

GENERAL DISCUSSION DAY TWO

TRIBBE: I just would like to make a comment on two of the recent papers. In Myron Arons' paper he made reference in metaphor to the experience of the stones of Florence elaborating perhaps on the obvious. I just wanted to point out that the history of psychical research is very rich in various types of this sort of thing. You mentioned psychometry in passing. Not only are strong psychics able to literally take stones from archeological digs and spin whole stories about them, date them accurately and so on, but persons who claim no psychic abilities at all can psychometrize with a token object and tell about its origins as well as its owners and so on. For the last 50 years many have spoken of the event for which Conan Doyle coined the term "psychometric apparition." It is not a ghost that is returning and is reacting to its element there, but rather something impregnated into the place replays exactly the same thing every time without variation. And then there is retrocognition. I think you probably were talking about it though you did not use the term. In a very special way I mention this in my book on the Shroud of Turin because there we find that over a period of five or six centuries there were mystics who saw the resurrection event over and over in their experience and wrote about it. And now we find just in the last few years that the Shroud of Turin scientific data validates those retrocognitive visions, so I think that the history of psychical research is rich in this sort of thing and the stones of Florence speaking to you is not that much to be boggled at. I would like also if I may to comment on Elizabeth Mintz's paper and particularly the discussion that it drew with reference to parsimony. I think, perhaps, that the great god Occam may have had a place in the physicalist science of his time, but I think in parapsychology it is shot with all manner of error if we try to apply it too closely. Specifically last year in my article in the fall issue of *Theta* on the facet of parsimony, which has become known as super ESP, I pointed out that it probably was the bugaboo that decided Dr. Rhine 40 years or more ago to abandon survival research as not being scientifically testable or investigatable. But, perhaps, he stopped too soon. Probably a more sensible approach would show that it has no application at all to survival data and that indeed medi-

umistic evidence, which was what the super ESP theory was developed to combat, should have ignored that theory and gone ahead. I think that we are just beginning to make headway in survival research now that the super ESP theory is perhaps not quite as much as the great god Occam would have had it be.

JONES: I have a question for Dr. Mintz. You mentioned what you assumed is a normal bell-shaped curve of psi experienced among the great unwashed and you said that psi ability is trainable.

MINTZ: I did not get your . . .

JONES: That psi ability was trainable or could be developed.

MINTZ: It is my personal belief that accessibility to one's psi ability can be developed. I feel that the ability probably is present in all of us, very likely on the bell-shaped curve like other human traits, but that our ability to receive these impressions which are unconsciously delivered to us by the universe, by other people probably can be developed. The sheep/goat experiment shows that. But whether or not we believe in psi it governs our accuracy of prediction on the Zener cards to some extent. Did I address myself to your question?

JONES: Yes, you did, but I was wondering what would happen to the curve theoretically when people assess themselves in training or whatever skill development courses there might be. What do you think would happen to it? Would there be a skew appreciably that a great many more people would manifest a great many more intuitive or psychic. . . ?

MINTZ: You know that gets into a whole other realm of which I would love to give a talk lasting at least half an hour. I do think that there are certain kinds of people who become preoccupied with the development of psi ability. I am thinking of a woman who became wrapped up in meditation when she found that her guru insisted that she meditate four hours a day. He could not understand why it was hard to do this with two pre-school children and she left the guru, in which I think she was quite correct. It is possible to focus so intensely upon the development of paranormal ability or spirituality that you become rather rude to people around you and not a very good person to work with or live with. I have read somewhere—the Coly's would bear me out—that Mrs. Garrett would discourage people from developing psi ability unless she felt that they were personally mature enough to manage life. Am I correct? Yes, I see you nod. So I think that an effort to develop psi ability simply because it is an exciting adventure might not necessarily be a good idea at all times for all people. I think it may perhaps develop naturally. I think a therapist who takes therapy

very seriously can hardly help develop some psi ability, at least when working with patients.

JONES: When Charley brought up the word "spirits," I was reminded that there is a burgeoning, it is really a growth industry right now, in publishing what is identified as channel information. I am sure that all of us who follow this field observe this. In one of the articles in one of the journals there was some guidance that I carry in my heart, if not in my mind: "Just because someone is dead does not make them smart."

