

PSI PHENOMENA, HEMISPHERIC DOMINANCE AND THE EXISTENTIAL SHIFT

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Parapsychology is an unorthodox science, so I trust parapsychologists should be inured to unorthodox propositions—even to those affecting their own specialty. Let me, therefore, begin with three somewhat dogmatic statements. First, I submit that half of our science—the one concerned with experimental evidence of the ESP or PK type—is largely based on statistically significant, but psychologically meaningless, if not irrelevant, evidence. The other half, the evidence of the spontaneous type, is psychologically significant, relevant and meaningful, but does not meet the criteria of strict scientific validation. Thirdly, I submit that the judicious treatment of the two sets of data nevertheless adds up to a scientifically testable and existentially meaningful picture of psychic reality. To be more specific, it presents us with the dichotomy of two different forms of psi, tied together by what I described as the existential shift (1971).

But, first, a few critical comments on the relevance to our issue of the much quoted notion of altered states of consciousness will be in order. We have to realize that, more often than not, ESP occurs without conscious awareness and PK without deliberate volition. They are facilitated by such minus-functions of the ego (or of the left hemisphere) as REM sleep, relaxation, sensory deprivation, etc. Yet, I pointed out elsewhere (1975) that such incidents are structurally rather than dynamically determined. They are due to the random occurrence of minor flaws in the screening or inhibitory functions of the reticular formation in the brain stem (and perhaps other neural structures) whose job it is to protect the individual from being flooded and overwhelmed by the influx of external stimuli—both sensory and extrasensory. It has been described as the Bergsonian filter (1914). By the same token, it is geared to prevent the fitful, chaotic discharge of motor impulses, both “ordinary” and psychokinetic, that would wreak havoc in a subject’s social and physical environment and exhaust the organism’s energies like a Roman candle.

While little is known about the *modus operandi* of the controlling neural centers designed to put a stop to such contingencies, it is safe to assume that they are due to a cluster of neurons caught napping at their jobs or to the irregular firing of others. Occasional irregularities of this order can be described as *flaw-determined*. They are paralleled by corresponding capricious bursts of psi-hitting or psi-missing.

The predisposing factors of what I described as *need-determined*, psychologically significant and dynamically meaningful spontaneous incidents are an altogether different matter. The available evidence indicates that such events are facilitated by specific interpersonal configurations—e.g., relationships between parent and child, husband and wife, therapist and patient, the medium and her sitters, the experimenter and his subjects. While flaw-determined psi events result from a haphazard malfunction of the protective screen, need-determined events are thus of a purposeful, goal-oriented nature. They are reaching out for physical or emotional contact, human or non-human, for closeness and intimacy with man's social or physical environment and the universe at large.

What, then, is the significance of the distinction between flaw-determined and need-determined phenomena? First, it clears up the confusion, still prevalent in the literature, concerning the nature and the predisposing factors of psi incidents in general. If our whole sensory-motor organization is geared to excluding psi from our ordinary mode of experience, it can only be expected that, by and large, flaw-determined experimental incidents of the ESP or PK type are predicated on mental relaxation, trance states, the REM phase of sleep and other minus functions, organic or functional, global or circumscribed, or in the suspension of what Henri Bergson called attention to life. I noted that, by contrast, need-determined incidents are predicated on the individual's actively reaching out for contact and interaction with persons or objects in his social or physical environment. In one case, we are dealing with chance that is apt to be defeated by volition, in the other with volition, conscious or unconscious, that may or may not be aided by chance. In any case, the two types of psi incidents are predicated on two antithetical mental sets or existential positions.

