

the situation must be the result of prior physiological activity, identical in enough evolution which, however, is the only technique possible for the case; for example, if it is claimed the light movement is the result of movement of biological faculties. The most likely alternative is that 'idea particles in the aqueous humour, everybody must have the same sized partition' is an inherent quality or characteristic of the level of consciousness in exactly the same place at the same time, moving in the same direction at the same speed, and this situation arises every time the experiment is carried out. The chances of such an occurrence arising fortuitously are remote in the extreme. The significance of the part played by the 'idea' hypothesis in the apparitional theory has been fully covered by Tyrrell and does not arise here. However, taking into account the possibly non-physical nature of the requisite stratum of consciousness, it is clearly possible that an 'idea' could arise from one or more psychical sources and thus provide a plausible theory for several other types of parapsychological phenomena. If the psychically inspired 'idea' is of a scene, it could explain the many accounts in the literature of people finding themselves in totally inexplicable surroundings, and if these have historical associations, we can account for the Versaillais type of experience recorded by Jourdain and Moberly.⁵ If the observer is of, say, a religious disposition, the 'idea' may well create a holy figure in a grotto or on a church wall. Although widely different in their presentation, all these manifestations, and those aspects of perception already discussed, are in fact simply different aspects of the one phenomenon, that is, an image arising in the consciousness on the inducement of an 'idea', for which in some cases there is no apparent physical basis.

What appears to be taking place, according to the 'idea' hypothesis, is that first all the observers perceive the light as stationary. One observer claims 'the light is moving upwards' and each observer then has an 'idea' in his consciousness which creates the image of the light moving upwards, and responsive observers will see the light doing so, as Gregory points out. In the case of the solitary observer, whose sensory image of the light is primarily influenced by an 'idea' the image remains either stationary or moves in an entirely random manner. On the other hand, most observers are able to control the movement simply by 'willing' it (i.e., by convincing themselves that they are able to do so), as with the anemometer effect described in an earlier issue of the Journal.² Control of movement is total and the light can be directed in whichever direction may be desired, or it can be rendered stationary. The observer sees it follow his 'willed' direction because there is now an 'idea' in his consciousness which is controlling the behaviour of the image. Most people have no difficulty in confirming this phenomenon for themselves.

As has already been mentioned, experiments with autokinesis and voluntary perception strongly indicate that the visual images being perceived arise simply from a belief (i.e., Tyrrell's 'idea-pattern') in the observer's consciousness and are apparently not related to activity of the visual cortex. Ample confirmation of this situation is provided by hypnotic hallucinations which arise from an 'idea' implanted by an external agent. There would appear to be little doubt but that the percepts from all three sources are created by the same mechanism, comprising the same elements and exist in the same area of consciousness. Since sensory and hallucinatory images are indistinguishable, there would appear to be good grounds for including sensory perception. However, there is one serious objection in that sensory images are obviously not initiated basically by an 'idea' but by a brain state, and yet it can be shown that their behaviour may be controlled by nothing more than an 'idea'. This implies that the visual cortex cannot be an integral part of the image (contrary to a widely held opinion), nor can it create the image as some kind of physiological appendage. It seems merely to provide information from which the consciousness may, or may not, create a percept.

Normally, in the creation of a percept, consciousness always follows a pattern in the visual cortex, and it does so with meticulous exactitude, as otherwise life would clearly be impossible. Such an arrangement has undoubtedly come into existence, as Tyrrell points out in considerable detail, through biological necessity in the course of evolution. Nevertheless, the overriding control of such a reliable procedure by an insubstantial 'idea' is a phenomenon which indisputably exists, as can be demonstrated experimentally. How and why, then, has such an alien influence become part of the conscious process? Certainly not

It is probably useless to speculate on the nature of the 'idea-pattern' and its associated stratum of consciousness, because if these are non-physical entities, as their behaviour would suggest, then the human intelligence, with its limitations, may be incapable of comprehending them. We might have no alternative but to be content with observing their manifestations. However, the extensive range of phenomena in which they appear to operate suggests that this situation already presents a serious challenge to the mind brain identity theory and lends credence to many of the claims of parapsychology.

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PARAPSYCHOLOGY AND RELIGION: RECENT CONTRIBUTIONS FROM ITALY

by CARLOS S. ALVARADO

Discussion on the relationship of psi phenomena and religion is a topic that recurs in the literature of religion and parapsychology (for a review from the parapsychological point of view see Thouless, 1977). Some have argued that psychic phenomena are at the root of religious beliefs and experiences (Lang,

1894). Others argue that the phenomena provide evidence for a basic tenet of religion, that is, the existence of a nonphysical aspect of human beings (Rhine, 1953). The latter reminds us that religious studies and parapsychology share a common interest in the concept of survival of bodily death.

