A CHALLENGE FOR SCIENTIFIC METHOD

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This paper tried to uncover some of the reasons why psychical research has been relatively unsuccessful in its attempts to elucidate the psi process. It was felt that the traditional methods of inquiry including the inductive, deductive and speculative have been properly executed when applied to the problems of psi, and yet have failed to make their expected contributions.

It was suggested that similar stalemates in the history of science have arisen because the problem under investigation was *so conceived* as to *necessarily* condemn any approach to failure, insofar as falsely stated problems can only give rise to false solutions. John Dewey's dictum that the initial step in every inquiry must be the transformation of the problem in nature into its correct terms was quoted, and in example, Galileo's transformation of the problem of moving projectiles into the problem of redefining force was used.

In applying this principle to the case at hand, it was argued that psi phenomena has come to be described in such a way as to carry with it unproven premises that may in fact be false, and has thus given rise to falsely structured experiments. Two premises were isolated. First, the presumed causal connection between agent and percipient was questioned. It was pointed out that though the idea of response of percipient to agent is part of many definitions of psi, this actually involves, in fact, a theory about psi. If it is to be entertained it must be stated in such a way as to be capable of being proved false, if it is false, which it

turns out cannot be presently done. All we have observed are correlations, and they may well prove to be indirect ones, depending much less upon agent-percipient factors than on the characteristics of the field in which psi occurs. Yet the false statement has been reflected in endless experimental attempts to manipulate agent and percipient, with general disregard for other simultaneous factors, which may in the end prove to be the more significant variables.

Secondly, the idea of psi being thought of as a new kind of perceptual process was challenged. The experimental similarity between psi and sensory perception was noted, but it was argued that this might only be a device to bring psi into consciousness. It was pointed out that many experiments have been based upon the unproven assumption that the similarity is a substantive one, and that their design has often been based upon the inherent idea of a kind of psychic eye, often involving even many of the optical and physiological characteristics of the physical eye.

It was suggested that psi may in fact be functionally very unlike sensory perception, and may not even be primarily a mechanism for gaining cognitive information about our physical environment at all. It was suggested that psi may be a phenomenon occurring most commonly within the realm of affect, and here it may be operating continually, with occasional cognitive manifestations appearing in the cloak of a perceptual-like experience.

It was pointed out that two major paradoxes have appeared in experimental design as a result of these possible misconceptions about the nature of psi. The rigidity was noted with which we cling to the traditional use of simple perceptual stimuli in the face of the two or three per cent accuracy of psi when indexed by this technique. The premise that psi is some kind of threshhold phenomenon has never been challenged, and our conviction that psi is a perpetual mechanism prevents us from drawing the

most obvious conclusion that psi, because of its minimal appearance when studied as perception, may be, therefore, something else.

Secondly, because of the initial predicative identification between sensory perception and psi, and because until recently at least, perception was treated as an essentially conscious phenomenon, we find ourselves in the odd position of designing experiments which demand a conscious act, involving conation and cognition, when in reality there is almost no basis whatsoever empirically for believing that psi involves the participation of conscious modalities. It was urged that the traditional type of experiment be supplanted by methods of observing psi on non-cognitive levels, and which do not demand conscious attempts on the part of the subject to produce psi.

In general, it was hoped that a painstaking re-examination of our traditional habits of thinking about psi may give rise to genuine innovations in experimental design, which will correct our tendency to insist upon psi operating under our conditions rather than under its own.