introduced to a woman, a retired medical doctor, who could demonstrate the so-called "human magnet" phenomenon whereby a person can attract small objects to his or her body. Vilenskaya comments as follows:

The most interesting observation was that I was also able in Klara's presence to "attract" the objects the same way. I could place a coin, lipstick, or rings on my forehead or "stick" them to my fingers held vertically; they remained "stuck" as if held by a strong superglue. (Imich, 1995, p. 181)

Could it be, perhaps, that her friend Klara really was using some extraordinary superglue unlike any we have in the West? Surely this would immediately become apparent to Vilenskaya once she removed these objects from her skin and laid them on the table to which they would then adhere. It strikes me, therefore, that either we have got to say that Vilenskaya, an honored member of the international Parapsychological Association, is a liar or that we have here a genuine strong phenomenon, one apparently unknown in the rest of the world but prevalent enough in Russia, for she also mentions other such individuals. The point I am making is that there could be no question here of her just being *mistaken*.

Similarly, a Ms Zhu Yi Yi of Shanghai, editor of the *Chinese Journal of Somatic Science*, covers China where she has herself studied diverse strong phenomena as displayed by children, mostly young girls. She describes one case of a 13-year-old girl who, after a few minutes of concentration, could unlock a locked door without using the key! Miss Zhu decided to try

a lock that she had bought in Shanghai. "Not only did I place the padlock on the door and lock it, I also took the key from the lock and placed it in my pocket, holding it tightly throughout the test" (Imich, 1995, p. 206). All this time the girl was under continuous observation yet, after 14 minutes, the lock was found to be unlocked!

Such recent incidents, trivial in themselves, are disturbing. Now let us turn to a major episode in the history of the paranormal. In his chapter covering Poland, Dr Roman Bugaj, a Polish chemist and parapsychologist, discusses at length the historical case of the materialization medium, Teofil Modrzejewski, better known to the world by his more pronounceable and spellable pseudonym, Franek Kluski.

Kluski's career as a medium was fairly brief. He was not a strong man, and séances adversely affected his health. Although he did not die until 1943 at the age of 70, his career as a medium began only in 1918 when he was 45, and he gave his last séance in 1925. At no time was he ever a professional medium. Professionally he seems to have combined the career of poet, journalist, and banker. He would have had no motive, other than notoriety, for cheating, and although that is no proof that he was honest, we may be sure that if he *did* have such a motive, skeptics would not have hesitated to make the most of it! Be that as it may, during those half dozen or so years when he was active as a medium, he managed to produce phenomena which, whether you regard them as genuine or fake, have rarely, if ever, been surpassed for their sheer audacity.

To give you just a soupçon of what is involved, let me quote a short passage from Bugaj's chapter where he writes:

The self-illuminating phantoms, therefore fully visible, were the most interesting during Modrzejewski's [i.e. Kluski's] séances. Their precise characteristics were given in [the] minutes of [the] sessions, quoted both in Geley's and Okolowicz's books.

All in all, forty-five phantoms illuminated themselves by their own light. Some would also use the light of phosphorescent screens. Following such strong light manifestations, Modrzejewski was always exhausted both physically and psychologically.

Of forty-five phantoms, thirty-six were exotic, the rest European types. The participants gave different names to each self-illuminating phantom. Among them, four were recognized as deceased friends or relatives of participants. The self-illuminating phantoms appeared 182 times. (Imich, 1995, p. 147)

I might perhaps add that some photographs of these phantoms are included in the book but, like all photographs of materializations, they look strangely artificial.

I have elsewhere (Beloff, 1993, p. 230) quoted an eye-witness account of a Kluski séance by a visiting Polish-American professor of aeronautical engineering, Pawlowski, who was on sabbatical in Europe and who afterwards published his own account of it in this *Journal* (Pawlowski, 1925). His account fully endorses those of Okolowicz. (Cielev and others, 1925)

among the sitters. Now it goes without saying that a determined critic can always invent scenarios to explain how *any* marvel whatsoever can be produced by trickery. For example, in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, which I edit, we recently published a paper by Michael Coleman (1994a) purporting to explain how Kluski could have fabricated the wax molds that were such a striking feature of his séances. For, as you may know, the phantoms, before they dematerialized, would occasionally be asked to dip their hands into molten wax so that the empty glove so formed could later be used to create a permanent cast. Coleman was, in turn, challenged by Mary Rose Barrington (1994a), a keen student of the Kluski case, and as was to be expected, the argument dragged on in succeeding issues (Barrington, 1994b; Coleman, 1994b) without any sign of resolution until, as editor, I was obliged to append to Coleman's (1995) final letter: "This correspondence is now closed"!

