

## MOTIVATIONS IN PSI RESEARCH

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EHRENWALD: I feel that our program chairman has put his finger on something which is most significant in parapsychology, maybe even the key to the whole problem of research in parapsychology: motivation. I think we have to focus on three aspects of it: the motivation of the experimenter, the motivation of the so-called agent, and the motivation of the so-called percipient.

It is very likely that we will find out in the course of our discussion that it is the combination and proper balance of these three sets of ingredients which may lead to positive results in parapsychology. At the same time we have to realize that motivation on the psi level is a horse of a completely different color than in other fields of research. When you do research in physics, or in biology, you decide to investigate a certain facet of a certain problem, you try to create favorable conditions and to select your variables, your machinery, etc. No such thing in parapsychology.

In the field of parapsychology we are moving on a different level of experience than in the field of ordinary, run of the mill laboratory research. When we address ourselves to psi phenomena, we have to shift from one level of adaptation to another. Let me remind you that our standard level of adaptation is geared to the laws of Euclidean geometry, of classical physics and communication theory. Shifting our attention to the psi level of experience involves a completely different level of adjustment. Viewed from the angle of classical physics or biology, this level of functioning does not have very much survival value. This may be one of the reasons why communication on the psi level is inaccurate

by ordinary standards. Trying to "catch" a picture by clairvoyance, for instance, is not as good as direct inspection. Like the visual perceptions of a patient suffering from optical agnosia, it is chaotic, subject to distortions which interfere with clear reception of the target impression. On the level of our standard cognitive experience, we have succeeded in eliminating most background "noise."

Why this is so—why psi level perception is not as dependable as sensory perception—is a matter for speculation. Is psi a vestigial function? Is it a groping attempt at reaching out for a new level of adaptation which, at the present stage of evolution, is of doubtful survival value? We are not sure.

In any case, if we focus on motivation in psi research we have to realize that, as a matter of basic principle, psi is not geared to clear-cut sensory experiences, to sharply focused impressions. This realization ought to help us when we feel a little embarrassed about the inaccuracies of our research results, about the quality of our evidence, or the difficulties of repeating positive results to which Professor Flew has made reference.

Basically, I believe that motivation in psi research (both that of the experimenter and of his subjects) does not seem to abide by the principles of learning theory, conditioning, operant reinforcement, etc., in the classical behavioristic sense. The principle of reward and punishment has proved effective in other areas, but does not seem to apply to psi, which apparently lacks survival value in the evolutionary time scale.

If motivations have this strong bearing upon the outcome of our experiments, it is important to try to understand what sort of motivation will be conducive to the results we want. In our Western culture, stumbling into occasional psi experiences is not a positive achievement but rather a predicament for a given subject. It is penalized rather than rewarded by society, especially by our scientific confrères or academic authorities. This is one of the obstacles in our way. We have therefore to find ways to coax, to cajole, to goad our subjects to be motivated to function in a new, usually unrewarding way. As pointed out earlier, what is required here is a total "existential shift" as described in one of my recent books.<sup>1</sup>

I do not think I can make any more specific recommendations along the lines of reward and punishment. I remember talking with Basil Shackleton more than twenty years ago in London: he was convinced that he would win at the roulette table because of his precognitive capacities. The fact is, he invariably lost a lot of money. Apparently

this sort of motivation is ineffectual in our field. What we need is an orientation toward an altogether different goal, endeavor or human interest; the need to explore; to attain a new dimension of freedom and mastery in dealing with the world at large. Reaching out for this goal may lie at the roots of motivation in psi research.

The psychoanalytic theory of instincts provides another interesting angle for study of motivation in this field. Eisenbud<sup>2</sup> put forward the idea that it is the aggressive, destructive instinct, Thanatos, which is the driving force of interactions on the psi level. He pointed out that this might explain why Western man is so scared of the thought of his own magic omnipotence, or of its destructive potential on others. I am not so sure that this is indeed a basic parameter. I think that there is another side to the coin. There is Eros; there is the need to restore our original unity with our fellow men; to go back to the symbiotic matrix of our existence. It may be this basic need which impels us to reach out to our fellow men in order to transcend the confines of our personality structure and the limitations of classical space and time.

If this is so, how can we mobilize in the laboratory such emotionally charged motivations? This is one of the tricks of our trade with which so many experimenters are concerned. If psi has little biological survival value, then it is very difficult to force it to make an appearance here and now at an arbitrary point of our choosing in the evolutionary process. You cannot turn a steppenwolf into a performing circus animal at the drop of a dog trainer's hat. Still, it may be possible to change his ways in the process of patient, long-term methodical training or "domestication." Hypnosis or other trance techniques seem to create motivations which shorten the time needed for such conditioning. Indeed hypnotic trance is a prime example of an "existential shift."

Turning to psychoanalytic concepts of motivation, I could mention voyeuristic tendencies in the telepathic percipient. Analytic patients do try to catch a glimpse of what is going on in their therapists' lives. Eisenbud came home one night and, on the basis of a dream of one of his patients, said to his wife: "Molly, we are expecting." His patient happened to be right. Nevertheless, I think that the rabbit test is still a more reliable indicator of pregnancy.

To sum up, motivations in parapsychology should not be measured by the same standards with which you measure them in other fields of research. One motivation is to satisfy a basic human curiosity; to explore things which go beyond the everyday horizon in which we are anchored, beyond the primeval cave in which we are caught and closed in. Another motivation is to establish contact, closeness, intimacy with our

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fellow men—and with nature at large. It is the closeness of the infant with the mother; of the patient with his therapist—which is, in effect, a replica of the early child-parent relationship. It is, if you like, a temporary regression to the symbiotic matrix of our existence. Still another motivation is to attain a new dimension of freedom—our emancipation from the supposedly immutable laws of nature. This is what Prometheus set out to do when he stole the fire from the gods—even at the risk of indulging in hybris, the crime of ancient Greek tragedy.

MARGENAU: Thank you very much, Mr. Ehrenwald. Your paper was so rich with illustrations of possible types of motivation, none of which was completely clinching, that I am going to be mean and ask: "Is your conception of motivation not merely a way of explaining that psi does not always work?" That is awful, awful.

Next on our program is Mr. Owen.

#### REFERENCES

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2. EISENBUD, J.: "Psi and the Nature of Things," *Int. J. Parapsychol.*, 5 (1963), 245.