

Reconciling the Paranormal with Mainstream Scientific Thinking

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Ever since the emergence of the study of the paranormal it has had a tentative at best relationship with mainstream science – by definition the study of phenomena outside the orbit of scientific explanation, the study of the paranormal has been largely rejected by the scientific community – after all, they are experiences which lie at odds with the rational and empirical approach through which science defines itself. The presence of a large number of charlatans and frauds – particularly during its early Victorian years – certainly didn't help matters, and their continuing presence to this day serves to add fuel to the fires of rational skepticism.

The existence of paranormal phenomena such as spirits, ghosts, telekinesis and extrasensory perception are often labelled pseudoscience; “bad science” couched in scientific terms, exemplified by the various attempts to build machinery to measure such phenomena which bear an unfortunate resemblance to the gadgets found in movies such as [Ghostbusters](#). And yet, while parapsychology and other similar fields have made little progress towards reconciling the paranormal with mainstream scientific thinking, recent developments seem to suggest that a reconciliation may be something the future will bring.

A problem with the empirical approach to “proving” the existence of paranormal events is the reliance on the use of technologies available to man to measuring these phenomena – for instance, the fact that no one has ever produced a verified photograph of a ghost or spirit is taken as ample evidence for their non-existence, while the notion that

perhaps the machine itself is incapable of capturing something that exists on a different plane of reality is rarely considered. But this problem is gradually being increasingly addressed by a growing number of scientists, many of whom who are at the cutting edge of consciousness research, recognizing the crucial link between how the mind works in relationship to paranormal experiences.

Dr. Gary Schwartz, educated at Harvard and a former teacher at Yale, and the author of *The Afterlife Experiments: Breakthrough Scientific Evidence of Life After Death*, studies the phenomenon of predicting the future and has discovered a number of people he considers to be “the real deal.” Predictably facing criticism from skeptical colleagues, he is building a compelling argument for the reality of precognition in the context of a broad progression of conscious stages in the human brain.

Dr. Alan Sanderson is just one person currently leading the way in the new field of spirit science – what is commonly known as exorcism is now moving in a direction which seeks to make it a scientifically accepted phenomenon, drawing heavily on our collective psychological history and belief in spirits and possessions, in essence updating the rituals of expurgation which cultures conducted throughout history and lending them scientific credibility. Known as spirit release therapy, psychologist Dr. Terence Palmer described the process as one which “sits uncomfortably between the disbelief of a materialist secular society and the subjective experience of spirit possession: whether that experience is a symptom of psychosis, symbolic representation, socio-cultural expectation or a veridical manifestation.”

Palmer resurrected and expanded on the ideas of Frederick W. H. Myers, who in the late 19th century challenged the limitations of science and posited a radiation or energy as the source for telepathic phenomena – while his ideas weren't

formulated with any academic rigor, he was correct to observe that science struggled to understand some of the basic functions of consciousness and was therefore ill-equipped to proclaim phenomena beyond their understanding as irrelevant or non-existent. Only a science which takes full account of the breadth and range of human conscious experience would be capable of coming to terms with the paranormal. Or, as Palmer would write over a century later, "To permit the accommodation of all human experience into a broader scientific framework is a scary prospect for several reasons. But fear is the cause of all human suffering, and only when medical science puts aside its own fears of being proven wrong can it treat sickness effectively by showing how fear is to be remedied."

Another scientist from a very different tradition to Palmer has also recently posited a scientific explanation for seemingly inexplicable phenomena. Bernard Carr, an astronomy and mathematics professor from Queen Mary University of London, has suggested that the idea of the multi-dimensional universe could explain how and why such phenomena occur – manifesting outside the realm of the four dimensions with which we are familiar, such experiences represent our low-level consciousness interacting with entities on a higher dimensional level, Since the concept is in its infancy – and open to endless debate and speculation – we have yet to develop the relevant tools, both literally and emotionally, to fully grasp the implications.

These may amount to only tentative steps towards a final reconciliation between science and the paranormal, but despite persistent criticisms from some mainstream materialistic scientists and the inevitable problem of securing funding for such "controversial" research, the renewed research into areas from qualified scientists, previously dismissed outright as pseudoscience, is clearly a step in the right direction. Whatever this line of enquiry reveals, the fact that it is being explored with renewed vigor – and from an increasing

variety of respected scientific circles – is something to be heartened by. All of us at some time in our lives experience phenomena which feel dislocated from the physical – perhaps these will become better understood sooner than we realise.

About the Author

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