

IMPLICATIONS OF PARANORMAL COGNITION

H. H. PRICE (*Great Britain*)

It is difficult to devise a conceptual framework into which to fit the phenomena of psychical research. When we call them *para-normal* or *para-psychological* we tacitly recognize that they do not "fit in" with conventional systems of knowledge. But just as the advances in the physical sciences from the 17th century on have required invention of new conceptual frameworks, so we now need a revolution in thinking which will permit inclusion of what we now call *para-normal* phenomena. This will require two sets of concepts: First, those which will unify the paranormal facts *inter se*, to give us a working philosophy of physical research itself. Second, a more comprehensive set of concepts which will unify the whole paranormal field with the rest of our total knowledge, from whatever source gained.

The modern Western-educated outlook is composed of two major elements: First is belief in scientific method. Second is a set of general assumptions and beliefs, not about method, but about human personality, its relations to the rest of the universe, "the mind and its place in nature." While the latter element is logically independent of the other, for historical reasons there is a close psychological connection between them. The point at which there is conflict, between those who take note of the facts established in parapsychology and those who reject or ignore these facts, is with respect to this second element of the western outlook. It is not as to scientific method, which is accepted by both parties alike.

As to the second element itself, it is assumed by the majority of Western-educated people that in some form the materialistic conception of human personality must be correct. In this view, however explained in detail, mental processes are assumed to be completely explicable in terms of brain processes. Underlying this is another (often unconscious) assumption that what is publicly observable is in some sense "more real" than what is not.

The facts of paranormal cognition are difficult to reconcile with any materialist system. This is simply because of the extrasensory character of such cognition. It cannot be fitted into any mechanistic psychology, since it gives non-inferential information by some means other than stimulation of the sense-organs.

Some have attempted to explain such information as derived from successful guessing. But if someone's guesses over a long period are consistently correct, we are no longer willing to describe them as mere guesses. This explanation is really question-begging. And, in cases involving vivid and detailed mental imagery, a hallucinatory voice, or a telepathic apparition, the description "guessing" is ludicrously inadequate.

Nor is it easy to see how any "physical radiation" theory could account for paranormal phenomena, particularly that of precognition. What kind of physical process could it be in which the effect precedes the cause? Should we not be forced to postulate an *additional* physical world, already containing duplicates of events still future in ours, or strange entities and stranger processes not part of the publicly observable world as we know it (when the whole purpose of the theory is to preserve the materialist concepts generally held)?

Theories of "interaction," while the classical alternatives to materialism, must be carefully scrutinized. Traditionally, they are associated with the doctrine that every "mind" so interacting with the brain is a psychical or spiritual *substance*, and it is supposed that such substances are indivisible

and uncombinable with one another. Yet many parapsychological data, such as those of mediumship, indicate that personality is not indivisible, but may actually become fragmented, and that two or more personalities may overlap. The hypothesis that the unity of a mind or of a mental entity is a matter of degree and not of "all or none" deserves careful investigation. Certainly if we oppose materialistic concepts with any dualistic interaction theory, we must dissociate ourselves from the substantialist conception of mind historically associated with it.