

## AFTERNOON GENERAL DISCUSSION DAY TWO

MORRIS: One of the ways that I have tended to look at this is to divide it up into three levels: anomaly, psi and then a theoretical concept of some sort. People can come into this field from the top down with a theoretical notion that has them interested, the mind/body problem, for example. Or they can come in from the bottom up starting with anomalies. Somewhere in the middle is where I have been putting the concept of psi. It is capable of being operationally defined and it is more than just an anomaly. There is a body of partial information about a set of concepts here. Not enough to warrant theory yet, but enough to make it more than just an anomaly. It almost seems to me that you can order the three of them in a row as knowledge increases: anomaly, psi and theory. An anomaly is an event that is unexplained by those who observe it and about which they seem to have relatively little knowledge. Any anomaly is capable of either going eventually in the direction of psi and some new set of theoretical terms or trailing off into the existing corpus of knowledge. If you go one step up into psi, you can have a set of operationally definable terms that still do not call for a specific theory and are still capable of trailing off either in their entirety or partly into the organized corpus of knowledge. And if we can make clear to people in general, whether they be official critics or not, that when we use the term "psi" we mean more than an anomaly, but we do not yet posit a theory, then we may accomplish something. There is a parallel in the Society for Scientific Exploration with regard to the people there who are interested in celestial anomalies. This can be viewed from the top down as the question of whether there is extraterrestrial intelligence, or from the bottom up as anomaly—when I look up I do not understand everything I see and they have the same kind of dichotomy. Some people say that everybody interested in celestial anomalies assumes extraterrestrial intelligence, whereas many of them are simply saying that they do not understand what those things are and would like to find out.

PALMER: Despite what you just said, I still do not see the value of making a distinction between psi and anomaly. I do not see what we are gaining with the third category. What I would like to emphasize

and what bothers me about "psi" is the way we are using it so that it does double duty. We use it indiscriminately as something to be explained and as an explanation. That is the main problem that I want to get rid of. There may be different ways to do that and I would like to talk to you some more about your ideas on that.

ROLL: I wonder if the critics are really worried about anomalies, things that do not fit in. I suspect that they know what this is all about. I also suspect that we really know what it is all about on some level. We may not know it in detail, but we certainly have some good ideas, whether or not they are spelled out in great detail and with commitment to theories and concepts. The minimum you can say about psi is that it involves relationships and connections between people and between people and their world. That is the minimum. These connections have very significant implications for human relations and human responsibilities. If they are what they seem to be from our work, they carry immense implications and I think that is a significant part of the worry. There is a commitment there. There is an implicit change in human relations, human responsibility and ethics.

I would like to go back a little. There are a couple of things that need to be spelled out a bit, that I have difficulty with. One is the concept of goal-orientation and the other is the concept of boundaries, which of course are very central to all of this. Debbi noted that we have operational theories and John also brought them in. We can clarify or help to locate this kind of conceptualization in relation to a systems theoretical approach with a biological basis. In biological theories and in chemical theories time has an arrow, time moves in only one direction. This is one of the points that Prigogine emphasizes. I think in dealing with life, including life after death and certainly including psi as an expression of living systems, there is a past, present and future. Time moves in one direction and so of course our conceptualization is affected by that. I would add parenthetically that the findings of precognition, as Bob Morris and Nancy Sondow and others, myself included, have indicated, are quite consistent with a conceptualization of time as having an arrow. Then, let us just explore this concept of goal-orientation. Our activities here are goal-oriented; my talking, listening, taking a glass and so forth. We want to do something, we have a certain purpose, a certain goal, we do it and we do not know how we accomplish it. Now, as we examine that situation we know through centuries of scientific exploration that there is an understandable process; we now understand how these things are accomplished. We understand how we achieve our goals and that there are mechanisms and processes that account for that. So, similarly, in speculating about a psi

system, one would suppose that there are understandable processes whereby psi is accomplished. We do not have to know these processes to reach our goals. We do not have to know those aspects of the system, because we are part of the system, thus we can accomplish psi. At the same time, as scientists we can understand psi by plotting, exploring, investigating the situation. Goal-orientation in that limited sense fits into an overall picture, rather than being the concept of a set goal, that then does something mysterious. I think it is probably the second one that you were addressing before, some other aspects of goal-orientation.