Other writers have discussed psychic phenomena in relation to specific religions such as Judaism (Bazak, 1972) and Islam (Grunebaum, 1966). In addition, there has been much attention paid to psychic phenomena in a Christian context such as those reported to occur around Catholic mystics and saints (Thurston, 1952), and phenomena such as Marian apparitions (Freixeda, 1985). More recently, the topic of parapsychology and religion has been discussed in a conference of the Parapsychology Foundation (Shapin & Cooper, 1987) and is frequently considered in contemporary publications such as *Christian Parapsychologist* and the *Journal of Religion and Psychical Research*.

One of the most recent contributions to the subject in question appeared in the Italian journal *Quaderni di Parapsicologia* (1989, Vol. 20, whole issue). The journal is the proceedings of a 1988 conference held at Bologna to discuss different aspects of the relationship of religion and parapsychology. In this report I will briefly summarize and comment on the contents of the proceedings.

Father Andreas Resch presented an overview of ideas about psychic phenomena in the Catholic Church. The coverage ranged from the activities of the Fathers of the Church such as Tertullian to the 18th century activities of Prospero Lambertini, known as Pope Benedict XIV. According to Resch, psychic phenomena are of interest to the Church because they may foster worldviews that are different from conventional doctrine, or they may manifest in ways consistent with Catholic beliefs (e.g., some cases of apparitions and healing). Parapsychology, says Resch, may be useful in terms of studying the authenticity and causes of miraculous claims. This is a point that has been made before by other students of the subject when, for example, an attempt has been made to draw differences between 'true' mystical phenomena from 'demonic' or human paranormal occurrences (e.g., Farges, 1920/1925).

Other presentations may be classified in two general groups: papers dealing with phenomena reported to occur around particular individuals and with phenomena reported to occur around particular groups.

In one of the most interesting papers of the conference Giorgio Gagliardi and Marco Margnelli summarized psychophysiological researches conducted with five children that claim to have had visions of the Virgin Mary since 1981 at Medjugorje, Yugoslavia. One of the phenomena the children show is that of 'synchronisms' or movements or gestures done at the same time by all children during ecstasy. The children have been subjected to a variety of tests which include visual and auditory evoked potential, galvanic skin response, heart and respiration rate measures. In the author's views the research has demonstrated that while the children claim to have their visionary experiences 'the brain is sensorially isolated from the environment, [and] the synchronisms do not seem to be caused by signals from the environment...' Some of the studies of synchronisms focused on eye movements. Two children showed similar eye movements when they were seeing the apparition of Mary. Analyses of films showed that their eye movements coincided with each other within a variation of 200 to 500 milliseconds. Gagliardi and Margnelli interpret this to mean that

synchronisms are parapsychological phenomena consisting of ESP communication between the visionaries' brains while in an altered state of consciousness. However, one wonders if such an explanation is necessary. The authors do not consider the effect of practice, or previous experience of the children in the production of the phenomenon. It is conceivable that after having had months or years of experience of trance behaviour the children have learned a routine of movements while in trance and have developed shared assumptions about the position or movements of the apparition, or sensibility to subtle sensory cues that may be helpful to coordinate the phenomena described as synchronisms. This conjecture may not be substantiated by empirical evidence, but it is the sort of consideration that we have to take into account before concluding that the phenomena in question may be explained by recourse to an ESP process.

Two other presenters discussed psychic phenomena associated with particular individuals. Father Reginaldo Thorel talked about paranormal phenomena in the life of St. Catherine of Siena. His discussion included mention of incombustibility, visions and knowledge of the hidden sins of people. Thorel argued that miracles are not considered so important now as in the past for purposes of canonization. The individual's virtues are receiving more weight in such processes.

Giancarlo Rosati described a variety of phenomena reported around the Indian swami Sai Baba, who claims to be an Avatar. This included descriptions of psychic phenomena such as materialization of objects and healings. However, in Rosati's opinion this is not the important aspect of Sai Baba's phenomena. He placed more importance on the spiritual transformations that were reported to occur to people around Baba. The proceedings also include a short paper about Baba's doctrine and interpersonal relationships by Angelo Chiari. Readers interested in more in depth information about Sai Baba should consult Haraldsson's (1987) recent book on the subject.

The rest of the presenters dealt with conceptual issues. Emilio Servadio argued that psi phenomena are partly physical and partly metaphysical or transcendental. Since science deals with the physical world the scientific method was considered to be inadequate for a complete understanding of psi. Similarly, Sergio Bernardi argued that the idea of different levels of reality is clearly seen in Eastern religions and philosophies. Psychic phenomena was seen as a natural part of systems such as yoga.

