
PARAPSYCHOLOGY AND THE "ULTIMATE REALITY"

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When we use the expression "The Philosophy of . . ." we usually mean that from the discoveries and the achievements of a science, we can obtain or suggest conclusions and views that go beyond purely scientific ascertainments or constructions. For instance, many biological discoveries have encouraged some scientific writers to expound a "philosophy of biology"—be it the behavioristic philosophy of Professor Skinner, or the dualistic philosophy of Arthur Koestler.

In a previous paper, I reached the following judgment in regard to a "philosophy of parapsychology": i.e., that its contribution to our culture "is recognizable, above all, in the better knowledge it enables us to acquire of man's psychological and physiological nature or, in other words, of the human personality." Nowadays, this conclusion seems to me sorely inadequate. In fact, it is not very different from what could be said after reviewing the most recent data and findings of psychology, physiology, or even psychoanalysis. My present-day inferences are much wider. I really think that parapsychology, in spite of its limitations, can give us some reason to adopt an enlarged view of the ultimate essence of man, and of the universe.

In another paper, a more recent one, I have tried to show that in different degrees, the subjects of those investigations that we call "parapsychological" seem to bypass somehow (even if they are unaware of it) our usual ways of thinking and perceiving, and to partake of a world of "immediate thought." This world, I pointed out, "can be reached by obtaining a more or less pronounced reduction (or abolition, in extreme cases) of our usual, conscious, individualized awareness. . ." Therefore, mediumistic or similar states could be considered as more or less enlarged psychological areas, pertaining mainly to a different kind of thinking. This would be the precondition, for a medium, to show abilities such as bypassing the spatial or temporal limits of individualized thought, and also the way of considering, feeling, and disposing of "matter," i.e., of apparently "inanimate"

pieces of reality, so closely connected with our customary, subject-versus-object distinction, typical of our usual state of mind. I know only too well that the views expounded this far are brushed off, or even considered with some contempt, by the supporters of an alleged "new trend" in our discipline. I will attempt presently to examine and to summarize the whole issue.

The "new trend" I have mentioned aims at tracing back all possible psi- γ or psi- κ phenomena to marginal, hypothetical, or not yet discovered *physical* energies. It was according to such a main trend that, in the Second International Congress of Psychotronics, held in Monte Carlo from June 30 to July 4, 1975, the very term "parapsychology" was hardly used, or was vaguely frowned upon. Psychotronics, in the concept of many of its supporters, was to be the only legitimate approach to those phenomena that several researchers and men of learning (obviously considered "old hat") persist in calling "parapsychological." The definition of psychotronics, as it was suggested by a restricted "Scientific Committee," was *per se* very eloquent. "Psychotronics," it was declared, "is a science which, in an interdisciplinary fashion, studies fields of interaction between people and their environment (internal and external) and the energetic processes involved. Psychotronics recognizes that matter, energy and consciousness are interconnected in a way which contributes to new understandings of the energetic capabilities of the human beings, life processes and matter in general."

It can be easily observed that in the above quoted definition, total emphasis has been put on "matter" and "energy." Although something formally pertaining to psychological disciplines has been preserved in the general term "psychotronics," terms like psychological, parapsychological etc. have been carefully avoided. In the definition, one finds indeed the term "consciousness", but in a fashion that seems to imply the exclusive existence of *conscious* processes and mechanisms. Apparently, for those who accept the aforesaid definition, mental processes that are not conscious do not exist. In fact, a staunch supporter of this "new trend" openly declared during the Congress that "unconscious" is simply "that, to which no attention is being paid." All modern discoveries regarding the human unconscious, its processes, its laws, etc., were thus flatly denied.

It is widely known, by now, that in some countries, and especially in the Soviet Union, quite a few parapsychological terms have been deleted from what could be called the official, scientific dictionary. For example, one is not supposed to speak or to write about *telepathy*. The approved term is "bio-communication." What is still called psycho-

kinesis by many parapsychologists is related to "bio-energetics," and so forth.