My second point is that the distinction between flaw- and need-determined phenomena is, nevertheless, by no means unconditional and absolute. Virtually all successful ESP and PK tests of the forced-choice type show that they, too, are facilitated by the subject's and/or the experimenter's need for the experiment to succeed. They

call for a favorable experimenter-subject relationship; for the positive attitudes of Schmeidlerian sheep; for the individual agent's or percipient's emotionally charged motivations, conscious or subconscious, for his subliminal intentions to produce results. Failing this, flaw-determined extra-chance scores are rarely sustained; initial successes peter out, showing the characteristic decline or extinction effects that were a bane of the early Duke experiments. Indeed, Charles Tart (1976) has shown that giving proper motivation and immediate reinforcement of the subject's correct responses counteracts this tendency and greatly improves scores. In effect, his approach tends to transform flaw-determined incidents into need-determined events. Failing this, a foolproof procedure that worked well in one laboratory would fail to be duplicated in another.

We should realize, however, that such failures merely bear out once more the basic proposition that under ordinary conditions our whole mental make-up is well protected against the influx of ESP into conscious awareness or against the breakthrough of PK into our motor behavior. They are discouraged and repressed because they have little or no survival value at the present stage of our cultural or biological development.

What, then, is responsible for the occasional intrusion of need-determined ESP into our conscious awareness, or for the fitful breakthrough of PK incidents into our behavioral repertoire? The triggering factor is what I described as the existential shift (1971, 1976). I pointed out in several articles that, as a general rule, human personality is geared to functioning on the standard Euclidean, Newtonian, Darwinian or Freudian level of adaptation. Personality operates as a system open for business with its time-tested physical and social environment, but is stubbornly and consistently closed to psi. On the standard level of functioning, external stimuli reach us through the "ordinary" channels of sensation and are conducive to motor or automatic discharge within the same closed and virtually self-sealing system.

But it is a matter of pragmatic experience that under specific, more or less well-defined psychodynamic conditions, we are capable of shifting our mode of existence to an altogether different level of adaptation. It is a shift in which we relinquish our customary defensive position towards psi phenomena, while at the same time paying less attention to our time- and space-bound Newtonian, Darwinian or Freudian universe. I noted that such a shift is usually correlated with a subtle change in a given interpersonal configuration or in the

person-to-world relationship. It is a shift that is apt to recapture, if only for fleeting moments, man's original symbiotic closeness with parents, parent surrogates, or sibling figures, with things animate and inanimate, and ultimately with the universe at large.

Yet it should also be noted that the existential shift is by no means confined to dramatic alterations of our state of consciousness, but includes changes below the threshold of consciousness. More often than not, both ESP and PK operate on a wholly unconscious plane. They are closely related to subliminal perception or what can be described as subliminal intentions. In short, the existential shift encompasses alterations of consciousness as well as of our standard behavioral repertoire. It includes, yet goes far beyond, "altered states of consciousness."

I have also stressed that the existential shift is by no means confined to the field proper of parapsychology. It is involved in the switch from magic to science; from the sacred to the profane; from the religious to the mundane outlook; from prose to poetic diction; from the Parthenon to the Gothic cathedral. On the physiological plane, it may involve the change from wakefulness to the REM sleep and from left hemisphere dominance to the dominance of the right hemisphere.

Indeed, the last few years have afforded a growing body of clinical and experimental evidence pointing to the part played by neurophysiological factors in the existential shift. This is illustrated by a brain-injured patient of mine (1931) with a lesion in his left parieto-occipital region. His presenting symptom was an optical agnosia, combined with temporal and spatial disorientation and disturbance of his drawing ability. In this case, I was struck by the close similarity of his drawings with the telepathic drawings of the Warcollier and Upton Sinclair type. My patient's drawings showed profound distortions and disorganization of shapes, figures and forms, with a tendency to left and right reversal. At the same time, his sight, his peripheral visual functions, were unimpaired.

Cases of this type suggest that the patient's disorganized and distorted drawings are the products of a still functional right hemisphere, if and when the left side of the brain has been put out of action by an existing brain injury. By the same token it can be argued that a would-be percipient's groping attempts to catch a glimpse and draw a picture of a telepathic target, is likewise due to the logical and analytic shortcomings of the right hemisphere engaged in the processing of telepathic or clairvoyant stimuli. The recent pioneering contributions of Sperry (1964), Bogen (1969) and Gazzaniga (1967),

point in the same direction. So do the experimental studies of Braud and Braud (1974), Broughton (1976) and others whose studies are more specifically concerned with the part played by the right hemisphere in the origin of psi phenomena.

