

21. Beyond beliefs: explanation and anomalous phenomena

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Introduction

Anomalous communication (extrasensory perception, telepathy) and anomalous action at a distance (psychokinesis) are often referred to under the umbrella word “psi” (pronounced “sigh”). They are two aspects of a fascinating and potentially important phenomenon that is the subject of contentious non-mainstream scientific inquiry, usually within a sub-discipline of psychology-parapsychology.

It is widely accepted that if the evidence for these phenomena were “real” the impact on theories of mind, causation and time as well as social institutions would be great. What is not widely accepted is the use of the evidence for such phenomena in science or philosophy. Instead scientists who publicly declare their interest in the phenomena are often criticised and psi remains almost invisible in philosophical discussion. This paper is concerned with the debate over the use of psi. It will use an analysis of the presuppositions of the modern worldview to try to untangle some of the issues that inform discussion about psi within the sciences and philosophy.

The title *Beyond Beliefs—Anomalous Phenomena and Explanation* comes from the main idea that will be explored within this context. That is, it is not the phenomena that are new, it is the background beliefs about where explanation is sought for the phenomena that has gradually changed over time and continues to inform the debate. An understanding of these background issues can help to put the current debate over the evidence into perspective.

The paper will first define and explain psi and briefly indicate what kind of evidence there is for the phenomena, then give an example of the

current debate about the use of psi in science. It will be suggested that it is more than an epistemic debate about the evidence, and this will be supported by an account of the tension between the build up of the evidence and acceptance of the phenomena as plausible. Then an analysis of the presuppositions behind the modern worldview will be sketched out and their relevance to the debate detailed. A discussion of the possible outcomes for materialism will conclude that the most reasonable way forward is to accept the evidence for psi as plausible and attempt to expand the scope of science and philosophy theory to encompass the phenomena.

Psi definitions and examples

Psi is otherwise known as telepathy and psychokinesis. The former is anomalous communication and the latter anomalous action at a distance. Psi is commonly broken into the following elements:

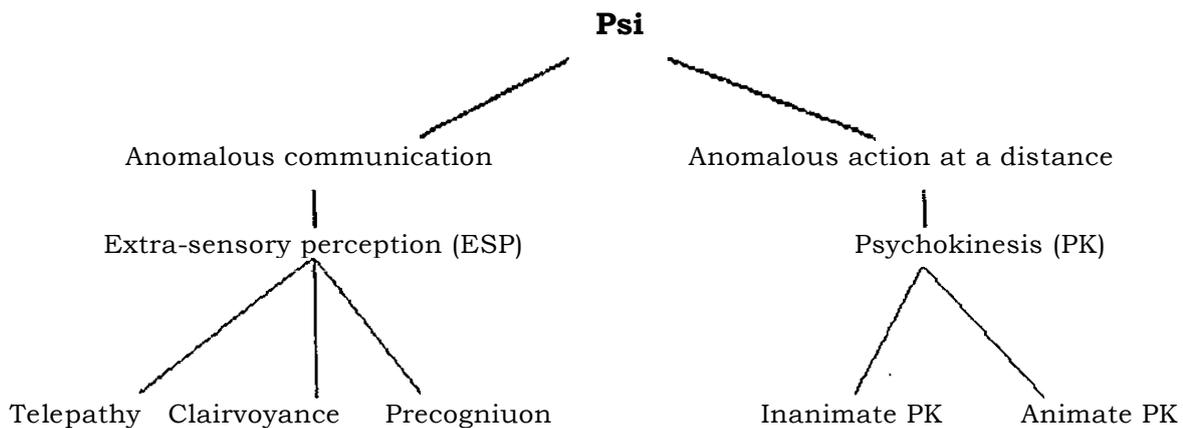


Figure 20.1. Diagram of Psi elements.

Anomalous action at a distance

Anomalous action at a distance occurs when matter is affected by a person without any known force or mechanism. This can be an object outside someone's body or substances within the person's own body. To encompass both of these aspects of psychokinesis it is defined by the philosopher Stephen E. Braude as "the causal influence of an organism on a region *r* of the physical world without any known sort of physical interaction between the organism's body and *r*." (Braude, 1986, p. 220). It is important to realise that it is defined by what it is not. If something occurs that *cannot* be explained mechanistically by reduction to any of the four known forces then

an instance of psychokinesis can be said to have occurred. Below are some examples:

Psychokinesis—animate	Psychokinesis—inanimate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychosomatic illnesses • ‘Miraculous’ cures—spontaneous remissions of terminal disease • Increases or decreasing own or other organism’s blood pressure • Voluntary control of heart beat rate • Stigmata • Levitation • Healing at a distance • Causing seeds to germinate faster than control seeds • Knowing someone is staring at you when other sensory cues are not possible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving a compass needle without touching the compass • Stopping and starting mechanical objects without touching them or using other known devices (remote control etc.) • Controlling the weather • Levitation of physical objects during séances • Materialisation or apportionation of physical objects during séances • Poltergeist phenomena (stones falling from nowhere, knocking on doors, objects falling from shelves, pictures falling from hooks, knives hovering in the air).

