

The Farther Reaches of Psi Research: Future Choices and Possibilities ¹

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Over four decades ago, an article describing a Symposium on the Future of Parapsychology appeared in the *International Journal of Parapsychology* (Amadou, et al., 1962). The article summarized responses to questionnaires that had been submitted to 29 authorities. The participants in this “symposium” included the following luminaries of psi research and related disciplines: Robert Amadou (France), C. I. Ducasse (U.S.), Jule Eisenbud (U.S.), Eileen I. Garrett (U.S.), Alfred Goldsmith (U.S.), Hornell Hart (U.S.), Rosalind Heywood (Great Britain), Sir George Joy (Great Britain), C. G. Jung (Switzerland), G. W. Lambert (Great Britain), Henry Margenau (U.S.), C. A. Meier (Switzerland), C. W. K. Mundle (Great Britain), Gardner Murphy (U.S.), Carroll B. Nash (U.S.), Fraser Nicol (U.S.), Arthur T. Oram (Great Britain), Humphry Osmond (Canada - Great Britain), Joseph Rush (U.S.), J. B. Rhine (U.S.), W. H. Salter (Great Britain), Gertrude Schmeidler (U.S.), Emilio Servadio (Italy), Ian Stevenson (U.S.), Robert Sommer (Canada), Robert van de Castle (U.S.), Gerda Walther (Germany), René Warcollier (France), and Rhea White (U.S.). The 29 participants had been asked to respond to the following 10 questions:

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1. How do you define parapsychology?
2. Which areas of research, in your opinion, should be classified as belonging within parapsychology and which do not?
3. Do you anticipate that future research would emphasize quantitative or qualitative work?
4. Do you believe that accomplishment of a repeatable experiment is essential to strengthen the position of parapsychological studies within the scientific community?
5. Have you any comments on recent criticisms employed in parapsychological studies?
6. Do you believe that certain qualitative researches may be quantified in order to achieve wider acceptance?
7. In the qualitative area, where do you foresee the greatest potential for future research progress—spontaneous phenomena, crisis telepathy, survival studies, out-of-the-body experiences, or any other?
8. Do you feel that during the past decade, parapsychology has become more widely accepted among scientists in other areas?
9. Have you any comments regarding the psychological significance of certain psychic phenomena?
10. Have you any comments regarding the special psychological conditions that seem to favor or reduce the likelihood of an occurrence of psychic phenomena?

I cite this information in order to indicate the types of issues that were felt to be most important at that time. It would be of interest to ask those same questions, today, to

a panel of experts and compare their answers with those of four decades ago. It also would be interesting to examine the accuracy of the predictions of that earlier panel. These are not my aims in this present chapter. I will, however, cite some of the content of this earlier “survey” in connection with some of the observations I will be making.

In this chapter, I make three sets of suggestions for the future development of psi research. The first is that our subject matter and our discipline might be situated in a larger, more general context than that in which it currently resides. The second is that it would be fruitful for us to revisit many of our research designs, findings, conclusions, and assumptions in order to examine these more deeply and thoughtfully and, possibly, to reconceptualize some of these. In the third set of suggestions, I present ways in which psi research might be extended and expanded in the years to come.

Toward a Larger Contextualization of Our Work

The domain of contemporary psi research is relatively narrow. When psi research formally began—in the guise of psychical research, in the early 1880s—its researchers, such as F. W. H. Myers, were addressing a wide range of interesting and unusual experiences and phenomena that were not yet well-understood. The investigated topics included disintegrations of personality, genius, sleep, hypnotism, sensory automatism, phantasms of the dead and of the living, sensory and motor automatism, trance, possession, ecstasy, various manifestations of the unconscious (the *subliminal self*), as well as phenomena of thought-transference, clairvoyance, Reichenbach’s observations and theories, hauntings, physical and mental mediumship, and other types of psychical experiences. Gradually, many of these phenomena were incorporated into the subject matter of psychology proper, no longer were considered paranormal, and eventually were

excluded from the ambit of psychical research. This gradual exclusion of former subject matter meant that psychical research—as it metamorphosed into parapsychology and then into psi research—became increasingly limited in its coverage. It became concerned more and more with less and less. Today, psi research restricts itself almost exclusively to the “big four” phenomena of telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis, with an occasional nod toward survival/afterlife topics. Along with this topical limitation has come a narrowing of its favored research methods, a privileging of contrived quantitative correlational and experimental studies, and a de-emphasis of qualitative studies of naturally-occurring experiences and phenomena. A British colleague once quipped that, in psi research today, “ESP” might appropriately stand for “*extinction of spontaneous phenomena.*”

The already-narrow range of studied phenomena—telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis—suffered further restriction as an increasingly small number of variations of each of these received serious attention. Thus, telepathy—which originally referred to instances of distant feeling (literally, distant suffering)—came to be represented by the guessing of specific shapes on Zener cards and, later, by the specific content of pictorial targets. Clairvoyance became nearly synonymous with the guessing of the order of concealed cards and with remote viewing of natural and artificial sites. Precognition and psychokinesis became increasingly identified, respectively, with the foreknowledge and influence of the outputs of electronic random generators. Even the variations of the variations have been increasingly restricted—nearly all target events and response protocols are visual in nature, with other sense modalities virtually ignored. Additionally, the means of investigating each of these narrow processes have themselves

become correspondingly narrow. Not very long ago, I was distressed to find an announcement of the program for a professional parapsychological convention so worded that it appeared that the entire conference was to be devoted to a large number of new Ganzfeld and random number generator studies.

