

SISTER, CAN YOU PARADIGM? A FEMININE PERSPECTIVE ON PARAPSYCHOLOGY

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Some time ago, I became disenchanted with my own practice in the dominant paradigm in which I was educated as a scientist in conventional biophysics. I had difficulty with certain aspects of conventional science, including its epistemology and methodology, especially when applied to the study of humans. My disenchantment extended to some of the psi research I had done, and in part even stemmed from it. I saw serious limitations to mechanical reductionism as well as the psychological viewpoint assumed by the scientific method, that is, the separation of the observer from the observed. The latter seemed too limited for research on psi and human systems generally. I stopped doing research in the field because I sensed that documenting psi under such conditions was absurd. More importantly, significant work needed to be done at the foundations of science.

My earlier published work (see Rubik, 1992 for an overview) on human volitional effects on target biological systems included studies on healers, including the late Olga Worrall. We studied effects of intention to heal along with laying-on-of-hands on damaged bacterial cultures, using conventional scientific protocol with considerable attention given to experimental design and methodology. On occasion, we found positive healer effects on the bacteria under a variety of conditions using growth and motility inhibitors. However, we faced some unreported difficulties in that work that spanned a period of several years, including difficulty in replication with Worrall in the third experiment. Novelty was clearly as important, both in maintaining her interest and in her manifesting effects on bacteria, as was a good breakfast and being in the "right" mood. On several occasions, under double-blind conditions, we also recorded anecdotal evidence of Worrall's ability to remotely ascertain the status of the bacterial cultures, data that was unplanned in our experimental protocol and was, therefore, by strict scientific methodology, unreportable. It became clear that there were human factors not easily controlled for, irreproducibilities, and qualitative

anecdotal data that were particularly meaningful for Worrall but that were scientifically meaningless because a "hard nosed" approach of strict protocol did not accommodate these.

However, upon further reflection, I came to realize that the approach and methodologies of mainstream science were developed for the physical world at a particular time when science was liberated from the shackles of religious dogma. As such, it may reflect a cultural and historical slant that we need to reexamine with modern eyes.

Physical theory developed for the inanimate realm may be inadequate to account for some of the most profound features of life, such as consciousness and psi, which challenge the dominant paradigm of reductionism. Furthermore, the foundations of physical science may not be entirely appropriate for the human sciences, of which parapsychology is one. One example is that causal relations—cause and effect—are important in physics, and are appropriate for machines and for limited aspects of the physical world, but the conventional notion of linear causality may be inappropriate in the realm of life. On the other hand, some feel that parapsychology has not progressed much because of the lack of an appropriate mechanism for psi. In my opinion, this is a case of "physics envy."

Conventional science presents, I believe, a lopsided description of nature, which lacks the feminine archetype and is dominated by a stereotypically masculine ideology that is unemotional, detached from the object of measurement, and so-called "objective." I question the objectivity of modern science, colored, as it is, by the values, beliefs, and the orientation of the Western white middle class men who developed it. Furthermore, I question the very idea of objectivity itself. Human endeavors necessarily reflect human concerns. Science is hardly neutral, lacking, as it does, the feminine archetype: It is unbalanced. Much modern parapsychology, despite the fact that it is dealing with the "soft" and human dimensions, has simply adopted the tenets of conventional science. Perhaps this is one factor contributing to the apparent lack of progress in the field in recent years.

Let me illuminate the ways in which the feminine archetype may be incorporated into parapsychology to yield a more balanced science. How can we deal with optimizing psychological variables, which are so critical to the outcome of psi research, or better, how can we facilitate a feeling of wholeness, a profound experience with a sense of expanded

awareness that seems indispensable to psi manifesting? One is by involving our participants in the experimental design. Another is by sharing a meal together, for being of one "body" makes us more of one "mind." Another is not to treat our participants like laboratory rats, putting them through thousands of trials that yield statistically significant results that are humanly insignificant.

Most importantly, we need to examine the foundations of conventional science—the assumptions, the scientific method, the criteria of replicability and reproducibility, etc.—in relation to parapsychology and what we know and believe about psi. If the standard scientific approach is inadequate, as I believe it is, we must reveal this and move forward to develop new foundations. At the least, I think we will need to develop a qualitative methodology for parapsychology that is experimentally sound and yields psi effects under optimized controlled conditions that are convincing and satisfying to participants as well as experimenters. Humanistic and transpersonal psychology may be helpful in this regard. We need to further attend more to the inner realm in our approach and data taking, documenting personalities and states of consciousness by both subjective and objective measures.

Although quantum theory, with its interpretation of the interaction of the observer and the observed, may seem promising as the basis for a new epistemology for psi, there is still considerable confusion over its interpretations among its scholars. I think that we need to go beyond these. We need a new cognitive structure to circumvent the paradoxes of quantum theory, one whose vision goes beyond any of the conventional interpretations. This new vision may be our greatest hope for building a bridge from parapsychology to conventional scientific thought. Feminist thinking, through asking new questions from a different perspective, may arrive at fresh insights in this area. In short, my view is that psi is a fundamental, because I believe that mind and matter are fundamentally interconnected. Moreover, I believe that one's beliefs or expectations determine the extent to which one experiences this interconnectedness. Those who assume that mind and matter are distinct and unrelated are less able to experience psi.

Finally, a feminine approach, together with the masculine one that has already been well developed, once integrated, will birth a gender-balanced science of the whole human that will embrace all the extraordinary abilities of humans, including psi.

REFERENCE

- Rubik, B. (1992). Volitional effects on a bacterial system. In B. Rubik (Ed.), *The interrelationship between mind and matter* (pp. 169-190). Philadelphia, PA: Center for Frontier Sciences at Temple University.