ROCKWELL: Well, to put one more spike into poor William of Occam, I think the parsimony concept that is usually used by critics of parapsychology to say that anything you can do no matter how complicated to avoid creating this entity of psi is of value from the standpoint of reducing parsimony, I think can really get off base. Harry's friend Marks, who did the *Nature* article, wrote a book with Richard Kammann called *The Psychology of the Psychic* in which he makes the incredible (to me) suggestion that the most unreliable data of all are the data of your senses, your own experience. If you stop and think about what that means, the only way anyone can know what is going on in the universe is through the senses. If you do not trust your own senses presumably then you run around and ask other people what their senses tell them. Somehow or other, this is supposed to be more reliable. I think that is the real end of the road for the critics when they come up with that kind of a conclusion.

ISAACS: I agree with you in one sense, but you must concede that human observers are subject to multiple sources of error—that is why we use automated measuring systems. Now I am going to be naughty and defend William of Occam. Why I do so is because two people have criticized him and have used his argument to exclude the super ESP hypothesis in favor of spirits. So your positions are self-contradictory because you have used Occam's razor yourself to say that the spirit hypothesis is a simpler one and therefore more desirable than the more highly complex super ESP one.

NEPPE: Having initiated the parsimony argument I think it is only fair that I do comment. Let me say this: I do not believe that it is probably the most appropriate approach to any form of scientific endeavor. I do not know if one gets any nearer to the truth by saying $A \rightarrow B$ is the true route as opposed to A via C, D, E and B . This is particularly so when flying, for example, from Seattle to Washington where there is only one direct route anywhere and most of the time it is not non-stop. What I am really saying in this frame-work is the fact that it does not say that the most parsimonious or the simplest is the truest. However, it is an assumption that underlies conventional sciences

and in our attempts to meet with conventional sciences in terms of parapsychological endeavor it is worth while bearing in mind that conventional scientific thought might think in that direction. The consequence is that when we put forth arguments which may involve several logical steps, but which may not involve the direct shift in terms of the simplest kinds of hypotheses, we must be able to justify that direction as opposed to going in the more conventional direction. I am not saying that the more conventional direction is the appropriate one or the inappropriate one.

COLLINS: Well, it just happens that like Marshall McLuhan's cameo appearance in the movie *Annie Hall* I have William of Occam right here. The problem of trying to use ideas like parsimony, Occam's Razor and so on is that they are not applicable in practice. I am slightly out of my depth here, but technically you need to remember that there was another thing as well as Occam's Razor and it is called Einstein's Chopper. It has an unfortunate connotation. The point about Occam's Razor and Einstein's Chopper is that they are in tension. I cannot remember which is which, but one of them tells you the rule is to minimize the number of entities in your universe and the other one tells you to minimize the number of relationships in your universe. You find that as you increase the number of entities the universe gets simpler in terms of the way they are related and vice-versa. A simple example is that you have got an incredibly simple theory if you just say God causes everything, which is simple in one way, but very complex in another. It is not straightforward to apply ideas of parsimony at all.

ARONS: Here's the difficulty with that. As a convenience let us take one thing at a time and we will take the thing which seems the simplest for us to test. The first tendency is to be very pragmatic. There is an implicit linearity and criterial type of progress that Boirel a French philosopher noted: that you end up for example with a mentality as in technology in which you say TX1, which was the best that we could get, is now supplanted by TX2 which is even more efficient, faster and so on and so forth. Technology has progressed. Okay. Fine. I could see that as a means of moving toward the kind of linear progress needed to make you see that you are moving in some direction. Boirel pointed out, however, that to take, for example, the world of art you cannot say that impressionism is better than cave drawing by any type of criteria; you can simply say that it is different from cave drawing, so that our progress now is in the form of mind expansion. We have the world of cave drawing *and* the world of impressionism. Neither can be said to be better. If scientists start to take off from the technological model, as long as they remember the price that they are paying for that, I do

not have any difficulty. When they then say that the other types of progress like art and philosophy are pre-sciences, in other words that they (sciences) have outgrown them and they have rendered them obsolete, that is where the problem comes in. Take, for example, language. The whole language philosophy trip we have been on for 20 years has been talking about optimal parsimony, in which language itself, as Aristotle said, has many, many different meanings simultaneously and each meaning gives meaning to the others. Now you do not progress by reducing them down to one meaning because you lose all that is there. If you want to go back to get to the heart of meaning, you have got to go back to that train station of multiple meanings all coming in and all possible. This is the problem I have when they start using Occam's Razor because it is used in such an authoritarian and conclusive way and usually unconsciously.

