

STATUS OF ESP RESEARCH

ORD # 4282-74

Introduction

ESP and general psychic research has been of interest and at times a concern to funding and operating agencies, both public and private. The potential contributions of this research has been most difficult to assess because the investigations have not always been conducted under appropriate and carefully monitored conditions nor have they received the type of funding that other social science areas have found available. Thus the ESP community tends to be more private, inbred, and difficult to evaluate.

This investigator has had the opportunity since 1961 to become reasonably well acquainted with major ESP Centers and researchers. This opportunity resulted from his position with a foundation willing to offer funding and advice to the ESP field. He has served as formal and informal consultant to such people as J.B. Rhine and his Institute in Durham, North Carolina (formerly Parapsychological Laboratory, Duke University); to Gaither Pratt of the University of Virginia, and to others. He has attended the national and international meetings of the Parapsychological Association as a member in good standing for over 10 years. His interest in the ESP and psychic phenomena areas has been that of an observer not as an advocate nor a debunker. This philosophical position has been well known to the parapsychological researchers, thus has posed no threat to them personally or professionally. He holds therefore, a unique relationship to evaluate the trends in this field.

Study Objectives

To determine the status of ESP and psychic phenomena research and studies and to evaluate potential application of published and private findings.

The general area of psychic phenomena gained tentative acceptance in the late 60s and early 70s and its investigators have been able to publish in more journals of other disciplines than in the past. Previously their reports were principally restricted to journals of parapsychology and psychic phenomena. In addition, parapsychology is now a division of the AAAS and some articles have appeared in their publication Science. Articles have appeared in the public press such as Newsweek, Time, and other magazines describing the research efforts of such prestigious groups as Stanford Research Institute on the psychic phenomena. The Department of Defense publicly commented on such research studies and attempted to evaluate to some degree the application of such findings. Unfortunately such critiques have been limited to only a few research efforts in the general field.

It is suggested in this proposal that a more systematic review be made not only by examination of published research but by interviews with researchers in the field. Potential insights of such individuals would give us much more understanding and comprehensive knowledge of this field than just published reports.

It is anticipated that this investigator, with his history as an observer in the field, would have good access to such populations. Such a review written would be more objective, less dramatic than those

written by the news media for popular consumption. It could identify potential areas for future research emphasis and replication. A systematic investigation of psychic phenomena research would also identify potentially productive research personnel entering the field.

It is important that such a review be done without either threatening research personnel nor raising their hopes for more "respectable" funding than they have been able to find in the past. Obviously such a review should help eliminate some of the myths associated with this devilishly attractive and yet disappointing area of investigation. At the same time potentially important leads regardless of their approaches or implications could be carefully evaluated.

Approach

Such a study must be conducted at a reasonably personal but objective level. It must be low-key* but thorough. (1) a literature survey of domestic and selected foreign sources should be examined and recorded as an annotated bibliography; (2) interviews with both domestic and foreign investigators should be conducted to identify important ongoing projects; (3) major meetings of parapsychological association and other associations should be attended and reported; (4) appropriate visits should be arranged to examine procedures and methodologies being used by ESP and psychic phenomena investigators; (5) a report of these findings should be submitted at the end of the project.

*A recent article in the New York Times (20 August 1974) best illustrates the need for the low key and personal approach. The story discusses the exposure of Dr. Levy, a well respected parapsychologist as a data manipulator. In few "scientific fields" is this type of event a reasonably common experience. Only through personal contact and trust can any hopefully effective study be made of these phenomena avoiding the morass of personal enthusiasm and lifetime commitment.

Contributions of the Study

The value of the study generally appear in the text above. Its principal contribution explicitly would be the status report and an objective evaluation of where the investigators in the ESP and psychic phenomena area have been, where they are now, and what is predicted to be general trends in the future. These findings obviously would apply to potential utilization of such research for practical application by a variety of public and private organizations.