In my opinion, it would be a great mistake to think that all that has been reported so far boils down to a simple question of terminology. This can indeed be said of several changes that have occurred in the "labels" that parapsychologists have used for many decades—starting, as we all know, from the very term "parapsychology," which right now has the majority of the votes, whereas the British have adopted long ago, and still seem to prefer, "psychical research," and the French go on using "métapsychique." I am definitely convinced that behind the difference in terms there exists a fundamental difference of *philosophical* premises. To put it in very clear-cut, uncomplimentary words: it is my view that the subject-matter of our investigations is nowadays considered under two completely different philosophical angles; one is non-exclusive, but mainly non-materialistic, the other one is an angle whereby all nonmaterialistic views on *anything*, including our field of research, are unscientific, and to be condemned. The consequences of this philosophical clash are not yet completely visible for one major reason, that I shall try to describe in philosophical terms.

In spite of all that has been contended by a wide range of philosophers and thinkers (I shall mention some of them in a subsequent part of this paper), it has to be admitted that *empirically speaking*, we usually feel that we are moving in a reality-system where there are causes and effects, where time runs in one direction, where space has three dimensions, where if one applies a certain known stimulus one can expect a certain response, etc. This is why an idealist and a materialist can agree about devising or using innumerable technical instruments, from a pair of scissors to a jet-plane. This is why in many realms of science and technology there can be an understanding and a cooperation between people having a completely different philosophical background, say, between a convinced atheist and a devout Catholic. A well known example of the possibility of such cooperation is the "Bureau Médical" of Lourdes, where medical doctors of different creeds (or having no creed whatsoever) can examine and discuss the same case of a purported process of illness and recovery.

Things seem to change considerably, however, when one deals with problems that have an almost immediate reverberation on "ultimate realities," i.e., with problems whereby the very essence of man, nature, the universe, etc., can be viewed, nay, *have* to be viewed, according to this or that philosophical conviction. A person who abides by the

conviction that nothing transcendental can be *proven* on a non-transcendental level will not be able to collaborate in a purported "experiment," devised with the declared aim of demonstrating survival. A non-religious medical man at the "Bureau" of Lourdes would refuse to discuss with a religious colleague whether a sudden, medically incomprehensible case of recovery could be the consequence of a miraculous intervention of the Virgin Mary, whereas he would certainly agree to examine with his colleague the anamnesis and the X-ray photos pertaining to the case.

Let us now see how this kind of what might be called a "mutual non-understanding" could be applied to our subject matter. I will take into consideration that most studied and best-known phenomenon: telepathy.

It is hardly necessary to mention that many attempts have been made to "explain" telepathic occurrences, and that many hypotheses regarding the phenomenon have been suggested, but I shall consider two main "models" only. One I would call the "communication" model, implying the transmission of "something" (waves, particles, neutrinos, bio-energetic radiations, or some other element) from "transmitter" A to "receiver" B. The other might be called the "communion" model, implying that in telepathy, nothing "physical" is "transmitted"; that there is a nonphysical field, or denominator (more or less corresponding to the "collective unconscious" in the Jungian sense) which unites all human beings—perhaps simply all that lives; and that in those cases where this union, even for a second, becomes actual, A and B can cease to feel as if they were utterly separated, and can "merge into each other psychologically, to go then immediately back to their previous, empirical separation, which is what we usually perceive in our everyday experience.

In the Western world, the first kind of approach to telepathic phenomena (assuming the "communication" hypothesis) is still pursued by some researchers, in spite of the difficulties and contradictions it presents, and that were openly acknowledged by many investigators (including the Russian physiologist, L. L. Vasiliev). But the second idea—although it may seem rather abstract and far-fetched to some—has a full right of citizenship, can be openly declared, and has been expounded and sustained in many ways by many prominent philosophers and parapsychologists. Could we say the same of those people who can think only in terms of bio-communication, and who have adopted the materialistic philosophy as the only valid one? Certainly not. For them, any such approach is unscientific, idealistic, etc., and has to be repelled. If they were asked to

cooperate in a series of experiments, aimed at giving some support to the "communion" hypothesis of telepathy, they would certainly refuse.