The trouble with trying to explain *all* strong phenomena as conjuring is that if it is to carry conviction, it needs to be demonstrated and the question we must then ask is: Could any conjuror at the present time (if necessary parading as a medium) do the sort of thing that Kluski did again and again and still get away with it? Until this is tried, we can but speculate, but as far as I know, although our close-up conjurors do quite different kinds of tricks, the conjurors who *do* produce spectacular effects of this sort operate, like the sensational showman David Copperfield, from a stage or television studio. Before I could take seriously the conjuring hypothesis in a case like this, I would need to see the trick performed in rooms that have been expertly searched and sealed, as, of course, was routinely done in the case of Kluski.

But I am not here concerned to authenticate the Kluski phenomena. I cite them now to consider what follows if we *do* take such things at face value. To the minimalists, someone like Kluski is at best a stumbling-block, at worst a nightmare—the sooner forgotten the better. To the maximalists, he represents a triumphant and perhaps unanswerable vindication of their beliefs.

CONCLUSION

In delineating these two major schools of thought, I have striven to avoid partisanship. In concluding, however, I feel it would be craven of me not to make clear where I stand on this issue. Perhaps I have already betrayed my bias, but I can no longer feign neutrality. In all honesty, I cannot see how I *can* do otherwise than side with the maximalists. I am, as I have said, uneasy when I contemplate the implications of some of the strong phenomena, but if I have to choose between Eisenbud and Rhine, I choose Eisenbud. We shall never know for certain whether Serios was for real—as nearly all who actually witnessed his performances believed—but I have only admiration for Eisenbud's courage and determination in taking on this challenging case.

There is a good case for suggesting that weak phenomena are best

studied in an academic setting where the emphasis is on "process-oriented" research, whereas strong phenomena are best left to amateurs and psychical research societies. At all events, there is certainly no reason why our two schools of thought need to clash. But I must protest that a minimalist parapsychology is at best a truncated parapsychology. It is a discipline that has no historical roots and little relevance to real life. Now none of this would matter if parapsychology were just a new branch of physics destined to transform the prevailing physicalist worldview, but if, as I would maintain, there exist strong phenomena that cannot be gainsaid, however rare and inaccessible they may be, then minimalism is no longer a viable position.

Having declared my own bias, however, I wish to say, finally, that given the uncertainties with which both camps have to contend, the only defensible stance is one of mutual toleration.

REFERENCES

- BARRINGTON, M. R. (1994a). The Kluski hands. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 59, 347–351.
- BARRINGTON, M. R. (1994b). Kluski and Geley: Further case for the defence. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 60, 104–105.
- BELOFF, J. (1993). *Parapsychology: A Concise History*. New York: St. Martin's.
- BRAUDE, S. E. (1986). *The Limits of Influence: Psychokinesis and the Philosophy of Science*. New York: Methuen.
- COLEMAN, M. H. (1994a). Wax-moulds of "spirit" limbs. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 59, 340–346.
- COLEMAN, M. H. (1994b). The Kluski moulds: a reply. *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 60, 98–103.
- COLEMAN, M. H. (1995). [Letter to the editor.] *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 60, 350–351.
- FERGUSON, K. (1992). *Stephen Hawking: Quest for a Theory of Everything*. London: Bantam.
- HAWKING, S. (1993). *Black Holes and Baby Universes*. London: Bantam.
- MITCH, A. (Ed.). (1995). *Incredible Tales of the Paranormal*. Bearsville, NY: Bramble Books.
- MORRIS, R. L. (1994). *Developing an integrative parapsychology: The Koestler Chair approach*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Edinburgh.
- PAWLOWSKI, F. W. (1925). The mediumship of Franek Kluski of Warsaw. *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*, 19, 482–504.
- SCHMIDT, H. (1993). Non-causality as the earmark of psi. *Journal of Scientific Exploration*, 7, 125–132.
- 6 Blackett Place
Edinburgh EH9 1RL
Scotland, UK