WEINER: If I understand your point, and I very well may not, some of the studies that have been cited to support the idea of psi being goal-oriented, have the difficulty that you are referring to. If we make an analogy with reaching for a glass you would say: "This is my goal, this is what I want to do." We do not know how we do it, yet at the same time there is a mechanism for it; we do not have to posit any kind of a mystical principle to explain it. When that analogy is extrapolated in parapsychology, it does not matter how difficult the task is going to be. Now, in the analogy of reaching out for a glass, you can say that although we may not understand the mechanism, we can still hold up the glass. But can we hold up a table, a room, a building? This is a bad analogy, because I do not wish to talk in terms of PK's strength here, I do not wish to say that PK could lift up a building, but rather to talk in terms of the difficulty or complexity of the task PK may accomplish. The fact that there are gradations in the difficulty of a task suggests that even if we do not know what the mechanisms are, they are important in some sense. What the proponents of the goal-oriented models seem to say (and I would agree with Dr. Schouten that we do not have the data base to make this kind of extrapolation) is that it does not matter at all.

I find your comment—that in systems theory what seems goal-oriented at one level of a system might have a mechanistic explanation at another—to be quite interesting. At this point I do not have any comment about how that might relate to psi phenomena other than to say that I think it is an intriguing idea and could be worked with. Have I addressed your point?

ROLL: Yes, you did, indeed. I remember also one of your other illustrations of this mixture of an ESP and PK task that seems complex and I think that is another aspect of it. It seems complex, but actually that may not be a complex task within a systems theoretical approach. Lifting a building might be a complex task so there is that aspect too.

GIESLER: John, let us go back to your discussion of constructs in

parapsychology. I am still confused, but I am making progress. I am addressing you, Bob Morris, and Sybo Schouten at the same time. I could go to the field and I could describe a very odd event that either I observe with my own eyes or that is reported to me by an informant or a native whom I am studying. Let us suppose that the event seems odd to me; it does not fit with what I would expect. Right there is a construct. But before I go on, let us just assume that I tried as well as I could to describe the event (trying to minimize interpretations) that I observed or that is told to me. If it is told to me, merely the *way* that it is told is going to be construct-laden because of the beliefs of the person telling me. Those beliefs plus the event actually are the "psi phenomenon" I learn about. My point in relation to your ideas is that I think we are going to have to get back to the most basic levels of the psi experiencers' constructs to see whether the constructs are valid or not or what the role they play is, as opposed to forging ahead with *our* constructs of these events and depending on *our* interpretation of the experiencers' constructs to do lab research with experimental designs that *mimic these events in the field*, or better, *mimic our or the experiencers' constructs* through which we learn the event. In other words, I see a kind of circular attack here. You want to perceive what you study as "anomalies" rather than "psi" per se, so that you avoid the shaping inherent in the use of the construct "psi." But you intend to study the "anomalies" via the designs of the experimental laboratory that are so founded on the "psi constructs." Thus, I cannot see how you could essentially describe a true "anomaly," as if now the word designated something without a construct, via the experimental designs of the lab or, shall I say, to the degree that one could describe the original spontaneous event in its natural context. It seems we could do what you are talking about and should, back at step one in the field or with spontaneous cases, but that if your study of anomalies is in the lab you begin a few steps ahead with several more layers of constructs.

PALMER: That is a real can of worms. I am not sure I understand what you are saying. I think I know what you are getting at and I welcome the comment because it is something I need to deal with. I should not pretend that we can be totally objective at any level. Getting beyond implicit conceptualization into explicit conceptualization, that is what I am referring to. In other words, once I accept the implicit theory-ladenness of my observational terms, then I make the observations as I would in an ordinary experiment where an average experimenter is simply not going to worry about the theory-ladenness of his observational terms. What I am talking about is the level of theorizing that he would deal with explicitly.