Admittedly, there are occasional exceptions to the generalizations made above—now and then a new topic or research technique makes an appearance. However, my characterization of a general trend toward a decreasing range and variety of studied phenomena seems to be an accurate one.

I suggest that our field can profit from an expansion of its subject matter and from a larger contextualization of what is studied in psi research. Others have made similar recommendations. John Beloff (1978) urged psi researchers not to preclude unusual phenomena that seem to fall outside of the traditional psi domain and suggested that we be willing to explore anomalous processes other than those that fit securely within the well-known “big four” psi categories. John Palmer (1980) suggested that it might be useful for psi researchers to include additional “correspondence” phenomena (such as those found in astrology, synchronicity studies, and in the magical tradition) to those that we already study intensively. Susan Blackmore (1985, 1988) often has recommended that we expand parapsychology to include unusual mental phenomena such as out-of-body experiences, near-death experiences, lucid dreams, mystical experiences, and altered states of consciousness that suggest other “planes” of mental functioning—even when these are not accompanied by ostensible or veridical forms of the “big four.” A recent compendium of relatively unfamiliar experiences—the *Varieties of Anomalous Experience* volume edited by Etzel Cardeña, Steven Lynn, and Stanley Krippner

(2000)—follows in a similar direction by included experiences such as hallucinations, synaesthesia, lucid dreaming, out-of-body experiences, alien abduction experiences, near-death experiences, anomalous healing experiences, and mystical experiences along with its treatment of the more familiar parapsychological topics. I think these extensions are commendable. The term “anomalous,” however, is unfortunate in that it suggests that these various experiences are not normal or natural.

The *psi-mediated instrumental response* (PMIR) and *conformance behavior* theories of Rex Stanford (1978, 1990) and the *psychopraxia* theory of Michael Thalbourne (see, e.g., Storm & Thalbourne, 2000) are additional instances of models in which psi, as we conventionally conceive it, is only one manifestation of more general processes through which intended aims or events that fulfill or correspond with needs or dispositions come about, both endogenously and exogenously. These models open their doors to include psychological processes that ordinarily would not be considered legitimate topics for parapsychological consideration—processes such as meaningful coincidences; insight; creative problem-solving; creativity in general; memory; and various attentional, intentional, and volitional acts and mind/body interactions.

Michael Thalbourne’s construct of transliminality provides still another way in which the subject matter of psi research can be extended (e.g., see Sanders, Thalbourne, & Delin, 2000). The transliminality construct—which harks back to Myers’ (1903) similar construct of *subliminal consciousness* and the *subliminal self*—includes psychic functioning as one among several related processes in which one accesses ordinarily inaccessible “unconscious” materials; the construct later was extended to cover susceptibility to and awareness of an unusually large volume of subliminal, supraliminal,

and external inputs (Thalbourne, Bartemucci, Delin, Fox, & Nofi, 1997). This umbrella construct brings together a great variety of related processes such as psi functioning, paranormal beliefs, magical ideation, manic-like experience, depressive experience, creativity, mystical experience, fantasy-proneness, absorption, hyperaesthesia, and schizotypy.

Rhea White (e.g., 1997) has gone, perhaps, further than anyone in urging psi researchers to broaden their investigatory interests to include, as proper subject matter, not only the familiar forms of psychic functioning, but also other kinds of exceptional human experiences (EHEs), including mystical and unitive experiences, encounter experiences, unusual death-related experiences, peak experiences, exceptional human performance/feats experiences, healing experiences, desolation/nadir experiences, and dissociative experiences—even when these exceptional experiences do not include what we ordinarily consider to be “paranormal” content or accompaniments. In White’s view, EHEs constitute the larger context, within which conventionally recognized psi phenomena are only one of many classes of unusual experiences that may share important features. By studying these seemingly diverse experiences in connection with one another, we may learn much more about them and about their essential qualities than would be possible were we to continue to study them only in isolation.

In the 1962 survey mentioned above, respondents were asked which areas of research should be classified as belonging within parapsychology. J. B. Rhine’s answer is representative of the views of many investigators, both then and today: “The subject’s experience of environmental influences through ESP on one hand, and his action upon the environment through psychokinesis on the other” (Amadau et al., 1962, p. 8). This

response is telling, in two ways. First, it emphasizes interactions with the external environment; there is no mention of more exclusively internal events or interactions. Second, this response specifies particular, alternative forms of *knowing* and of *doing*; it does not address particular or alternative forms of *being* nor *changes in one's mode of being*. In its future growth, psi research might be expanded to more fully address ways in which its studied phenomena may interact with or influence their experiencers' ways of being in the world—and this would include issues of self schema, identity, and worldview, as well as possible transformative changes in these areas.

Mention of alternative modes of knowing, doing (influence), and being suggests the relevance of the growing field of *transpersonal studies* as an appropriate larger contextual frame for parapsychological research. Transpersonal studies recognize ways in which identity, development, modes of knowing, modes of influencing, and other human potentials can extend and expand beyond those that are present in our typical, egoic mode of functioning. There is a recognition of what William James (1902/1985, p. 508) termed a *More*, and that there are intimations of such a More in each of these areas of our nature and functioning. Elsewhere (Braud, 2001), I have elaborated, in detail, many interfaces of parapsychological, transpersonal, and consciousness phenomena.