It seems to me that we have thus reached an unavoidable consequence, i.e., that parapsychologists can no longer ignore or forget the philosophical background to which they finally have to trace back their work—even if it is admitted that much of this work is not strictly or directly dependent on one's philosophical assumptions (let me remind you of what was said of the Lourdes Medical Bureau and of its variegated members). In fact, I think that this Conference is the right place where a man of science, who has studied parapsychological phenomena for a long period of time, can freely express his philosophical convictions. Starting from this statement, I shall now proceed to express my own personal views.

In the very beginning of this paper, I put forward two bold assumptions: first, that there are in nature two different kinds of thinking of basically opposite essence; second, that some individuals (in particular, those who are considered apt to show evidence of psi phenomena) partake, if only partially and momentarily, of a universal, unconscious, timeless, spaceless thought, representing the inner face of nature. Let us now see if and how these hypotheses can be substantiated.

A whole range of thinkers and philosophers (in the West, particularly, Plotinus, Roger Bacon, Pascal, Schopenhauer, Schelling, and to a certain extent also Bergson) have contended that beyond the boundaries of empirical reality, there exists a quite different, transcendental reality (the *Noumenon* according to Kant, the *Wille* according to Schopenhauer). A similar view has been maintained all along by mystics and seers, especially by people like Ruysbroeck, Eckhartshausen, Marsilius Ficinus, Swedenborg, Robert Fludd and many others in the West; Lao-Tze, Milarepa, Shankara, Ramakrishna, Ramana and several others in the East. Many poets and writers have expressed this same basic idea—of a limited and empirical *versus* a total, eternal Reality—in some of their works; let me only mention Dante, Blake, Hölderlin, Novalis, Balzac, Whitman, Tennyson, Carpenter, Rimbaud, Nerval, and, in modern times, Maurice Maeterlinck, André Breton, and Aldous Huxley.

Could it be that all the aforesaid people were victims of delusions, wishful thinking, or day-dreaming? Hardly! For some of them, by the way, the realization of an Absolute Being has been a shattering, almost terrifying experience, which they probably would have avoided if possible. Allow me to recall a few words written by Charles G. Finney; ". . . I literally bellowed out of the unutterable gushings of my heart.

These waves came over me, and over me, and over me, one after the other, until I recollect I cried out, 'I shall die if these waves continue to pass over me'. . . " Horace Traubel writes: "What is this flood, overcoming body and sense? I feel the walls of my skull crack, the barriers part, the sun-flood enter. . . " Yet, they, too, arrived at the same conclusion as those who had experienced only bliss and joy and ecstasy in their perception of Total Awareness (or Cosmic Consciousness, as Richard M. Bucke prefers to call it).

On the other side of the coin, it has often been pointed out that the "rules and regulations" which pertain to parapsychological phenomena, and to those people concerned with demonstrating these phenomena, are fundamentally different from those of our usual psychological understanding. In fact, they are no less different from those found at the time of "beyond the looking glass" of Alice in Wonderland, in comparison with those that Alice acknowledges and is submitted to at the beginning and end of her "adventures." This basic difference has been beautifully described and emphasized by Lawrence LeShan in some well known books and essays.

This characteristic of psi phenomena, and of the psi- γ or psi- κ "ways of functioning" of those people who are instrumental in bringing them about, is one of the causes of the resistance that parapsychology still encounters in many academic circles. It is also the cause of the consistent difficulties we meet when we try to squeeze such phenomena into the same containers, and to put them under the same laws, as we admit and use in other scientific fields. Some time ago, I tried to give some examples of this, apparently blatant "irrationality" of several parapsychological contentions. Psychology tells us, for instance, that a "communication" takes place under certain conditions, and with the use of signs, or signals, that in one way or other are emitted, and received, by the sense organs. Parapsychology tells us that in telepathy, there can be a communication or a communion between two or more people separate from any known sign, signal, or channel. Physics tells us that a physical effect (e.g. the movement of a solid object) can be obtained if a certain physical stimulus is applied. Parapsychology tells us that man's thoughts can *directly* exert an influence over a solid object, without any known physical link between the two. No wonder that so many people should have rejected similar contentions, and that many others should think that such contradictions to what science tells us are surely due either to errors, or to fantasy, misapprehension, fraud, conjuring, and so forth.