The fact is that the right hemisphere seems to be innately less capable of performing the standard logical, analytic and verbal operations which have become the preserve of the left hemisphere in the right-hander. As compared with its intellectually better endowed counterpart, it has a low I.Q. On the other hand, the right hemisphere, usually considered the dumbbell among the two, seems to be superior in tasks requiring intuition, creativity—and ESP. It has a higher Psi-Q, as it were.

There is one more feature that has to be added to the credit side of the right side of the brain. My clinical experience with patients suffering from left-sided hemiplegia (1931) indicates that it is damage to the right side which is responsible for the sense of “hemi-depersonalization,” for the strangeness, imperception of defect (so-called anosognosia) affecting the paralyzed or hemi-anesthetic side of such patients. Conversely, it seems to be the right hemisphere which imparts the sense of reality, of apodictic certainty, on its side-specific intuitions, on the patient’s dreamlike, hallucinatory or delusional experiences, defying all attempts at their refutation. The left hemisphere knows all the answers to questions of grammar, syntax, algebra and geometry. It is a superb digital and analog computer, storing, processing and retrieving messages fed to it from the outside world. But it lacks the inner certainty, the existential dimension that would lift it above the level of a robotlike precision instrument. In contrast, the right hemisphere may have all its information askew, but it never lacks the courage of its convictions that “it has gotten it all right.” It is wholly and unconditionally committed to the authenticity of its experiences. Clearly, this is the stuff which prophets, religious reformers, mystics and madmen are made of.

It goes without saying, however, that personalities of this order are no longer subject to the vagaries of the existential shift. They have attained an existential position in its own right which they are unwilling or unable to relinquish. This is in contrast to ordinary mortals who may sway toward—or be swayed away from—one position to the other, from Castaneda’s “ordinary” to “non-ordinary” reality, yet who want to make sure they have a return ticket from the “altered” to the “habitual” state of consciousness. Whether or not current attempts at methodical training will succeed in imparting a new dimension of freedom on the

right hemisphere and in bringing about a harmonious cooperation of Plato's legendary Two Horses with their Charioteer, is an open question. We have to bear in mind, however, that it took thousands of years of cultural conditioning for the left hemisphere to attain its present predominance and monopoly in intellectual tasks. There is no telling how long it will take for the right hemisphere to catch up with its senior partner.

DISCUSSION

SARGENT: Well, as you can imagine, I wasn't terribly comfortable with some of these arguments. Recently, a great deal of work has been reported with the subject Bill Delmore, which shows that the structure of his errors is similar in ESP tasks to that in subliminal tasks. Is this, as you say, statistically significant but psychologically meaningless? There is a great deal of work by Rex Stanford which is completely ignored here on need-related psi. Is this psychologically irrelevant? It seems to me you have an entirely false view of what the nature of the experimental evidence is and how we go about getting it, and I'm afraid that we seem to have, in some instances here, some examples of rather flaw-determined arguments.

EHRENWALD: I left myself an escape hatch. You didn't notice it. The escape hatch is, of course, that the need- and flaw-determined phenomena are only conceptually so strictly separated in real life. Flaw-determined psi wouldn't even occur if it, too, would not meet certain needs. Yes, there is a new breed of experimenters who try to do justice to this dichotomy. Indeed, in some cases they have achieved a harmonious integration of the two alternatives. I didn't go into the literature, though I could have gone back to Gardner Murphy's paper about psi phenomena and human needs. Of course, the very fact that you experiment with your subjects in your lab, meets some of your or your subjects' emotional needs. Failing this, only a few experimental artifacts are likely to happen. Nevertheless, my distinction between the two classes of psi is needed to conceptualize two different extreme positions in the laboratory as opposed to spontaneous cases. In short, I do not see the sharp cleavage between your position and mine. We both stand with one foot in experimental and with the other in the domain of spontaneous reality—with a third leg conceivably footed in the clouds.