Table 20.1. Examples of psychokinesis, action at a distance.

Anomalous communication

Anomalous communication is similarly defined negatively as the acquisition of information about a person or event in the past, present or future without the use of the ordinary five senses (taste, touch, sight, hearing or smell) comprising:

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| <i>Telepathy</i> | Information gained about another mind or minds without the use of the ordinary five senses. |
| <i>Clairvoyance</i> | Information gained from an inanimate object or event without the use of the five senses. |
| <i>Precognition</i> | Information about a person or event in the past, present or future without the use of the ordinary five senses. |

ESP-telepathy	ESP-clairvoyance	ESP-precognition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exchange of information between people without normal sensory cues • Consciously or unconsciously causing someone to think a specific thought • Knowledge of another's thoughts without use of regular communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Psychometry—information gained from objects or events • Locating lost or hidden objects (for instance, an ancient sunken ship, mining sites or stolen jewellery) • Remote viewing—knowledge of a far-off location without prior knowledge as to what is there 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prediction concerning a person's life (for instance, feeling a sense of foreboding when boarding a train and acting on it by getting off, only later to find train had crashed) • Guessing a target image correctly that was not selected until after the guess was made.

Table 20.2 Examples of anomalous communication.

The evidence for psi

The evidence for the phenomena fall into two categories usually referred to as “spontaneous”—because they are taken from instances in the everyday life of people—and “laboratory”—because they have been studied under controlled circumstances in physics or psychology laboratories.

Below are two examples of spontaneous psi—one of anomalous action at a distance and the other of anomalous communication. The experimental evidence will be detailed in brief afterwards.

The first is an example of the kind of anomalous action at a distance that is seen in poltergeist incidences. As strange as it sounds, it is a report by W.G. Roll, a seasoned investigator of such incidences who put together a comprehensive book on the subject that details similar incidences from 1612 to 1974. He reports as follows:

Several objects had moved when Roger, a 12-year-old boy was near, but it had happened out of my sight. This was in his home in Kentucky, December, 1968. I therefore stayed as close to Roger as I could. One time he went out to the kitchen while I followed a few feet behind. When lie came to the area between the sink and the kitchen table he turned around facing me. At that moment the table jumped into the air, rotated about 45 degrees, and came down on the backs of the four chairs that stood around it, its four legs off the floor. No one else was in the area, and I was unable to discover any ordinary explanation of the event (Roll, 1977, p. 387).

This type of evidence is dramatic, but also one-off. People involved as the focus for poltergeist incidences cannot produce this type of anomalous action at a distance on demand. The incidences are open to charges of fraud, and the reliability of witness testimony is sometimes questioned. However, the body of literature that details these types of events has resulted in numerous accounts of such phenomena often viewed by multiple witnesses who do not have a vested interest in perpetrating fraud about the event. Some photographic evidence has also been obtained, and, because the events can continue for months at a time, experiments with the anomalous phenomena associated with poltergeists, such as psychokinesis and apportation of objects, have been carried out in the field.

Catalogues of anomalous communication have also been compiled. Below is a report from *Phantasms of the Living*, which is a well-researched compendium of spontaneous telepathy. It was the first book commissioned by the Society for Psychical Research and is an early example of psi phenomena investigated with possible non-supernatural explanation in mind.

On March, 16th, 1884, I was sitting alone in the drawing-room reading an interesting book, and feeling perfectly well, when suddenly I experienced an undefined feeling of dread and sorrow; I looked at the clock and saw it was just 7 p. m. I was utterly unable to read, so I got up and walked about the room trying to throw off the feeling, but I could not: I became quite cold, and had a firm presentiment that I was dying. The feeling lasted about half-an-hour, and then passed off, leaving me a good deal shaken all the evening; I went to bed feeling very weak as if I had been seriously ill.

The next morning I received a telegram telling me of the death of a near and very dear cousin... I did not associate this feeling of death with her or with anyone else, but I had a most distinct impression that something terrible was happening. This feeling came over me, I afterwards found, just at the time when my cousin died (7 p.m.). The connection with her death may have been simply an accident. I was not aware that Mrs. K. was ill, and her death was peculiarly sad and sudden" (Gurney, Myers and Podmore, 1970, Vol. 1, pp. 197-198).