Considering transpersonal studies to be a suitable larger rubric in which to situate our psi studies, in the future, carries with it an additional and important benefit—it would motivate us to move beyond our concerns chiefly with the individual and with her or his conscious, egoic functioning to the larger unconscious, nonegoic, social, global, ecological, and spiritual contexts in which we are embedded. Such a contextual expansion would allow us to more adequately address the larger meanings and impacts of

the paranormal experiences and events that we study. Situating our work in a larger context can permit us not only to study a wider range of topics, but also to learn much more about the interrelationships among these topics and about the range of processes, persons, and larger social groupings upon which our studied experiences may have important interactions and impacts.

It has been suggested that “professionalism” means “disciplinary autonomy” and that “a field of study (or any line of work) is a profession when its practitioners are answerable for the content of their work only to fellow practitioners” (Menand, 2002, p. 100). In our discipline of psi research, I think we have been “answerable” to a too-narrow range of persons—both in terms of those we might serve and those to whom we might look for inspiration and useful ideas. Expanding our discipline could have beneficial consequences, in both of these respects.

Taking Stock of Our Findings: Consolidation, Integration, and Reconceptualization

Of course, it is important for us to continue to collect new data, in the future. It is equally important, however, for us to examine more carefully the data we already have accumulated, the conclusions we have reached, and the often unexamined assumptions that might be guiding our work. In these future consolidation, integration, and reconceptualization endeavors, the following guidelines can assist us.

Increased awareness of fads and wariness of too-limited time frames. Too often, our discipline seems to be driven, excessively, by the latest new thing. In an important and delightful book, *The Psychology of Science: A Reconnaissance*, Abraham Maslow—one of the founders of both humanistic psychology and transpersonal psychology—included his now-familiar aphorism: "I suppose it is tempting, if the only tool you have is

a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail" (Maslow, 1966, p. 15-16). The history of psi research has sometimes seemed to me to be a succession of hammers—each one promising to be the golden tool that will, at last, allow us to achieve the elusive goals of replicability of our findings and scientific acceptance of our discipline and our conclusions, and each one eventually failing to fulfill its promise, being discarded, and replaced by the next shiny new hammer in the never ending series. Members of the Hammer Hall of Fame have included well-attested and multiply witnessed spontaneous occurrences, carefully orchestrated sittings with mental and physical mediums, Zener card guessing, dream telepathy experiments, animal psi experiments, random number generator experiments, remote viewing tests, and Ganzfeld sessions. Three hammers du jour that now feature prominently in psi research include the techniques of meta-analysis, direct mental interactions with living systems (DMILS) research, and presentiment research. I suspect these, too, shall pass . . . and be replaced by still other hammers.

I mention this because if one is aware of this cyclical flow of discovery, enthusiasm, popularity, decline, and replacement of various research approaches, one will be less likely to become overly attached to any one of these, and less likely to invest any given approach, experiment, or outcome with too much importance or significance—less likely to see the world of psi exclusively through filters tinted by a particular tool, no matter how popular or faddish that tool might be. Such awareness and nonattachment, in turn, can facilitate freedom to explore other topics or the same topic in other ways—ways that would not be as possible were one to remain in the thrall of a currently privileged approach.

Along with a narrowness associated with allegiance to a limited range of research methods or topics comes another form of narrowness—a tendency to restrict our attention to a too-limited time window, in reviewing what is known about our subject. This is but another aspect of a pervasive syndrome of overvaluing the latest new thing. It always has struck me as curious that we, along with a majority of natural scientists, tend to behave as though knowledge has an expiration date—that findings and thoughts older than 5 years or so tend to be discounted as no longer valid or applicable. This tendency is evidenced by the time frames typically covered in our literature reviews and in the methods and evidence that we emphasize in our work and writings. Although progress undoubtedly has been made in some areas (chiefly in terms of technology), there are many instances in which early psi-related thinking and work rival, and sometimes even surpass, more recent efforts. It seems unwise for us to ignore or disdain important findings merely because they were published some time ago. In some cases, modern workers may not even be aware of the existence of relevant early work; such ignorance is an insult to the practice of good scholarship.

Space limitations allow me to mention only a sampling of cases that illustrate the relevance of early work.

- The Patanjali Yoga Sutras present a sophisticated system of psychophysiological exercises that fostered the psychospiritual development of the practitioner.

Aspects of these exercises were claimed to facilitate certain *siddhis* (powers) akin to those that modern psi researchers would like to cultivate in their research participants. The Sutras present an early anticipation of the much later models of “noise reduction” advocated by Honorton (1977) and Braud (1978).

- Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801-1887) is well known for his groundbreaking work in the area of psychophysics. Less well known is a series of seven books that were much more philosophical and speculative: *Das Büchlein vom Leben nach dem Tode* [*The little book of life after death*] (1836), *Nanna oder das Seelenleben der Pflanzen* [*Nanna or the mental live of plants*] (1848), *Zend-Avesta oder über die Dinge des Himmels und des Jenseits* [*Zend-Avesta or concerning the things of heaven and the hereafter*] (1851), *Professor Schleiden und der Mond* [*Professor Schleiden and the moon*] (1856), *Über die Seelenfrage* [*Concerning the question of the soul*] (1861), *Die drei Motive und Gründe des Glaubens* [*The three motives and grounds of beliefs*] (1863), *Die Tagesansicht gegenüber der Nachtansicht* [*The daylight view as opposed to the night view*] (1879). In these works he presented ideas concerning mind-body interrelationships, consciousness, life after death, the possibility that consciousness might be mediated by alternative structures, and the idea of a “large” or nonlocal body—each of which resembles modern thoughts about such topics. He also presented a clear anticipation of the more recent Gaia hypothesis.
- In terms of scrupulous care, thoroughness of investigation, and thoughtful presentation of research on spontaneous cases, the work of the founders and early members of the [British] Society for Psychological Research—as exemplified in, for example, Myers’ *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (1903) and Gurney, Myers, and Podmore’s *Phantasms of the Living* (1886)—remains unrivaled to this day.