TART: We have ended up in a very strange place with this discussion of parsimony, so I want to say that premature parsimony is persistently pathological! The rule of parsimony says that when you have two theories that are both equally good at explaining all the data, then it is an esthetic preference to choose the simpler one. Well, in this field we do not have any theories that explain a large part of the data well, much less two of them that are so neck and neck in explaining so much so well that we have to worry about choosing at this point. So where the real thrust of this conference has been illustrating the rich range of things we have to deal with—forget parsimony. Keep it for your salad, but not for the real work at this stage of the game!

TRIBBE: I just wanted to correct a misimpression. I did not say that mediumistic material is simpler than the super ESP theory. I said that the super ESP theory was taken apparently by Rhine and others to block all research into survival. This is not just blocking the mediumistic material as evidence for survival, but about 15 or 20 categories of evidence which can be brought along with mediumistic data. It is the blockage of the research that I was objecting to and that is what my paper in *Theta* last year went into.

ISAACS: Yes, I do take your point and I agree with you. I was delighted to see Emily Williams Cook presenting such an excellent paper at the Dallas PA Convention in 1985 on new methods of survival research, which include some of those trends, those lines of research that were blocked. I welcome the freeing up of research in that area because it is very important. I feel very excited that those forms of research may once again be started. I would like to see them go forward because they are all necessary in order to get a grip on this question.

STANFORD: Back, I think, around '64 Gardner Murphy wrote some-

thing that may have relevance to some of the things we have been discussing here. This will be a very rough paraphrase, but he said something to the effect that perhaps some day those of us interested in psi research will learn to create the circumstances, the environment, in which the psi phenomena may have their own life and may express themselves there. This brings up a number of thoughts. First of all, I am very grateful to Elizabeth Mintz for bringing to my mind today some of the things that I had read about years ago, some of which I had even forgotten about the psychoanalytic writings on psi. It is out there in that kind of world, where people with real needs and concerns, sometimes life and death ones, have to deal with their daily problems, that we encounter psi in some dramatic and interesting situations. We may not know exactly what to point the finger at and say that this is psi or this is not psi, but I do not think that is the point. I am going to make one final point, but let me lead into it by saying you have heard a good bit of talk here about the training of psi. I am not commenting upon that in any positive or negative sense in what I am about to say. But there is a possibility that we who are very experimentalist are very interested in possibly training or getting large magnitudes of psi. I would love to have those larger magnitudes of psi, but there is one I think we tend to forget about when we get in the lab and we are thinking about how we are going to train psi and how we are going to manipulate it and harness it and make it work like an ox and in the directions that we want it to go and so forth. It is very easy to forget about the larger picture that is out there, the psi that is outside of our laboratory. Occasionally I have had the feeling that some parapsychologists almost think that psi exists only in the laboratory. I want to suggest that many of us starting off in our careers in parapsychology were interested in the phenomena precisely because we saw the chance that scientifically there were some really important cracks in our cosmic eggs that could happen through studying parapsychology, through studying the phenomena. But we need to be very careful. In some ways the more technology we build up in our psi research and the more we think we have it pinned down, we may tend to ignore what is happening out there in the world. Sometimes that may be because we are a little afraid that we do not have the constructs to deal with what is going on out there. I will give you one example just to bring this home. Some years ago—and I am going to try to prevent any kind of identification of the parapsychologist involved in this story—I had a book that someone had given me that showed pictures of an ostensible apparition of the Virgin Mary atop a Coptic church in Egypt. I have no idea whether these pictures are genuine or not, but it was claimed that thousands of

people had observed the apparition there and it had been photographed and that there had been miraculous cures. My reaction was that I have not the slightest idea whether this evidence is valid, but, by golly, if it is true all of us are going to be stood on our heads, and it would be very important to find out if it was true. So I took this to a parapsychologist who I thought might have the wherewithall to perhaps pursue this, raise some funds or something of that kind to go over and check some of these things. I got the book back the next day with a note that said "I'm not interested, there's no documentation." Well, that was what I was hoping to see, whether he or she could not document all this or debunk it. But what left me kind of breathless was the notion that, if there is even the chance that we have something to learn from the phenomena out there, maybe sometimes we need to confront those phenomena head on. They may be scary, they may be difficult to cope with. We may not be able to experimentalize with them right away, but at least perhaps we had better listen to them and see if they point the way. The psi phenomena have their own existence. They have their own rules of life, if you will. To turn back to Gardner Murphy, we do need to try more to find out the environment in which the psi phenomena live and breathe and sometime we may need to go out there to find out.

KRIPPNER: Well, I think that Rex Stanford's comments were an excellent way to end the discussion.