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IS PARAPSYCHOLOGY A SCIENCE?

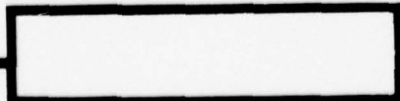
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PREPARED BY:

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IS PARAPSYCHOLOGY A SCIENCE?

Ivan Karamfelov

According to occultism any object (a photograph, watch or a lump of sugar) which a person has carried or slept with for a long time can be used by a clairvoyant to see instantly that person's thoughts and wishes as well as his past and future actions which are reflected in the astral world. The occultist Faneg in his book, Methods of Psychometric Clairvoyance, has described such concrete cases.

Is it really possible to see directly the past or the future? Are there people who are able, with only the force of their thoughts, to move objects in space? What kind of material carrier is it who has information on the past, present and future events as reflected from snails, lumps of sugar or radiated directly from the brain by certain individuals. Indeed, during the last few years the spreading of reports has accelerated, even in the press reports of some mysterious ability among our people have appeared. Some see in a lump of sugar the past and future of their visitors, others are able, over a distance, to move objects in space with only a glance, still others stop atomic decomposition, can command the clouds or govern the behavior of their relatives who are far away. Reports have appeared that scientific institutes have been created and serious studies have been under-

taken to investigate these, "new and until now unsuspected abilities of the human mind."

On the basis of such announcements several enthusiasts began, even in the press, to predict a change in science and life of humanity. "Just imagine," they say, "if science masters these latent mental forces, what changes will come about. With the help of telekinesis (the movement of objects using only the force of thought) one can construct enormous buildings and remake raw materials. The means of transportation will become unnecessary because people will move with the help of levitation (overcoming the earth's gravity and moving a person by thought force). People to people communication over cosmic distances will take place without using a complicated apparatus, without words, or speech, directly from brain to brain by telepathy (transmission of a thought over a distance directly from brain to brain)." The "new science" Parapsychology promises this marvelous future for humanity.

For those unfamiliar with these problems it all looks rather tempting and something quite new. In fact, history shows that magicians and conjurers have already come and gone thousands of years ago with such "new phenomena." In the middle ages they were joined by witches, spiritualists, occultists, illusion artists and other lovers of

mysticism.

Parapsychology was created during the last 100 years in Western Europe for purposes of explaining spiritual wonders and for providing religion with an experimental basis. In England, the leading theologian of the Anglican Church and well-known spiritualist, S. Moses, looked for natural scientific proofs for the significance of prayer as a means of communicating with God. Namely, he proposed to create a society for psychical investigations to collect facts which prove the possibility of transmitting thoughts over a distance and by this to have proved the connection with the "next world." The beginning of such activity was undertaken during January, 1882, in London when a Society for Psychical Investigation was created. The member of this society, F. Myers, while asserting that the souls of the dead are able to influence the lives of the living, proposed that such phenomena be named "Telepathy" (extra-sensory perception of objective events).

Today most of the parapsychologists in the capitalist countries are inclined toward a spiritualistic interpretation of "the parapsychological phenomena" even though some of these are declaring their loyalty to the natural

scientific positions. In the socialist countries parapsychologists strive to examine these phenomena on a materialistic basis. They are searching for new types of material developments for sending and receiving thoughts and not by the use of the five senses known at present. They are collecting stories about "spontaneous paraphenomena" and are conducting experimental investigations.

As a result of all this, a huge amount of literature has been collected, composed of stories about "mysterious occurrences" as well as stories based on theoretical grounds for proving the existence of mysterious psychic powers. The English Society for Psychical Investigation alone has collected over 700,000 cases of spontaneous parapsychological occurrences.

The spontaneous paraphenomena represent recorded facts such as these: someone, somewhere, sometime, something unusual was experienced or felt. In the collection of the London Psychological Society there are stories about the appearance of spirits, of dreams coming true, forebodings of misfortune, etc. But from such facts it is not possible to create a science. It is necessary to have repetition and experimental verification for the existence of such

"phenomena". This is why experiments were intensively conducted with special methods applied. The most important of these consists of mental transference by a sender (person who sends thoughts) to a receiver (person who receives these thoughts) an impulse for readiness for selecting a defined figure from five possibilities-a circle, cross, square, wavy lines, five-pointed star (Zener cards). The sender draws carefully and at random from the pack. The figure depicted on the card is suggested to the receiver over a distance. In this experimental performance 25 mental suggestions were carried out. The experiment is considered successful if the number of guessed figures noticeably exceeds 20 per cent of coincidences-the percent of possible chance coincidences.

Another method of parapsychological experimentation is the mental suggestion, over a distance, of visual images of objects, drawn out by lot beforehand, prepared and passed to the sender. Here is how one such experiment was conducted, considered a success by the parapsychologists.

The experimenter, U. Kamensky, was locked in an isolated chamber in Moscow, under the control of scientists. From a series of objects prepared in advance and known to

the experimentors, one was drawn and given to the sender. He, during a period of 10 minutes, sent his picture of this object. At a distance of 3,500 km in Novosibirsk, the receiver, Nickolaev, was also locked in a chamber under the same conditions. Exactly at the synchronized time during the ten minute interval he relates and writes down what he has received: "I see something long. It is black and made of plastic." At that moment the sender has been concentrating on a screw driver with a black plastic handle. He held it in his hands, looked at it and also visualized it.