In contrast to the above mentioned papers Alfonso di Nola rejected the existence of a transcendental world. Instead he postulated an objective and a subjective reality. He suggested that all paranormal occurrences (including so-called magical and miraculous events) may be explained by human psi faculties. Di Nola criticized scientists who do not want to study the paranormal on the basis of prejudice, as well as those that use the paranormal to justify religious prejudice. This paper provides a good balance to the other articles in the *Quaderni* that argue for a nonphysical and transcendental view of psychic phenomena. There was also a roundtable discussing the issues of the conference. Ferdinando Bersani summarized the previous papers and argued that parapsychology presents two dimensions. One was the attempt to explain phenomena in natural ways (i.e., as human faculties). Another was the possibility that psi indicated the existence of a spiritual realm. In his opinion some phenomena

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suggest: (1) other levels of reality (NDEs); (2) survival of death (ND mediumship); (3) independence of the physical body (OBEs, ESP, PK); and analogies with miracles (PK, materializations, apports, healing). He outlined several explanatory models of psychic phenomena some of which focused on supernatural and human causal processes.

After Bersani's comments participants and observers discussed further issues related to the topic of the conference. For lack of space I will mention only two of these comments. Resch recognized the practical difficulties that the Church faces in demonstrating divine intervention when trying to explain miracles. Filippini and Liverziani commented on the differences between mediumistic and saintly levitations, as seen in D. D. Home and Joseph Copertino. In his view Home produced levitations through the use of psychic energy, while Copertino's levitations were the product of his spiritual energy. This is reminiscent of Leroy (1928) attempts to distinguish the levitations of saints and mediums. Several attempts to establish different causal processes of psychic phenomena are interesting but unconvincing because no clear criteria are offered to sustain such ideas. Even if we admit differences of magnitude in the phenomena an explanation may be one of different social or psychological contexts. For example, a religious setting may provide a psychological set (e.g., no sense of personal responsibility in producing the phenomena) in which levitations and other phenomena manifest in a stronger way than in other contexts. Such conditions may be more psi-conducive than mediumistic seances or other contexts of psi-functioning. The point is that we have to consider other possibilities before committing ourselves to explanations having little evidence for their support.

The contributors to this conference mention issues that have been repeatedly discussed in the literature on the subject. Some show interest in anomalous phenomena reported to occur around particular individuals in a religious context. Others focus on how parapsychology shows the existence of nonphysical reality, a basic tenet of all religions. Still others argue for the practical use of parapsychology in distinguishing between human and supernatural causal processes or in the authentication of miracles. But is the body of knowledge of parapsychology consistent and reliable enough to help us explore these issues? The answer can hardly be a positive one. For one, we should be careful to avoid confusing ignorance of causal mechanisms with evidence for transcendental realities or nonphysical processes as some members of the parapsychological community are prone to do. We also have to recognize how little we know about psi phenomena in naturalistic contexts such as the one involved in the literature on miracles. At this point the best we can do is to speculate within reasonable limits and be aware that if parapsychology is going to be meaningful for issues such as the study of miracles or the influence of religious environments on the manifestation of psychic phenomena it will have to pay more attention to its subject matter as it occurs outside of the laboratory.

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THE SPINELLI DATABASE

by BETTY MARKWICK

I should like to offer some comments on Rick Berger's 'Note', in the October 1989 *Journal*, entitled 'A Critical Examination of the Spinelli Dissertation Data'. Table and page numbers refer to that article and to Ernesto Spinelli's reply in the same *Journal*.

EFFECT SIZE AND HOMOGENEITY

Dr. Berger expresses surprise that the effect sizes of randomly removed subsets of trials (Table 3) are virtually identical to the effect sizes of the original sets (Table 1). Yet surely this would be expected by virtue of the definition of effect size: for a given hit probability and hit rate, effect size is constant for large numbers of trials. Or perhaps Berger's point is that the effect sizes for the randomly removed subsets are *too* close to those of the original sets? We have:

	672	528	386
Observed hits, 1,500-trial sets	224	176	128.667
Expected hits, 500-trial subsets	448	352	257.333
Expected hits, 1,000-trial paired sets	221	167	125
Observed hits, 500-trial subsets	±3	±9	±3.667
Deviations	0.0603	0.6903	0.1568

Chi-square
The total chi-square is 0.9074, 3 df, p = 0.82. This means that the probability of obtaining a *closer* outcome in regard to effect size is 0.18—which is quite unremarkable.

CHOICE DISTRIBUTION MATRIX: DISCREPANCIES

Berger points out that five of the ten rows of the choice distribution matrix (Table 6) show unequal numbers of targets sent and received, although the row

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