- In the early 1970s there was much interest in the possible connections of “right versus left hemispheric functioning” and psi. Building on the work of Hughling Jackson, F. W. H. Myers (1903) and William James (1890) had suggested similar connections in their turn-of-the-century writings.
- In the writings of Carl du Prel (1889) one finds clear descriptions of state-dependent memory and other processes of great relevance to psi research.
- In the 1980s, Rupert Sheldrake advanced his ideas about the laws of nature as habits; very similar thoughts had already been put forward by Charles Sanders Peirce—the American philosopher, polymath, associate of William James, and one of the founders of pragmatism—in a series of papers published in *The Monist* (see, e.g., Peirce, 1891).
- In an early and eloquent statement, the British social critic and writer Edward Carpenter (1912) suggested that by “dying” to our thinking selves, in a manner made possible by meditation and related techniques, we might gain access to a larger self, with its increased nonlocal interconnections that could allow the types of awarenesses that we now call “psychic.”
- In the late 1980s, W. G. Roll (1988) developed his notions of the “long body” and its role in psychological phenomena. The idea of the “large body” had been presented by Henri Bergson in 1935, and had been part of the worldview of indigenous American Indians long before then. A similar notion appeared in the work of Fechner, mentioned above.
- Evelyn Underhill, in her classic book on *Mysticism*, in 1911, presented thoughts on the importance of reducing sensory distractions in order to access higher

knowing that are virtually indistinguishable from the noise-reduction models of psi optimization proposed in the mid-1970s by Charles Honorton and William Braud.

- Leonid Vasiliev's (1963) work on remote mental influences, conducted in the 1920s and 1930s, rivals similar contemporary work in its creativity, care, sophistication, and positive results.
- In his descriptions of *turbulent systems*—isolated macroscopic systems with a non-unique futures—in an early paper in the *International Journal of Parapsychology*, David Davies (1966) anticipated the importance of qualities of indeterminacy, randomness, and lability, which were later to be emphasized as important qualities of systems susceptible to psychokinetic influence.

In the future, more thorough scholarship and a greater honoring of the thoughts of earlier contributors might uncover important clues to psi functioning that otherwise might be lost, and a greater attention to the past might hasten future advances and prevent the redundant reinventions of many intellectual “wheels.”

Alfred North Whitehead (1929) once suggested that the European philosophical tradition consisted of a series of footnotes to Plato. It may not be inappropriate to suggest that many of the more recent works within the traditions of philosophy, psychology, and psychical research are, similarly, often pale shadows of the incisiveness and depth of thought of our predecessors. The quality and depth of the work of earlier contributions may be attributable to greater aptitude, more thoroughgoing education and training, stronger motivation and passion, and—perhaps—fewer distractions on the part of these earlier scholars. In any case, in my view, we might benefit greatly from attending as

much to these rich, early statements as we do to their more modern—but, sadly, often more superficial—simulacra.

More careful assessment of our conclusions and assumptions. Our future psi research can be assisted by deeper and more thoughtful analyses of our conclusions, generalizations, and assumptions. Here are a few areas to which greater attention might be directed.

- Do “psi-favorable test conditions” such as Ganzfeld procedures really *facilitate* psi? Certainly, psi hitting does appear to occur frequently and well during such procedures. Whether psi occurs significantly more frequently or significantly more accurately under these conditions is not at all clear—due to the typical absence of appropriate contrast or control conditions with which these ostensible psi-facilitators could be compared. Further, it is not yet clear to what extent any psi manifested in such conditions might be attributable to psi-enhancing properties of the conditions themselves or to various sampling, demand characteristics, or experimenter effects. Much more trenchant analyses seem to be in order, in addressing this issue, rather than taking it for granted to these conditions actually facilitate psi rather than simply provide occasions for psi to occur at a more usual rate. It is fortunate that, lately, at least some investigators are beginning to include the necessary contrast/control conditions that provide baseline estimates of psi expectations in the absence of the ostensible facilitators; however, a much greater number of such controlled studies are needed.
- Is psi really independent of distance? Although such a claim is made extremely often, its validity is not yet clear. What can safely be concluded is that psi can

occur at various distances and often at great distances. Sufficient experimentation and sufficiently profound thinking have not yet occurred, which could justify the conclusion of distance-independence of psi functioning. The difficulty of reaching a valid conclusion about this issue revolves around a number of complexities.