This kind of case shows that it is hard to tell if this type of spontaneous anomalous communication was a coincidence or whether the person did really receive some kind of anomalous information about the death of her cousin. For instance, at any one time on the earth, numerous people die unexpectedly, and, at any one time, a certain amount of people feel unaccountably sad. Sometimes there will be an unrelated correlation between the two events and it would be impossible to calculate with any degree of accuracy how often this should normally be expected to occur. It must therefore be considered that it is possibly merely a coincidence that this person experienced a feeling of sadness at the same time as Mrs K. died.

More dramatic incidences of anomalous communication are more persuasive because they involve knowledge communicated in detail about the death of the person or the events that have been “seen” anomalously. The philosopher Swedenborg has now famously described an incident of anomalous communication whereby he “knew” that his home town in Sweden had been devastated by fire, but also that his house had been saved as the fire had stopped three doors down from it. On his return, this was found to be the case. This kind of detailed information about an event that is later corroborated makes the evidence for spontaneous communication more convincing, perhaps, than vague feelings of sadness that correlate with the death of a loved one, however, the issue of coincidence must still be considered a possible explanation.

Since the 1920s, attempts to address this problem have been made. Psi, since this time, has been studied mostly in the field of psychology, taking its cues from early catalogues of anomalous phenomena such as *Phantasms of the Living*. In these early experiments, for instance, to test for the possibility of some kind of extrasensory perception, long runs of experiments were performed which used a set amount of targets—a sender would attempt to “send” the information to a “receiver” who was unable to access information from the sender through the use of any of the normal five senses. The sender would then ‘pick up’ the information and choose which of the target cards they thought was the correct one (Rhine, 1937). Action at a distance experiments were also devised. Long runs of experiments in which people would attempt to influence the outcome of dice throws were used to calculate above chance expectations, which imply psychokinetic ability in some people (Broughton, 1991).

Psi experiments have grown in sophistication since then. The experiments for anomalous communication have evolved into the ganzfeld experiments, among others, which use moving pictures and computer-generated randomly selected targets. A computer is used to record the results in order to prevent sensory cues that may have been observed unwittingly by the person making the guess. The atmosphere, too, is now considered important, and attempts are made to ensure the person making the guess is comfortable and relaxed and that all regular five senses are dulled (Bem and Honorton, 1994). Since 1974, more than 100 formal experiments of this type in various laboratories have been carried out (Palmer, 2003, p. 54).

Experiments showing anomalous action at a distance have also evolved in which attempts are made to intentionally produce a biased outcome on what should be random events determined by, for instance, the radioactive decay of an atom (Burn, 2003). The Princeton Anomalies Engineering Unit has also carried out experiments for over the last 10 years in which:

Human operators attempt to influence the behavior of a variety of mechanical, electronic, optical, acoustical, and fluid devices to conform to pre-stated intentions, without recourse to any known

physical processes. In unattended calibrations these sophisticated machines all produce strictly random outputs, yet the experimental results display increases in information content that can only be attributed to the influence of the consciousness of the human operator (PEAR, 2005, net).

It is thought that the results from these long-run experiments indicate that human consciousness somehow can effect-at a distance-machines that would otherwise act in a regular predictable manner.

In comparison to the “spontaneous” evidence, the perceived benefits were the same for the later experiments as the earlier ones. Conditions could be controlled more carefully, and, consequently fraud could be ruled out more certainly. Also, because these experiments could be analysed using statistics due to a known and limited target range, against chance expectations could be used to rule out fluky guesses or coincidence as being accountable for what appeared to be incidences of psi. As the amount of experiments grew and other laboratories attempted replication, meta-analysis of the data was also able to be carried out.

The evidence, however, is still controversial. There are those who maintain that “spontaneous” cases will never be replicated in a laboratory and that it is to these more dramatic incidences of psi we should still turn for evidence (Braude, 1986, p. 3). There are debates as to the use of statistics to find correlations in what should be random data, and, amongst parapsychologists themselves, there are disagreements as to what degree of statistical significance should be expected and is shown (Milton and Wiseman, 1999). Some skeptics still remain doubtful of the validity of the evidence for psi; for example, in a recent article James Alcock, a psychologist and long-time contributor to the debate, concluded “I continue to believe that parapsychology is, at bottom, motivated by belief in search of data, rather than data in search of explanation” (Alcock, 2003, p. 4).

But what is commonly agreed upon by both those who are researching in the area and those who have been previously critical of the evidence is that there is some evidence for psi “effects”—whatever they may turn out to be—and that “priority in parapsychology should be given to seeking a theoretical framework for psi in terms of lawful relationships” (Parker, Persson and Haller, 2000, p. 65).

