

## PARAPSYCHOLOGY, ETHNOLOGY AND HISTORY OF RELIGION

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Cooperative efforts between parapsychology on the one hand and ethnology and history of religion on the other, have been up to now almost non-existent. It is true that in America cooperation between ethnology and psychiatry—and especially psychoanalysis—has progressed considerably. But as far as collaboration between ethnology and paranormal psychology is concerned, we are still in the stage of simply urging that something be done. There is as yet no active and serious joint undertaking, based on observation and experimentation by organized groups.

One reason for this state of things is the fear of “metapsychics” which often has been a mixture of second-rate science and superstition. When in 1871 Tylor published his *Primitive Culture*, the popularity of spiritualism was at its height in Europe and America and the study of paranormal phenomena went no further than the “Report on Spiritualism of the Committee of the London Dialectical Society,” and Crookes’ experiments on “psychic force.” It is therefore understandable that an ethnologist like Tyler should confine himself to studying spiritualistic ideology with regard to primitive magic superstitions and neglect the possibilities of a systematic inquiry into paranormal phenomena. . . .

It is impossible to study the magic or religious ideology of the so-called primitive civilizations if one deliberately neglects the reality of paranormal phenomena. There is no science if the facts are only half verified. Tylor’s tendency outlined a religious ethnology and a history of primitive

religions on the basis of data confirmed as to ideology but not as to paranormal content.

A like orientation is to be found for instance in Levy-Bruhl's theory on the primitive mentality. . . . Levy-Bruhl holds that there is no such thing as paranormal phenomenology and that "normal" reality—or that which is considered so in the West—is the only possible objective reality. This supposition is however contradicted by the fact that there are indeed paranormal phenomena and that civilizations other than the industrial European-American one attach great importance to them.

Tylor's ideological orientation still remains today the example followed in ethnology and the history of primitive religions despite the collapse of all his hypotheses on the origins of religion and magic. . . . I have touched on this question in a monograph published in *Studi e Materiali di Storia delle Religioni* (1946) and in my book *The Magic World (Il Mondo Magico, Turin, 1947)* in which there is a chapter on the paranormal phenomena of ethnological magic and another on the history of the relations between religious ethnology and parapsychology.

An active collaboration between the historians of the great existing religions and the parapsychologists is certainly possible. . . . There is however a special difficulty which hinders such cooperation: although it may be possible for the religious historian to accept the idea of paranormal phenomena, historians belonging to any specific religious denomination will probably not accept unreservedly such a scientific tendency for their own religion.

Probably in such a collaboration there is a new possibility of confirming the cultural relativism which today dominates a large part of ethnology and the history of religion. This relativism means abandoning the concept of the superiority of the European-American industrial civilization and admitting the possibility of other civilizations being as valid as our own, but otherwise oriented.

For an active collaboration between parapsychology, ethnology and history of religion, our aims must be to:

1. Establish favorable conditions for a collaboration based on experimentations.

2. Set up contacts between parapsychology institutes and those devoted to ethnology and history of religion.

3. Facilitate frequent exchanges and personal contacts among parapsychologists, ethnologists and religious historians.

The progress of the cooperation between parapsychology, ethnology and history of religion, depends on how we carry out such a program.