First, we have no really good measure of the intensity or likelihood of a given psi occurrence. So, to say that psi happens well at various distances does not necessarily mean that the resultant psi had equal “strength,” acuity, accuracy, or likelihood at those distances. Second, there may be a mathematical curve relating psi to distance, but tests conducted thus far may not have explored appropriate distances in which the curve is not reasonably flat—i.e., we may have inadvertently been exploring extents of space that are too small or too large to show a distance-related gradient effect. The curve relating psi magnitude to distance may not be a simple inverse square function, throughout all parts of the distance range. Third, there may be something akin to an automatic gain control in our organisms that tends to amplify weak psi “signals” and attenuate strong psi signals, resulting in an artifactual appearance of signals of equal strength, when, in fact, there may be great differences (perhaps distance-dependent) in the strength of the “arriving signals” themselves. Fourth, as long as the relevant experimental personnel are aware of the distances being tested, there is the possibility of conscious or unconscious differences in effort or belief, at the different tested distances, that could influence obtained results. Adequate tests of the influence of physical distance should be done using multiple blind protocols, so that possible psychological modulators and confounds might be eliminated or

at least minimized. Such experiments have rarely been done. In fact, the only such work of which I am aware is that of Karlis Osis (e.g., Osis, Turner, & Carlson, 1971). Interestingly, in these well-controlled studies, Osis did find indications of a decline in psi scoring rate with increasing distance. Osis and others have also reviewed large bodies of other evidence that indicated possible psi scoring declines with distance. Fifth, if psi interactions are minimally constrained by time, then it becomes difficult to distinguish real-time psi at a distance from later or earlier psi at closer range, when the target events and percipients may have been closer together before the actual experiments or during checking. It is important to recognize that arguments similar to these, marshaled in connection with distance dependence or independence, also may apply to considerations of whether psi is time-independent, as is typically claimed. I always have been struck by the curious need to honor the importance of time (observing real-time occurrences, for purposes of determining veridical correspondences) in order to explore space-independence, and the need to honor space, in order to explore time independence of psi. In the future, more thoughtfully and creatively designed studies will be necessary to adequately address issues of psi's temporal and spatial independence or dependence.

- Is system susceptibility to psychokinetic influence related to physical randomness or perceived (psychological) randomness (variability)? It appears to be assumed and/or concluded without question that physical randomness or indeterminateness is a facilitating factor for psychokinesis. In virtually all experimental situations, however, a target's physical randomness is confounded by its perceived

randomness—or, better, by its perceived variability. It may be that what seems to be a physical effect may, in fact, be an artifact of participants' (and investigators') increased confidence or expectation for change in target systems associated with random as opposed to static behavior. Inclusive studies could be designed, in which these two factors could be artificially dissociated, in order to learn which might more adequately account for obtained PK effects.

- Do our commonly-used research designs address the functions that psi might ordinarily serve in everyday life situations? In laboratory studies of psi, the presence of psi is indicated by veridical evidence, and veridical evidence nearly always is indicated by formal correspondences between target content and percipient responses—correspondences of shape, color, name, formal associations and similarity, and so on. Are there any cases of spontaneous psi in which the participants describe, primarily, shapes, sizes, and orientations? Rather, is it not the case that, in everyday life instances, situations are described, particular persons are identified, and so on? Are we witnessing, here, a serious mismatch of how psi normally operates and how we expect it to accommodate itself to our artificial laboratory protocols? In the future, might there be creative ways of designing and exploring experimental tests that more closely approximate psi's everyday functioning? Gardner Murphy touched on this issue, briefly, in a passage in an essay on Frederic Myers and Myers' concept of the subliminal self and of the spectrum of different levels of the psyche (Murphy, 1971):

Now what kind of personality manifestations would be we concerned with at the highest levels of this analysis? We would be concerned with meaningful *communication* from person to person whenever the message is deep and significant: A message regarding values, regarding ideas,

regarding aspects of human living which are most precious. That is what we should be able to communicate through these subliminal strata of our personality. For the ordinary tasks of daily living, it may be sufficient to work with simple, conscious symbolism. But if one is in need of communicating something vastly significant and broadly human, it may require the use of all the levels at once, so to speak. It may require a telepathic message which is more than a telepathic message. (Murphy, 1971, pp. 138-139)

- Virtually all contemporary research on receptive psi (telepathy, clairvoyance, and precognition) is founded on the assumption that psi is essentially an information transference process. Hence, we emphasize, almost exclusively, the nature of the information that seems to be conveyed in psi interactions—examining, chiefly, formal correspondences of the *content* of psi-mediated messages. What if, however, the actual informational content of the psi experience is not paramount, but is only an incidental accompaniment of a more essential function of calling attention to certain persons or situation, serving as an indicator of distress or need, providing a preparatory signal, or providing indications of interconnection or relationship with certain persons or situations? It may be that the specific content of psi-mediated “message” is not as important as the fact that there is a message, that there is a particular source of the message, that certain subtle, yet profound, connections exist. Perhaps specific content is simply an incidental, ready-at-hand, or convincing way to convey the more general meanings to which I have just alluded. Stated somewhat differently, psi might simply be a dramatizing lesson-provider, and the lesson may be more important than the particular (incidental) informational content employed to provide the main lesson. If this is indeed the case, more attention—in future research—could be directed to identifying and exploring the additional functions that psi might serve, and “lessons” it might

