

## Introduction to the EJP Special Issue on Memory and Psi

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About two years ago, the organising committee were discussing possible themes for the 2006 Bial Symposium. When the theme of memory was suggested, I was at first a little uncertain how this theme would link with the topic of psi. It is easy to see how memory is of interest to neuroscientists and neuropsychologists. But what role does memory play in psi? Memory is a normal and fairly well-understood human capacity, whereas alleged psi abilities extend *beyond* what is currently known about human capabilities. Can we really expect to find links between the normal and the paranormal? Between memory and psi?

Actually parapsychologists have for many years considered the role that memory plays in psi experiences. They have investigated the question of memory and psi using both theoretical and experimental approaches. However, most of this work into memory and psi rests on a basic assumption. Parapsychologists generally assume that once information that is of extrasensory origin reaches a person's brain, that information may be processed and responded to using normal cognitive mechanisms. You could think of it as a two-stage process. Firstly, extrasensory information reaches the brain through as yet unknown means. Secondly, that information is processed and responded to in much the same way as the brain processes similar sensory information. Just as a faint sound or a scent can evoke a memory, an extrasensory impression may also evoke a memory. Memory may therefore play a role

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in enabling the expression of information that is of extrasensory origin. Each of the papers in this special issue illustrates this point in different ways.

John Palmer reviews how parapsychologists have used laboratory testing to study the role of memory in the processing of extrasensory information. The studies have typically compared performance on a memory task with performance on a related psi task. Dr Palmer describes some of these studies and considers what their findings can tell us about memory and psi.

Rex Stanford reviews laboratory findings that suggest how 'receptive psi' interacts with memory-related structures and processes. Receptive psi refers to the organism's acquisition of information through currently unexplained processes. Dr Stanford also considers how cognitive psychologists' research on the cognitive unconscious may inform the modelling of receptive psi functions.

Richard Broughton takes a theoretical perspective to ask how people's memories and emotions may affect their spontaneous psi experiences — that is, psi experiences outside the laboratory. He uses ghost experiences as an example and asks: how can such waking hallucinations be interpreted by the experient as anomalous or psychic, and what role does emotion and memory play here?

Christopher French and Krissy Wilson consider how memory processes may lead to erroneous claims of anomalous experiences. In particular they discuss how research in the field of eyewitness testimony and false memory may be relevant for reports of anomalous events.

Stephen Braude takes a wider philosophical perspective and presents a critique of how ideas about memory, and particularly memory traces, have been applied in psychology and neurophysiology. He argues that this misuse of the concept of memory has crept into parapsychological theorising, for example in connection with the evidence for postmortem survival.

When I was investigating the parapsychological literature on memory and psi in order to consider which speakers to invite to participate in the 2006 Bial Symposium, it struck me that although it seems that memory may play a pivotal role in psi experiences, there has been very little research on this question in recent decades. I hope that in reading this collection of papers, researchers may be inspired to reverse that trend.