Parapsychology, in my considered opinion, has given us ample evidence in favor of some basic views about man and reality, which had

been put forward for centuries by speculative thought (religious, philosophical, etc.), but had never been adequately substantiated. Parapsychology has shown that the empirical, customary, everyday reality as it impinges on our sense-organs or our instruments of observation is only one facet of a total reality, and that some people are sometimes able to live and act (for different lengths of time) beyond the limits of that facet. This is more or less the view that has been expounded and preached by those Eastern traditions which purport that the world in which we live is only phenomenal, delusional, a world of *Maya*; that beyond this world of appearance and necessity there is a world of Truth and Power; that deep down from the apparent multiplicity, Unity can be reached and realized.

Starting from this point, several further considerations can be made. The first that comes to mind is whether the aforesaid philosophical inferences from the parapsychological findings should reduce or invalidate the importance of parapsychological research and experimentation, or that of the scientific approach altogether. The answer to this question is an emphatic "No!" First of all, parapsychology can give us plenty of information about the mechanisms of the human mind, the processes at work in interpersonal relations, our usual ways of dealing with "objects," and so on. Moreover, let us not forget that even those people who can show indications of the existence of a transcendental world are human beings—even if they are called Milarepa or Aurobindo or Saint Francis or any of the contemporary great seers or mediums. These people have bodies, they have thought-processes, they have emotions. Several years ago, at a Conference sponsored by the Parapsychology Foundation, somebody asked a Dominican Father if God could not provoke a state of bliss in a saint by temporarily modifying the biochemical conditions of his brain-cells. The Father replied "Why certainly!" without winking an eyelid. I doubt whether a parapsychologist will ever be able to perform a blood examination of a holy man during a mystical rapture; but I maintain that this would be a most legitimate, interesting, and informative experiment. In a similar, but more practical vein, several observations have been made, using EEG, on yogis and inspired people while they were meditating or praying. Once more, I say that this is a good, scientific, truly parapsychological approach. But obviously, if such an approach can be agreed upon with regard to holy people and their "phenomena," I think that we can safely go our own parapsychological way when we study mediums, clairvoyants, or just ordinary people!

Some other important questions can now be raised. One is, whether our parapsychological tools are apt to fill the gap that exists between

our ordinary way of apprehending reality and the awareness of an Ultimate Reality. The second is, whether there might be other possible ways of filling such a gap if the answer to the first question should be in the negative.

In fact, such an answer *has* to be in the negative, for very simple methodological reasons. No *scientific* approach, method or experiment can ever give us certainties of a transcendental order (hence the *a priori* futility of all attempts aimed at “demonstrating,” in a scientific fashion, the reality of survival, reincarnation, or the existence of God). Parapsychology purports to be, *has* to be, a scientific discipline. Therefore, as I have tried to show, it can and does give us plenty of “pointers” towards the necessity of admitting an Absolute Reality beyond our usual, limited reality; but it cannot give us any *proof* of this, and will never be able to do so “because of the contradiction that does not permit of it,” as Dante would have said.

The second question appears then even more cogent; but it is obvious that an answer to it can only be a tentative one, and one that requires that we abandon our usual, logical way of thinking. There are indeed several methods or techniques whereby a person can hope to get a direct—if only fleeting—awareness of the Ultimate Reality. In a recently published paper, I have tried to describe the characteristics of three of them, namely: mediumship, mysticism, and initiation. In short, my contentions have been the following:

(1) Usually, a medium does not bother to “prepare” himself for his performances through any particular “exercise” (physical or mental as the case may be). He “abandons” himself to “something,” loses contact with his customary level of consciousness, and is not able to foresee what will happen to him, or to have a clear awareness of the “different reality” which he enters. Descriptions of such a reality by trance mediums have therefore always been vague, and very often contradictory.

