

GRAND MANUEL DE PARAPSYCHOLOGIE SCIENTIFIQUE
[GRAND MANUAL OF SCIENTIFIC PARAPSYCHOLOGY]

Edited by Renaud Evrard, Claude Berghmans, & Paul-Louis Rabeyron.

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This anthology is a comprehensive overview of the history and subfields of scientific parapsychology, its methods, findings, and theories. Although the emphasis is on laboratory studies, there is also some treatment of spontaneous cases and of the socio-cultural environment in which this research has been conducted.

The main target audience is French parapsychologists and other scientists who are unfamiliar with English publications in the field, especially given the lack of overviews written in French. However, the book substantially and creatively incorporates the French literature as well. There are eleven French authors, one Belgian, and three English-speaking authors (whose chapters were translated into French).

Historical sections cover the struggles of prominent intellectuals such as William Crookes and Frederic Myers in the UK, William James in the USA, and Henri Bergson in France to legitimise the study of psychic phenomena in the 19th century when the professionalization of science was in the process of tightening the control of orthodox science.

Nevertheless, the 19th century was also a period in which these countries were experiencing the impact of European quasi-scientific mesmerism and Swedenborgianism on religious movements like Spiritualism that spread throughout the UK, the USA, and Europe. By the 1930s, scientific parapsychological research on Spiritualist mediums centred on the Society for Psychical Research in Britain, and the American Society for Psychical Research had begun to morph from scientific or spiritual questions about mediumship into scientific laboratory studies such as those conducted at Duke University by J. B. Rhine and his colleagues. And after 1942, psychic phenomena became further secularised by being labelled as the unknown factor psi.

Phenomena covered in the *Grand Manuel* include presentiment and precognition, remote viewing, micro-psychokinesis, apparitions and hauntings, survival, unusual (e.g., death-bed) end-of-life experiences, clinical psychology of exceptional experiences, lucid dreams, out-of-body experiences, and near-death experiences. Specialists in some of these areas may argue that other

important literature should have been included, but these substantial though non-exhaustive treatments provide a strong overview with many useful cross-references to other sections.

More important than ever before is the treatment of methodological and theoretical issues. Some of the methodological problems that have plagued psi research are the replicability of findings, experimenter bias, information leakage and fraud, statistical treatment of findings, and the file drawer problem (selective publication only of positive results). There has been a long history of refinement of methods to ameliorate these problems, but there has also been a battle against the intransigence of some critics who may appear to be either uninformed or even wilfully ignorant. Many in this volume write also of difficulties caused by the low level of public funding for psi research. The authors call for more coordination of effort to focus on more comparable research questions and design.

Theoretical issues are interwoven with methodological ones. The reason for this relates to the elusiveness of psi itself. Experimenter effects, for example, cannot be controlled for by merely masking (blinding)—if psi exists. Even if the researcher, associates running the experiment, the subject, and the recorder or interpreter of results are all masked about the target, this may not rule out some subtle influence from the experimenter or someone else other than the subject. When sceptics run their own experiments, they may fail to replicate results because of their own unconscious experimenter effects.

Another interesting theoretical conundrum discussed is the phenomenon of retrocognition (and retro-psychokinesis). Some experiments have been designed to measure this, showing that outcomes may be affected by future intentions—as long as the results have not yet been observed. This connects to theoretical debates over quantum physics, which would seem to support the possibility of retro-psi. Although there are warnings about possibly misapplying quantum physics in this book and elsewhere, there is certainly at least a plausible analogy between quantum physics and psi phenomena.

Nevertheless, current issues demonstrate how important psi research is for testing the adequacy of our dominant paradigms of reality. Due to the lack of a basic understanding of psi processes, theory tends towards some kind of 'hidden order'. Early research by Rhine and others had shown that psi was apparently not a classical Newtonian force phenomenon. Psi did not fade by distance or get blocked by Faraday cages. So, what is psi?

In addition to quantum physics, this book considers other hidden-order theory models, including the metaphysical 'collective memory' theory proposed by the French philosopher Henri Bergson (1859–1941), with whom many English or US parapsychologists may not be very familiar. The virtue of this theory is that it is consistent with aspects of psi involving shared knowledge at a distance. The same can be said of Rupert Sheldrake's theory of morphogenetic fields.

Renaud Evrard presents George Hansen's theory of the trickster (a force that facilitates anomalies in liminal states but also thwarts attempts to capture them in research) as an insightful explanation for both the production and elusiveness of psi and its rejection by social forces defending the status quo. However, Evrard sees the theory as lacking a means of testing it experimentally. The same could be said about most if not all theories of psi, again due to the mysterious, apparently acausal nature of the phenomena. Nevertheless, many sections of the book present advances in the understanding of conditions favourable to psi: for example, the subject being in a relaxed mood or being in an altered state of consciousness.

Although the *Grand Manuel* emphasises laboratory studies, there are also sections on the social and cultural context. Part of this involves the historic battle between orthodox and heterodox science of course, but there are also variations in cultural interpretations of what are nevertheless universally occurring phenomena, such as apparitions, spirit mediumship, and near-death experiences.

The most extensive look at socio-cultural factors is found in the section on the work of Jeffrey Kripal, US professor of religious studies, a field along with anthropology and sociology in which much relevant work is being done by bracketing anomalous phenomena within a cultural frame, thus avoiding extremes of sceptical condemnation of the research.

The editors state that the bold style of Kripal may portend future directions in French parapsychology. In the US ecosystem of psi, although it may meet somewhat less academic resistance than in France, the paranormal thrives mostly in popular culture (e.g., in science fiction and comics as analysed by Kripal) and in esoteric societies or New Age and spiritual groups. There are also widespread paranormal beliefs and experiences in all societies for that matter, in spite of academic resistance.

In the summary, the editors state, "No chapter in this work directly treats concrete applications of parapsychology" (p. 626, my translation). They think it would be premature, due to experimental, theoretical, and social difficulties, a frustrating situation which they have learned to live with. I think this sells the book short and is too pessimistic. What they say may be literally true, but I see many sections that present, at least indirectly, useful, practical information.

The best example of applied parapsychology is found in Chapter 9 (pp. 337–359) on the history of and recent developments in clinical psychology of exceptional experiences, by Renaud Evrard and Thomas Rabeyron, a subject likely to be little known in the UK and the USA. There is also the practical use of remote viewing by the US intelligence agencies. In addition, the Esalen Institute in California, referred to by Kripal, has been the centre of a wide variety of alternative science research and applications. Although not a focus of this book, there are also increasing applications of spiritual or paranormal principles in

alternative (integrative) medicine. Perhaps someone will undertake a *grand manuel* of applied parapsychology as a companion to this book?

Not to deny the frustration of many parapsychologists with underfunding and academic resistance, I suspect that historical and theoretical chapters of this book will deserve future revision to celebrate new contributions of research on anomalies not only towards a better understanding of psi but also towards improved models of consciousness and the universe.

In conclusion, the *Grand Manuel* is a great and the most recent handbook for synthesising the variety of research in parapsychology and putting it into a historical, theoretical context. It is very well edited to connect important themes throughout and to integrate much literature, both English and French.

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