The parapsychologists, on the basis of similar (according to them) successful experiments began to speak of the future application of the parapsychological phenomena: realization of bio-tele-communication, enhancement of the effectiveness of the learning process through mental suggestion, extraction of information from the depths of the human memory, etc.

Are these hopes valid? Categorically, no! This is the opinion of academician Oparin, who asserts that a significant majority of the observations of telepathic and parapsychological phenomena are narrow-minded and don't reflect conditions characteristic of the scientific experiment. When the demands of the scientific examination

are applied these phenomena are shown to be fictitious, a result of self-deception or, more often, of obvious fraud. "It is evident," says academician Oparin, "that the tendency to attribute to all these mystical exercises the character of science of the future is absolutely fruitless and their propagation is absolutely harmful."

The exact same conclusions can be drawn after the analysis of the paraphenomena in the major work, Medical Occultism, published during 1962 and edited by professor Prokop in East Germany. In this book many facts are reported which deprives the parapsychological dogmas of their reliable imagery. "The modern cultural standard looks like a thin layer," writes professor Prokop, "under which the mysterious sciences and magic of the past centuries wait for the right situation in order to break through and rise to the surface." He points out that the abstract allegations of the parapsychologists are in need of evidence. Because of this reason, the parapsychologists are compelled to gravitate toward spiritualistic mediums and to work with "gifted people" from the ranks of clairvoyants, fortune-tellers, palmists, astrologers, etc. So the "super fortune-teller" is searched for frantically and such people are the basis on which the reputations of

scientific institutions are built. Up until now, in the world millions of experiments have been conducted. And the results? The results, as comrade Price says in his article, "It more likely can be explained as the foul-play or stupidity of the experimentors. Their hypotheses are unable to be disengaged from the belief which transforms opinions into evidence and feelings into justification."

The parapsychologists have been collecting facts for 100 years yet are not able to come up with one unique scientifically authentic fact to prove the existence of parapsychological phenomena. The experimental material cited in the parapsychological literature is not unique since it has been examined in experiments by rather suspicious individuals and these tests haven't been repeated by any other individual. An isolated experiment does not have any scientific meaning, however honest its author may be. Also, while interpreting the para phenomena, subjective explanations are given full play with the desired being presented as the real. Such are the findings of all scientists who have had to investigate the parapsychological experiments, represented as scientifically authentic. In his book, Parapsychology, the American professor Henzel examines all parapsychological experiments conducted in America and comes to the conclusion that not one of these

are scientifically authentic. To the same conclusion also came the commission of scientists, which conducted during 1968 the controlled experiment, "Moscow-Kerch" on telepathic sending. It found that the records of the preceding experiments for distant telepathic communication between Moscow-Novosibirsk and Moscow-Leningrad are treated roughly, without the usual systematic requirements being observed. So, from the conflicting utterances and recordings of the receiver, the parapsychologists have separated only the words, "I saw something black, plastic, long," in order to assert that the receiver has received the telepathic thought of a screw driver. But even as these words are being pronounced by the receiver, in all their significance, an unbiased person will see a one-sided and biased explanation by the experimentors. Isn't it possible for the words, "black, plastic and long" to characterize other objects which were prepared for transmitting, such as a cigarette holder, pen knife, box, etc., which can significantly raise the percent of guessing in comparison with the mathematical probability? The same psychological mechanism is used also by fortune-tellers, who, as they speak complicated words, let the visitor adjust the words to their own beliefs. The famous telepaths, Nickolaev and Kamensky, placed under strict experimental conditions before the commission of unbiased scientists in the controlled experiment, "Moscow-

Kerch", conducted under the patronage of the newspaper, "Literaturnaya Gazetta", during 1968, showed zero results.

But why, inspite of all this unmasking, don't the parapsychologists stop seeking verification of their belief in the existence of telepathy and other paraphenomena? They don't because with the assistance of only facts it is not possible to refute one belief. To make this point clear, let's take as an example the beliefs of the members of the Ashante tribe of southern Sudan. Even today they ascribe all misfortune to witchcraft. A complex system of beliefs and ceremonies has been erected and postulates accepted so that everything which occurs confirms their belief. "Witchcraft," they say, "causes death." Consequently every individual death is proof of the witchcraft which was made. The oracle makes other witchcraft in order to revenge the death. Soon after this, a neighbor dies. Obviously, he is guilty and, therefore, the witchcraft of the oracle has punished him. If the incantation doesn't act, this proves that the words have been chanted incorrectly or a certain part of the ritual has been done incorrectly.

A similar way of thinking is also shared by those who believe in the existence of telepathy. When there is a coincidence in guessing, this means that a telepathic com-

munication has been realized. When there isn't a coincidence, something is preventing its realization (associative obstacles, the earth's magnetic pole). People with such a closed system of thinking never want to hear that other more plausible explanations of their "paraphenomena" are possible. They do not acknowledge the arguments of scientists who prove that telepathy contradicts the basic ideas of modern science. They follow their mirages, thus confirming the thought of Engels, expressed in, "Natural Science and the World of Spirits." "The most correct way for natural science to deal with mysticism is neglect, but toward speculative thought the enthusiasm of creeping empiricism."

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