(2) The attitude of the religious mystic is very different. The mystic believes in a superior order of things, in God, in Life eternal. He continuously tries to purify his inner being. When he goes into different states of consciousness, he knows that this is bound to take him nearer to God, and toward the supreme beatitude of Paradise. His mystical experiences are therefore quite different from those of the ordinary medium, and different also—beyond some superficial resemblances—are the paranormal events that may accompany them. The mystic always maintains that the Creator and the created world are substantially different, and that no spiritual achievement will ever make one and the same thing of the Supreme Maker and his creatures.

(3) An initiate usually admits knowing that every human being is a spark of an Absolute Fire, and that people in general feel different because they are "ignorant" in a philosophical sense. Initiation techniques (from Yoga or Zazen to transcendental meditation, psychedelic methods with or without drugs, and a whole series of other rites or exercises) are certain to actualize the aforesaid virtual essence and to obtain the cessation of all distinctions between the individual and the universal Self, the re-absorption of all apparent realities into one, of the delusional multiplicity into an unique and only Truth.

It is obviously beyond the scope of this presentation to go further. I think I have sufficiently developed my main assumptions, clearly stating what, to me, a "philosophy of parapsychology" can actually mean. It means very much indeed. As a scientific discipline, parapsychology cannot give us the explanation of the universe, but it certainly can give us plenty of help in our search for such an explanation, within the limits of our human possibilities.

DISCUSSION

PENELHUM: I would like to begin by expressing my appreciation for the combination of depth and clarity in your presentation. I would like to follow this by a question designed to make sure that I fully follow the implications of the view you put forward. I was very interested in the early part of your address, when you drew a comparison between the two groups of parapsychologists whom you distinguished and the medical men at Lourdes, who approached the special phenomena they were investigating there in apparently different ways. It's a striking feature of our culture that people who differ as totally as this in their general understanding of our world, can nevertheless cooperate in detail in scientific and other investigations, and I take it, in the case of Lourdes, one would express this by saying they disagree deeply on the question of whether or not there is—excuse the expression—a supernatural factor. All of them operate with a distinction between the supernatural and the natural, and they merely disagree as to whether the supernatural *exists* or not, so they can agree totally about what the natural is like, and this is why they can combine medically. Now I've always thought, myself, that one of the major interests of parapsychology is the fact that this neat separation of the natural and the supernatural is constantly being challenged by the things which parapsychologists discover. Now, am I right in thinking that in your view the two groups of parapsychologists that you distinguish, differ in the following way: that one group wishes to treat the investigations of

parapsychology as uncovering wider and deeper understandings of the natural, but does not wish to accept the suggestion that these understandings point to anything beyond the natural, but the other group insists that they point beyond the natural; and that you associate yourself with the latter view? If that is correct, I'm extremely interested in your concluding remarks, which suggest not only that the investigation of parapsychological phenomena will continue to be rigorously scientific, but also that there can be no conclusive philosophical demonstration of what I might loosely call the supernatural implications of them. have I summarized your view correctly?

SERVADIO: Yes, you have. What I tried to express was an apprehension. That is, whereas I am quite prepared to perform an experiment with a person whose ideas I know to be materialistic, as I am not a materialist, I fear that if I, as a non-materialist, should plan, for instance, to demonstrate that telepathy could be indicative of a collective unconscious, an experienced materialistic parapsychologist would say, "I am not prepared to perform such an experiment because the aim you have in mind, or the idea or the frame of reference you have in mind is unscientific, so I cannot agree to collaborate with you in such an experiment." This is my apprehension.