SARGENT: All this seems to be a very provocative and unfair

comment—that experimental evidence is largely based on statistically significant but psychologically meaningless, if not irrelevant, evidence. That was just provocative, I thought.

EHRENWALD: This was a hyperbole of mine—a reference to the prototype of Rhine's card-calling tests. His five symbols are psychologically neutral, if not meaningless—even though I myself had found in an informal experiment that a subject looking at a plus sign was reminded of “crosses in a cemetery” or “kisses in a letter.” Still, as I noted in my paper, responses in the classical card-calling experiments are usually due to minor flaws in the Bergsonian filter which screens irrelevant stimuli out of consciousness. This is in contrast to most spontaneous incidents—for instance, in the psychoanalytic situation—which often carry a high emotional charge.

SERVADIO: One important question that has been raised sometimes concerning the psi phenomena during the analytical situation is whether these phenomena disturb or help the analytic work. Now, this question, in my opinion, could be compared to asking whether a door should be opened or closed. It can be either-or, and this could be useful or harmful and this also happens in the psychoanalytic situation. The softening or breakdown of psychological defenses against psi, as you pointed out, can be useful or harmful. In my own personal experience, psi events during analysis have usually been helpful, but this is not always the case. I remember one of my pupils who had a case where, continuously, the patient was producing psi phenomena. He seemed to know paranormally everything that concerned the analyst. So this was really disturbing. And now, one most important question is if we should leave it at that and say that our interest is just to see how a door is functioning. I don't think so. I think there are dangers and, in my opinion, a very human essence is involved and the danger of leaving our inner doors completely blocked is neither superior nor inferior to that of wanting, by hook or crook, that something—but what?—should come in!

TART: I'm still a little bit puzzled over what you mean by “flaw-determined.” In terms of “need-determined,” I can see there is obviously a continuum of motivation. It may be a life or death situation which requires you to make a correct psi choice; it may be, say, an apparently meaningless situation—someone asks you to guess at a pack of Zener cards, but if there's a transference relationship to the experimenter, your success or failure may have a tremendous

emotional charge. I can see that continuum, but where exactly do you call it a "flaw-determined" response? That's what I'm not clear on.

EHRENWALD: I think I'm a little clearer on it, but just a little bit. What I mean to say is this: Yes, it is in the nature of human beings to look to goals, purposes and meanings in human affairs. The fact is that they cannot always be found. Let me give you an example: I have heard thousands of dreams over the years and I have tried to understand them guided by Freudian, Adlerian or Jungian principles. There was supposed to be no chance. Yet it turned out over and over again that I just couldn't find a deeper psychological meaning in certain elements in a given dream. I thought I couldn't find it because I'm too dumb. Then I came to the conclusion that I may be dumb, but I don't find the meaning because there wasn't any. I had to conclude that *some* elements in the manifest dream content may be due to minor neurophysiological accidents—to flaws in the Bergsonian filter, if you like. They are not amenable to psychoanalytic interpretation. We come across the same problem in the psychopathology of everyday life; e.g., in slips of the tongue. Slips of the tongue are supposedly always meaningful, but Freud himself pointed out in an early neurological study that in aphasia, slips of the tongue are partly due to structural defects: to the breakdown of neurons, to the malfunction of synapses, and whatever—they are in part flaw-determined.

TART: So that the need-chain is really so derivative that it's not worth tracing it back. For instance, you might say the exact position of that ashtray in front of you was need-determined to some extent, but it really wouldn't be worth an analysis to determine why the waiter put it in exactly that position compared to every other position on the table.