- provide for those who participate in its occurrences, apart from the specific information that might be used in readily serving those functions and in providing more general lessons. This possible lesson-offering function of psi is not unrelated to the notion of the *mythopoetic function of the unconscious* (a term apparently coined by F. W. H. Myers; Theodore Flournoy called the process, poetically, “romances of the subliminal imagination”), in which unconscious processes continually and autonomously construct stories, fictions, and myths, which are dramatized in the form of dreams and other productions (see Ellenberger, 1970; Flournoy, 1900; Myers, 1903). Here, psi correspondences, the selection of targets, and even psi itself may be subtle and impressive mythopoetic productions.
- It is commonly assumed that, in receptive psi, the true “target” is the actual, concrete target instance at hand. Hence, veridicality is assessed by carefully noting clear and precise correspondences between a percipient’s protocol utterances and drawings and the physical details of the specific content of some target event. What if, however, the true target in receptive psi is not the specific, concrete, particularly actualized target, but a more generic form of which the particular target is but one instance? What if psi taps into the more abstract forms, “ideas,” potentials, possibilities, or “archetypes” of which particular targets happens to be only one of many possible instantiations? Such psi access to a more general form, template, or model could account for at least some of what hitherto have been called “misses.” This issue is a large one, albeit one that might be explored fruitfully in future psi research. Such research would have to expand to

- include correspondences that are more relevant to shared meaning—and perhaps other qualities (see below)—than to formal correspondences alone.
- Another assumption which has been guiding our research is that alphanumerical targets are much more difficult to psychically access than are more nonverbal target properties such as shapes, forms, textures, colors, and so on. Although there are intimations that this might be true, there is no strong, direct empirical support for such an assumption or conclusion. Perhaps there have been so few successful “readings” of left-hemispheric-type targets not because such tasks have been tried repeatedly and have consistently failed, but rather because such attempts are extremely few and have not been given fair or adequate tests. There have, indeed, been cases in which there have occurred accurate readings of psi target information. Could we be finding much evidence for psychic access of forms, colors, and other right-hemispheric-type qualities because these are chiefly what we have been looking for and emphasizing in our research—both to ourselves and to our research participants? Could such findings be instances of self-fulfilling prophecies and selective attention on the part of investigators and participants alike?
 - Psi-favorable conditions—typically, particular states of consciousness—usually are inferred from the presence of some ostensibly state-inducing procedure. For example, the Ganzfeld procedure is assumed to produce certain changes in the percipient. As many have remarked through the years—particularly Charles Tart, in his perennial admonitions—it is unwise to simply assume that a state has been altered merely by noting the presence of some ostensible induction procedure. It

- is much more useful to actually assess the influence of the induction procedure—i.e., to provide a *manipulation check*. Much of the variability in obtained psi results, in connection with state production aims, might be attributable to variations in the extent to which induction techniques actually are effective in yielding the aimed-for state changes. More direct measures of state changes—using both subjective and objective accompaniments indicators—could be employed in future research into psi-favorable and psi-antagonistic conditions.
- Among those psi researchers who are interested in survival/afterlife research, an assumption or conclusion is often made—either explicitly or implicitly—that if an out-of-body or near-death experience occurs in this life, such experiences might continue after death. Such a view is neither logically nor empirically justified. It must be remembered that those experiences occur in living beings, and it may be that life is a necessary condition for their occurrence or maintenance. Their occurrence in the living is *consistent* with an hypothesis that they may also occur after death, but the latter is only an hypothesis and not a guaranteed conclusion or legitimate inference from their presence in the living.
 - Related to the above is a view—prominent among advocates of survival of bodily death—that out-of-body, near-death, and psi experiences in general, as these occur in the living, demand a conclusion that physical substrates cannot explain and are not required for these phenomena, and that, therefore, these phenomena make plausible the survival of consciousness and certain aspects of human personality following the death of the body. I agree that these psi-related phenomena are *consistent* with such a view. However, in the future, we might

consider the alternative interpretation that these and other psi-related phenomena may be operations or properties of *emergent* processes or structures that have their basis in the living physical brain and body, and arise from these, but might continue to depend upon the latter and might cease functioning and existing when the foundation from which they emerged disintegrates, with death. Emergence does not imply independence from the foundations or components of what emerges, nor does emergence imply persistence in the absence of substrate.

Possible Future Extensions and Expansions

I offer the following suggestions of ways in which psi research might be extended and expanded in the future. Such expansions would enrich our discipline, allow us to contextualize our studies more fully, and allow our work to become more meaningful to a greater range of persons and groups.

- We can expand the *content* of psi research by including important processes that we have neglected and by identifying gaps in our current understanding of psi functioning. We can extend our investigations beyond the usual “big four” processes of telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis. Including some of the related processes mentioned in the “Larger Contextualization” section of this chapter (see above) would be one way of doing this. This would involve inviting other experiences—exceptional human experiences, nonordinary and transcendent experiences—into our investigatory ambit. We might also consider some of the large number of nonordinary experiences identified by Stanislav Grof (1972, 1975, 1985, 1988) for possible inclusion.