STANFORD: It's easy for me, thinking at one level, to see how a transcendentalist view (to use a very general term) allows us to feel comfortable with the concept of knowledge outside of the reach of the senses, and that immediately makes us comfortable also when we hear about psychics who seem to have experienced a so-called mystical, transcendental experience such as apparently Mrs. Garrett had, but this kind of view is one I want to ask some questions about. One is, we see plenty of instances of psi interchange in which there doesn't seem to exist in the person experiencing the psi interchange any of this mystical or transcendental world view, and I wonder how that accords with the viewpoint that there is such a transcendental reality that underlies these phenomena. The second and, I think, closely related point is this: if you adopt that viewpoint, I'm wondering where that would take us in our research. It can, I admit, make us feel comfortable about the phenomena, but where does it take us? How does it lead us beyond our present position in research? Does it have payoffs in terms of what we're going to do tomorrow when we go back into the laboratory?

SERVADIO: As I've tried to show in my paper, descriptions of mystics in the East or the West or even some mediums from totally different

cultures, seem to have many things in common, so while I don't say this is a proof that what they say corresponds to this transcendental view of reality, it certainly strikes one as significant, as meaningful. It's not by chance that something that Milarepa said a few centuries ago corresponds to what a European seer or perhaps Mrs. Garrett could have said during one of her trances. This is the first point. The second point I tried to maintain in a communication to the Edinburgh Parapsychological Association Convention was that perhaps certain difficulties between researchers and parapsychologists in our parapsychological research could be reduced; it can be meditation, it can be trying to know our depths a little more, and, of course, we have means that are known to everybody such as the value of psychoanalysis and things like that. But there are also other techniques, you have mentioned at least three or four of them, and I really think that this kind of descent into ourselves, as Sir John Woodroffe suggested many years ago, would be instrumental in making our work a little easier.

FRENCH: Currently philosophers of the physical sciences don't generally think of themselves as telling scientists how to proceed or what assumptions they are to make, but as explicating or analyzing what is done by those scientists. You leave me with the impression that philosophers of parapsychology ought to take a more direct role in setting the bounds, shall we say, of assumption in methodology for the discipline.

SERVADIO: I'm not of the opinion that any scientist should imagine himself as a good microscope or something that cannot be discussed. I think that every scientist would do well to examine himself a little bit. We know that the history of science is full of cases in which scientists made "mistakes," gave a push to some experiment to make it work out, or have behaved in the scientific field they were working in, in a way which indicated that they certainly had something in their inner structure that was not functioning as it should have been. Now, if this is true in general, I think that it is even more true in our particular field, where we face very subtle and delicate interpersonal relations, such as observations of Gertrude Schmeidler about "sheep" and "goats," and the importance of participation of the observer in the observed field.

ROLL: I think one of the ways our field is unique and distinct from other sciences, is that our primary instruments are ourselves, and I suspect that we're really going to be moving when we regard ourselves as subjects for investigations along with our so-called subjects. In connection with another point you made, I wonder what you think

about Dr. LeShan's discovery of the rather striking similarity between the statements of mystics and the statements by people who take the other route, who explore outwards, that is, contemporary physicists.

SERVADIO: It is said in Yoga that from a certain point onwards there is no more distinction between inner and outer reality. Now I have wondered if some physicist, perhaps unawares, has not found the same thing. I think that when Heisenberg, in 1926, found the principle of indeterminacy, that is, the presence of the observer as being part and parcel of the total field of things that we're observing and of the observer himself, he reached something that the seers of all the ages in India had reached two or three thousand years ago.

ANGOFF: With Dr. Servadio's paper, we have come to the end of the formal presentations of this conference. The proceedings will be published and the Foundation will keep this book in print indefinitely along with others in the series. The Foundation is grateful to all of you who have contributed to these meetings.

BENDER: I may be the senior member of this symposium, and without having been delegated by you, I feel that I want to express the warmest thanks for this excellent symposium to the Parapsychology Foundation—to its President, Mrs. Eileen Coly and her colleagues who have organized it. It was an interesting and encouraging symposium, and for the elder people, it was a wonderful opportunity to meet with younger ones and to establish a contact which might help to find new ways for parapsychology. In this moment, I remember that some weeks ago I received an invitation for a discussion in Paris on Gabriel Marcel's work which bore the title, "Presence Gabriel Marcel." And I would like to end this conference by naming it for the late founder and president of Parapsychology Foundation: "Presence Eileen Garrett."