GIESLER: Yes, I understand your suggestion—remove constructs at the top layer and leave the other layers intact. Well, at least we have gotten at it a bit. All right, thanks, John.

MORRIS: It seems to me that there have been three main themes at this conference. One has been the emphasis on the need for a conceptual sharpening in the field. Another has been an interest in increasing the exploration of the full range of human experience, both in the field and under controlled laboratory circumstance. A third is the area of strategies and problems of application. I have tended to be more identified with the last of those three, at least in terms of my formal presentation. I would like to say that I am clearly very much in favor of applications. It is the dominant reason that I am in the field. I am not interested in the theoretical aspects. I am in this because I think it has the opportunity to enhance the quality of people's lives, to enhance human communication for the public good. I think that it is important that we give as much thought as we can to the host of potential problems that lie ahead for us with both the joys and sorrows of making the attempts of transition into application. I can get very excited about it. I like Bill Roll's notion of application as psi-conductive. I like a lot of the attempts that are getting organized here. One of the things that concerns me is the question of generating scenarios of what is likely to happen next. One specific area of concern is that I have come to identify my own involvement in science as a public endeavor. Science tends in general, but with plenty of exceptions, to be a publicly conducted endeavor with public evaluation of results, with public development of procedures and overt communication. When one gets into the applied mode sometimes that stays public; often, however, it becomes a private endeavor. It becomes a proprietary endeavor. It becomes an endeavor in which there is not full and open evaluation and assessment of the procedures that are used. And I would just like to encourage us all to continue to figure as best we can how to enable this transition to take place in a way that really is going to match the public good.

MISHLOVE: I would like to make a comment that would wrap things up a little bit from my perspective. I am just reviewing in my mind now all of the papers that have been presented in the last two days and there is really a very broad picture that has been presented. The theme of this conference has been *CURRENT TRENDS IN PSI RESEARCH* and some of the trends indicate that we are dealing with a process or phenomenon that has the potential for interfering with machines, has the potential for healing biological organisms—a variety of applied uses have been suggested. It may incorporate human consciousness outside of the body or the experience or perception of that. It may

include death, near-death experiences and even beyond death. It may involve the penetration of the dream state. There has been a suggestion that psi may in some way be related to omniscience and that it may interface with many other disciplines. What has also come up is that we create our own barriers to understanding the psi process, both because of our conceptual inadequacies and because of the inadequacies of our own language. It seems as if we are almost better at describing what it is not than what it is. There is also an enormous social barrier that faces us in having this phenomenon understood. In summarizing all of these elements that have been brought to bear in this conference I would like to try and go back a little bit to a systems approach. For me the systems approach suggests that the starting point is to see things in the largest possible context. One of the concepts which is central to the systems approach is sometimes called cybernetics, sometimes called autopoiesis. It has to do with a system becoming changed through obtaining feedback about itself. In effect, the large social system of which parapsychology is part is going through that process. Science is part of that process. Parapsychology is a very significant part of that process as well. And we can see from the presentations that have been made that, should the breakthroughs that we are all seeking be accomplished, it would have an enormous impact, possibly disturbing the homeostasis of the social system within which we exist. I think we need to be very sensitive to that and, perhaps because of that fact, appreciative of some of the difficulties that we ourselves are facing. They are probably healthy. When people like Sybo suggest that what we really need to do is almost turn around in the other direction and build bridges and work very slowly and carefully to link up with the extremely rationalist perspective, that is healthy.

ROU.: I would like to express the appreciation of the group here to Eileen Coly, Robert and Lisette and the Parapsychology Foundation for arranging this wonderful get-together and this type of meeting. We do not have any other meetings like this in the field, where a few of us can get together and intensively explore selective areas and also the situation of only having people come who really are interested to participate. It is a wonderful occasion for all of us to be here in this exciting city and we even have a World's Fair here this year. We have been very restrained in our appreciation for each other, but let us now express our appreciation to the Parapsychology Foundation.

ANGOFF: Those kind words bring us to the end of this meeting. The Parapsychology Foundation thanks all of you. Ladies and gentlemen, the Thirty-third Annual International Conference of the Parapsychology Foundation is adjourned.