

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON
PSYCHOLOGY AND PARAPSYCHOLOGY
APRIL 30 to MAY 4, 1956

INTRODUCTION

An International Symposium on the subject of "Psychology and Parapsychology" was held from April 30 to May 4, 1956 in the former Abbey of Royaumont near Paris.

The Abbey is often used for conferences by learned societies and the announcement that a parapsychology conference would be held there aroused much interest along with skepticism in some quarters. The high level of the talks and the interest shown in the discussions brought about a complete reversal of any criticism there may have been before the meeting was held.

In selecting the theme of the symposium, the conference organizers wanted to show the need of close integration of parapsychology with other sciences. This was the gist of the introductory report by Robert Amadou who has played a major part in spreading knowledge about parapsychology in France.

Mr. Amadou and Dr. Emilio Servadio, Vice-President of the Italian Society for Parapsychology, were joint chairmen of the symposium, organized in cooperation with the Parapsychology Foundation.

No scientific research is possible without a prior outlining of methods. That is why Dr. S. David Kahn's report "The Enigma of Psi" on the opening day of the conference attracted so much attention, as did likewise the brief remarks of Prof. Leon Delpech of the University of Aix-Marseille: "Attitudes toward Parapsychological Problems." The purely technical report of Dr. D. J. West: "ESP and Mood" and a communication by Dr. Roland

Cahen-Salabeille on a dream of possible telepathic content concluded the first day's proceedings.

May 1 was especially rich in instructive work. Dr. Emilio Servadio presented a long study linking psychoanalysis and parapsychology. This was followed by papers presented by Drs. Jan Ehrenwald of New York, Jule Eisenbud of the University of Denver and C. A. Meier of Zurich. All of them are "depth" psychologists, but represent different schools. Servadio and Eisenbud are orthodox Freudians, Dr. Meier is a disciple of C. G. Jung and Dr. Ehrenwald inclines toward a somewhat eclectic, tentative approach. It was striking to note that despite these doctrinal differences, there was close agreement between these psychoanalysts on the tremendous importance which parapsychological phenomena have for psychic therapy.

It is well known that the prime factor making for success or failure of psychoanalytical cures is the mechanism of transfer and even counter-transfer. The phenomenon of transfer can no longer be considered in the purely affective and simplistic terms that it was formerly. We still don't know too much about the essence and dynamism of transfer but it seems that it is tied to psychological phenomena very akin to psi, and telepathy seems to play an increasingly important role.

Freud himself, although a rationalist opposed to every kind of supernaturalism, was the first to point out the phenomena of telepathy and premonition in his analyses.

The most revolutionary theory was perhaps that put forward by Dr. Meier. He said the phenomenon of transfer may develop in a cycle including not only the analyst and his subject or third persons, but even inanimate objects. This supposition would seem to point to talismans and magic.

May 2 was devoted to the relation between parapsychology on the one hand and cultural anthropology and the history of religion on the other. Pierre Barrucand spoke on "Anthropology and Parapsychology" and Ernesto de

Martino of Rome University reported on "History of Religion and Parapsychology." The study of so-called primitive or pre-literate societies opens an especially rich and fruitful path to psi phenomena. Several ethnologists have described remarkable occurrences observed during field expeditions. For example, it must be admitted as a fact that persons in some social groups are able to walk on fire. The phenomenon has been described by many scientific observers. Extraordinary examples of "direct voices" appear to have been observed also, for example in Siberia.

Barrucand recalled that in the late 19th century the English anthropologist Andrew Lang wanted the specialists in psychic research of that day to take part in ethnological expeditions.

At that time neither the methods used by scientists nor the level of development of psychic research made it possible to put into practice Lang's suggestion. The situation is different today and as J. R. Swanton recently suggested, cultural anthropology will not be complete unless it takes into account the achievements of parapsychology. The discussion that followed these first two May 2 papers was especially lively and fruitful. Prof. Mircea Eliade took a prominent part in the debate. The conferees seemed especially impressed by the problems posed by Siberian Shamanism.

The remainder of the session was devoted to the communication of Rev. Father Reginald Omez: "The Viewpoint of a Catholic Theologian." This, too, provoked keen discussion and allowed the speaker to inform us of a number of interesting phenomena—poltergeist, pseudo-possession, etc.—observed by him during his work as a clergyman.

May 3 was devoted to the topic: "Psychophysiology and Parapsychology." Dr. Alain Assailly told of the parapsychological influence of middle-aged persons on young sensitives. Prof. Jean Lhermitte, whose health prevented him from attending, sent in his paper on "Bilocation Phenomena in Neuropathology." Lhermitte, a member of

the French Academy, cited extraordinary subjective observations which present remarkable similarities to "the trip to Astral" of occultism or "the contemplation of his own skeleton" of Shamanism. However, this study did not clear up the mystery, for bilocation and the ability to see one's own body from outside it, although they are substantiated by a number of well authenticated examples and observations, are still totally inexplicable in the present state of our knowledge.

Another paper was presented by Dr. Jean Bruno on the physiological aspects of Yoga and the possibility of utilizing Yoga techniques in parapsychological experimentation.

The closing day, May 4, was devoted to general discussions and the drafting of resolutions.

The symposium marked a huge step forward for parapsychology, especially in France. The organizers of the symposium were very happy to note the interest displayed by the representatives of university and scientific psychology, such as Mme. Suzanne Pacaud, Jean Cavozi, Dr. Pierre Binois, and others. University psychologists are considered to be especially hardboiled rationalists. Therefore their sympathetic attitude may be deemed a particularly valuable homage paid to the symposium's scientific worth and solidity.

ROBERT AMADOU (*France*)