- We can expand the *aims* of our research efforts. Currently, most of our research is devoted, directly or indirectly, to establishing evidence for the existence, in as “pure” a form as possible, of the processes of telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psychokinesis. A second emphasized aim of our work is to understand better the processes through which these abilities operate. To these two aims, we could add a third aim of exploring the life impacts of experiences and the meanings and interpretations that people attribute to their experiences, whether or not their experiences have demonstrated veridical aspects. To participants and to the public, impacts, meanings, and interpretations are of great interest—even more so than are evidential proofs and posited mechanisms. The addition of this third aim also could allow us to address potential practical applications and implications of our work far better than we presently are doing.
- Within the traditional realms of our research, we could entertain additional choices and innovative approaches to our more familiar subject matter. In the area of receptive psi, we could devote more attention to nonvisual targets and target events. Rather than deliberately rule out meaning in our targets (as, for example, Ed May and his co-workers have done, albeit for good reason, in their studies of the information and information change qualities of targets; see May, Spottiswoode, & James, 1994), we could add more meaningful elements to our target events and to our experiments in general. This should enhance their relevance to our research participants and could add useful motivational, need-relevant components to our studies. (The Gardner Murphy passage that was quoted in an earlier section of this chapter also has relevance here.) Rather than

restrict our PK targets to random electronic and mechanical devices, we could extend our target events to include not only biological systems, but also psychological, social, cultural, and even planetary processes and events. Not only would such studies provide information about the possible range and limits of psi influence, but they also would open up new areas for potential practical applications.

- In future studies, we could enlarge our conceptualization of psi's major function. Virtually all of our work has been guided by the (often unstated) assumption that psi operates chiefly in ways that are redundant with sensory processing. Thus, we study how well psi can duplicate vision (in becoming aware of the visual forms, colors, and other qualities of targets) and the other conventional senses. However, we have excellent senses for accessing such information. Why would nature have developed a psi process that merely duplicates already excellent sensory functioning? Might psi operate, more effectively, in areas that are not so readily accessible by our regular senses? Perhaps an important function of psi is to provide knowledge of qualities of the world that are not immediately evident to the senses. Such *nonevident* qualities would include relationships in which various objects, events, or persons are embedded; the past histories and possible future trajectories of present objects and events; associative networks of which particular objects or events are but nodes; instances that are parts of the same whole; meanings; and potentials. This accessing of latent or implicit tendencies or potentials that are not yet available to the senses calls to mind a definition of *intuition* once provided by Carl Jung: "the perception of the possibilities inherent

in a situation” (1960, p. 141). *Nonevident psi* might account for at least some interesting “misses” that have occurred or might occur in our experiments—instances in which several participants might psychically perceive subtle qualities of target events that are “incorrect” with respect to their sensory referents, but might, nonetheless, be discernable with some degree of consensus among similarly and properly prepared psychic observers. I have elaborated this idea of nonevident psi elsewhere (Braud, 1982). Is there such a thing as *psychic space*, and can it, its dimensions, or its contents be discerned directly? Can our conscious awareness itself be a measuring instrument or a *psychoassay* for events and influences for which no other detectors presently exist? In the future, we could develop creative research designs and approaches that might allow us to learn about other realms in which psi might be more active, more accurate, and more at home. In exploring such areas, challenges involving the validity and trustworthiness of these observations and knowings would be great, but not insurmountable. Two specific methods might serve us well in exploring nonevident psi. One of these is to conduct very thoughtful and probing phenomenological studies of persons’ subjective experiences upon confronting a given ESP target; by identifying a greater range of experiences, including bodily and other “preconceptual” experiences, and by noting possible commonalities of such experiences—especially those that are present in many percipient reports but are not obviously related to the formal properties of the target—across percipients. Another promising method could be the use of the *projective differential* technique developed by Peter Raynolds (1997) and his co-workers.

This technique assesses persons' reactions to rapidly presented pairs of abstract images as a way of measuring holistic and intuitive responses to a wide range of objects, persons, situations, or concepts, and it can provide both quantitative and qualitative assessments of subtle, nonevident qualities and meanings, as well as indications of the degree to which these might be shared by the research participants.

- We can devote more attention to possible experimenter effects—both conventional and psi-mediated—and also to possible effects of *place*. As far as I know, there has not yet been any systematic study of the possible role of the *location* at which our studies are conducted. Certainly, our study outcomes can be influenced, both directly and indirectly, by conventional physical characteristics of the testing location—e.g., the geomagnetic ambiance of the locale, or even (as Spottiswoode's [1997] local sidereal time work has suggested) the test site's cosmic situation or orientation—as well as more subtle qualities of place. Some of the latter, no doubt, still await discovery and exploration.
- It should be possible, in the future, to integrate our studied phenomena more fully with other processes. For example, there are great resemblances between direct intentional influences (psychokinetic influences) and what has been called *himmah* and *empowered imagination*. Henry Corbin (1972, 1981) has elaborated Ibn al-‘Arabî's description of *himmah*—a kind of transfigured or empowered imaginal process or creative imagination, through which it becomes possible to directly perceive subtle or spiritual realities and to endow products of one's imagination and intention with a form of external reality, capable of being

perceived by others. Jess Hollenback (1996) has described *enthymesis* or empowered imagination, with properties identical to those of *himmah*. In these systems of thought, ordinary imagination may remain “local” in what it may know and accomplish. However, a special form of concentrated, empowered, transformed, or dynamized imagination can know and act veridically and nonlocally. There are, of course, many other descriptions of processes in various esoteric, spiritual, and wisdom traditions that bear close resemblances to the processes studied in psi research. Being aware of these and what is known about these could help advance our own knowledge of the similar phenomena that we study. To deny such similarities and to privilege our own studies as somehow more objective and valid are indicators not only of poor scholarship and limited inquiry, but of hubris, on our part, as well.