EHRENWALD: The position of the ashtray is connected with the waiter, and if I have a chance to analyze the waiter and put him on the couch, then I may arrive at some conclusion about his actions. But if I'm dealing with a patient suffering from aphasia and he cannot name a certain object, I have two alternatives. I may assume he cannot name it because he has a grudge against that particular person or object; but there is also the possibility that he can't name him or it because he simply is unable to do so: because he is incapacitated, because there is a flaw, an accident, a microscopic, cerebral or vascular malfunction in his physical make-up. The same may be true for occasional seemingly meaningless, or to our understanding, meaningless chance hits in an experimental series. If we try to analyze it, we may conceivably find the meaning of a given hit. It could conceivably be interpreted in

psychodynamic terms. For instance, a key appearing in a patient's dream carried the markings 1107. It happened to be the markings which I had on my office key. Beautiful! I had discovered the transference angle. But that still did not explain why the dreamer had hit upon that particular element—that particular set of numerals in his dream work. That may have been flaw-determined. There are trillions of keys and numbers in the universe at large—including mine. Why did he pick the number 1107?

TART: If I understand what you're saying, then, there is a very closely determined core of meaningful inter-related needs, but yet there are some things that are so far on the periphery, or so many random variations thrown in, that you can't practically accomplish much with a need-determined analysis there, and many laboratory situations are essentially operating way out on that periphery.

EHRENWALD: Yes, I would say that.

DEAN: I feel compelled to respond to the statement that psi ability does not have survival value in our culture. With my colleagues, I wrote a book called *Executive ESP*, where we tested with a computer scored test the precognitive ability of more than 150 presidents of business companies, or chairmen of the Boards of Directors. The tests showed that they did have it, and the ones who could do well on the test also did very well at making profits for their companies, and the ones who did poorly on the test, did very poorly on profits as well. The book is selling extremely well in its German translation, in Germany and Switzerland. We're getting lots of royalties. It's been translated into Japanese, and it's presently being translated into French. Over the summer, I have been entering into negotiations with the Royal Dutch Shell Company; the director of Management Training is thinking of using the test for the selection of superior decision-makers in the Shell Company, the third largest business in the whole world. I've set up a seminar on this in Tokyo for next Spring, and the former president of the Sanyo Company is going to describe how he has used his ESP ability in decisions for his company. The former president of the Shell Company, has told us over the last few weeks, that he has used sixth sense in his decisions for the Shell Company *all the time*. I cannot let pass the statement that ESP ability has no survival value in our culture. Business depends on it!

EHRENWALD: I would be glad if I could be convinced that their success was due in part to psi. It may have been, but the evidence which we have gotten so far is ambiguous, because I can, with just one remark,

puncture not the experimental facts, of course, but at least their interpretation. How do you know that what you got was not due to doctrinal compliance? That is to say, the experimenter and those involved in the experiments were strongly motivated to prove a point—what great guys they are, and lo and behold, they proved it.

DUPLESSIS: I have been very interested in what you were saying about the Zener cards reception in telepathic experiments. It was a task for Mr. René Warcollier to avoid what is called the “predominance effect.” For instance, he has made many tests, using the Zener cards, to find out if there are some symbols which are more often received than others. He observed that the “stars” which are the most often received in the United States, perhaps because there are stars displayed on the American flag, have not this “predominance effect” in France. Have you observed statistically if the results of Zener cards experiments are the same in different countries of the world?

It is difficult to avoid this phenomena, because the subjects' calls are often influenced by what they are accustomed to have in their environment.

EHRENWALD: I agree with that observation, of course. You have to agree with observations anyway if they are facts. It is usually the interpretation which is controversial. But I was interested in this question, for instance, and I discussed with Dr. Berendt what sort of ESP tests should be done in Israel. We came to the conclusion that, for instance, using the five fruits of the Bible would be more congenial to the subjects in that country than the seemingly meaningless neutral symbols on the Zener cards. The fact is that man is a symbol-making and symbol-reading animal. We will be able to use material that is even meaningless, but is potentially meaningful and do a parapsychological Rorschach test with it. This is why I again come back to my previous position that the strict distinction between flaw-determined and need-determined phenomena is an over-statement and we need it simply as a handle to discuss a certain cleavage in the material.