- The foregoing considerations prompt the suggestion that we employ much more inclusive inquiry approaches in our future work. Psi researchers often behave as though the only useful approach for learning about psi is to mimic the methods of natural science. I believe that such an attitude and approach is unnecessarily narrow and limiting. Whereas much may be learned about science through this approach, we can learn even more by augmenting this strategy with additions from the human sciences; from psychological investigations (as opposed to purely cognitive or behavioral ones); from the findings and thoughts of various esoteric, spiritual, and wisdom traditions; from philosophy; from history and other humanities, and from the arts. In the case of psi, as in the case of all other areas of human experience, we can learn much from these diverse areas. Not only can this

- expand and enrich our store of knowledge and wisdom regarding psi, but it also can foster more meaningful dialog with those in other disciplines and with the public at large—for whom the languages and observations of these “nonscientific” areas are often more accessible and more meaningful to their lives than those of science. Thus, I suggest a future investigatory stance of *science plus* rather than *science only*. Perhaps, rather than continuing to be framed as “parapsychology,” our field might be broadened and reframed as “paranormal studies”?
- In a previous section of this chapter, I suggested transpersonal studies as a possible larger framework for our studies. Building on the prior “three forces” of psychology (behavioristic, psychoanalytical, and humanistic approaches), the “fourth force” of transpersonal psychology included the valuable contributions of all of these, but added an emphasis on a *More*—beyond the personal or egoic processes that had been the major subject matter of the first three forces—and, especially, how experiences of that *More* (more ways of knowing, doing, and being) influenced one’s expanded sense of identity and one’s values. In some cases, the resultant changes may be sufficiently persistent, pervasive, and profound studies to be considered transformative. In the future, psi researchers, too, might concern themselves, to a greater degree, with the possible impacts of psi-related experiences upon the sense of identity, the values, the worldview, and the possible transformative changes of those who have these psychic and other exceptional experiences.

- The “elusive” nature of psi has been much discussed (e.g., Kasahara, 1993; Kennedy, 2001). Some have suggested that a fear of psi might account for at least part of this elusiveness (e.g., Braud, 1985; Tart, 1984; see, also, Grossman, 2002, for related considerations). If this is so, then any tactics that might reduce such fear could help reduce the inhibition of psi. In the future, two research approaches might help reduce fear of psi. One of these would be projects specially designed to explore the limits of psi, and—more specifically—how psi might be attenuated or *blocked*. If persons could become more confident in their ability to reduce unwanted instances of psi, this could free them from fears of being overwhelmed, or influenced in unwanted ways, by psi. Such empowerment could, in turn, reduce psi-related anxieties and concerns. Another fear-reducing approach would be to encourage studies that focus on *positive practical applications* of psi. Increased awareness of, and direct experiences of, positive psi impacts could help counter apprehensions about possible negative influences.
- In addition to exploring possible limits of psi, in the future, psi researchers might explore more extensively and more boldly the range of events and systems that might be psychically influenced. If physical randomness is, indeed, an important factor in determining the susceptibility of various “target events” to possible psychic influence, there are numerous physical processes in nature that could be so explored. Thus far, psychokinesis investigators have limited their target events almost exclusively to bouncing dice and deliberately constructed random event generators. There exist much more dramatic, larger scale, natural target systems that possess random and chaotic characteristics and that could be explored for

- susceptibility to direct mental influence. These include wind currents, weather phenomena, ionospherically-mediated radio transmissions, and even sunspot activity, other solar emission phenomena, and cosmic rays. There already have been a handful of preliminary studies of psi influences upon weather and weather-related processes (e.g., Barker, 1979; Castillejo, 1973; Chauvin, 1988; Cox, 1958, 1962a, 1962b, 1978; Nelson, 1997; Schmeidler, 1973), and these have yielded provocative results. Such investigations could continue and could be extended to some of the other labile natural systems just mentioned.
- In various societal contexts, persons or groups who are insecure or feel threatened about their acceptance or position may try to emphasize their own feelings of worth and enhance their own value by distancing themselves from other persons or groups whom they perceive as being below them in some hierarchy of acceptance. By playing down the qualities and accomplishments of those “others,” their own status is relatively elevated—at least in their own eyes. This dynamic may contribute, in part, to the disdain that psychology—whose own status as a science sometimes is questioned—often shows toward parapsychology and other novel areas of study. Unfortunately, establishment parapsychology sometimes displays this same pattern in its attitude toward novel findings within its own areas of interest and, especially, toward workers who are viewed as not having the requisite credentials and not belonging to the professional parapsychological ingroup. Specific instances of this dynamic can be seen in the devaluing of the work of “amateurs,” “New Age practitioners,” popularizers, and advocates of various esoteric traditions. I hope future psi researchers can be more

- open to novel principles and discoveries in many areas, including those just mentioned, rather than being closed to contributions of these “others” due to feelings of defensiveness. These potential outsider contributions, of course, should be carefully evaluated through thoughtful consideration and critical thinking, but not subjected to a blanket rejection or neglect, on the basis of their sources.
- Perhaps the most important and most effective future emphasis for our psi studies is one in which all of us become much more intimate and familiar with our subject matter. We can do this by becoming more attentive to psi experiences that may occur in our own lives, and learn more about these from a first-person perspective (see, e.g., Braud, 1994). We also can devote greater attention to more thoroughly *preparing ourselves* in ways that might allow psi experience to visit us more often. For such preparation, we can find useful advice in our accumulated psi studies, findings, and theories, and also in various spiritual, wisdom, and esoteric traditions in which psi and psi-like processes are recognized and are honored for the important roles they may play in our lives, well-being, growth, and development.

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