The significance of psi

On a theoretical level, the ramifications of the acceptance of psi could be profound. For instance, if psi shows that people can obtain knowledge of past and future events then our theories of time would need to account for this (Brier, 1976, p. 56). Theories of causation, too, could be influenced by the idea that if anomalous action at a distance does occur it might indicate

cause and effects can take place uncontiguously and sometimes back to front—as in the case of some retrokinesis experiments that seem to indicate effects precede their causes. Some of these ideas are not an anathema to current developments in theories of time and causation, but psi is often invisible in discussions of this kind. There is scope for psi effects to be useful in metaphysical speculation of these matters.

Theories of psi would also impact on current debate about consciousness and issues in philosophy of mind. For instance, John Beloff, a psychologist who helped to found the Koestler Parapsychology Unit at Edinburgh University, believes that psi effects “mark the boundary conditions beyond which we can no longer treat the individual as a psychophysical atom” (Beloff, 1963 and 1978, p. 365). He adopts a form of dualism accordingly. And philosophers such as Keith Campbell are aware that “the Mind-Body problem requires for its solution a judgement on parapsychology” (Campbell, 1984, p. 94).

However, academics who actively research psi or use findings from psi experiments or catalogues of spontaneous psi are few and far between. A debate about whether the evidence for psi should be used at all is still current as a recent example shows.

Scientists dispute psi

In 2001, a furore broke out in the British press regarding telepathy. The Royal Mail in Great Britain had published a special edition of stamps to commemorate British Nobel prize winners. In the accompanying pamphlet, Brian Josephson, a Nobel prize winning physicist, was quoted:

Quantum theory is now being fruitfully combined with theories of information and computation. These developments may lead to an explanation of processes still not understood within conventional science such as telepathy, an area where Britain is at the forefront of research (Josephson, 2001, net).

In a critical article published by the *Observer*, two scientists were quoted in response to the text in the pamphlet. David Deutsch, a physicist from Oxford University, said, “It is utter rubbish. Telepathy simply does not exist. The Royal Mail has let itself be hoodwinked into supporting ideas that are complete nonsense” (McKie 2001, net). Another academic, Herbert Kroemer, made the comment, “I am highly skeptical ... few of us believe telepathy exists, nor do we think physics can explain it. It also seems wrong for your Royal Mail to get involved. Certainly, if the U.S. postal services did something like this, a lot of us would be very angry” (McKie 2001, net).

In response to the criticisms, Josephson published a letter setting out the evidence he found convincing for psi, but it did not generate a response from either of these scientists.

Although this is perhaps a trivial example of scientific debate over the evidence for psi in a non-scientific forum, it shows neatly two important aspects about the use of psi. First, it indicates that the use of psi in science as a “real” phenomenon has potential to help solve current problems in science. Second, it shows that the debate is less about epistemic issues and more about already well-grounded beliefs regarding the evidence for psi. This explains Deutsch’s and Kroemer’s adamant reaction to Josephson’s statement (because for them telepathy cannot exist no matter what it looks like) and why they did not respond to his list of evidence for telepathy which he found convincing. Their public exchange regarding the use of the evidence for psi effects within science can be simplified to a “yes it is, no it is not” type of debate without any immediately apparent resolution for either side.

To resolve the debate it is important to examine what might be behind the various perspectives depicted by prominent people such as Josephson and Deutsch and Kroemer in the debate about psi. To progress with this aim in mind first the tension between the evidence and scientific explanation will be set out. Then the transition from a dualist/supernatural worldview to the current materialist worldview will be sketched.

Tension between the evidence and acceptance in science

The philosopher C.D. Broad listed the ways in which psi violates not, just what is expected in science, but also what he dubbed “Basic Limiting Principles,” which we “unhesitatingly take for granted as the framework within which all our practical activities and our scientific theories are confined” (Broad, 1949, p. 37). His four main principles that psi phenomena transgress were: general principles of causation, limitations on the action of mind on matter, dependence of mind on brain, and limitations on ways of acquiring knowledge (Broad, 1949, p. 40).

But two points can be made about such a list. Firstly, because psi is defined negatively, it will be, by its very nature and definition, considered anomalous to current areas of scientific certainty such as the acquisition of information through anything but the five senses or the ability of organisms to effect matter at a distance. The philosopher Michael Scriven argues this point:

Now the nature of parapsychological experimental design—no more than the limiting case of ordinary experimental design—is such as to exclude ‘natural’ explanations. That is, demonstrating

that a parapsychological phenomenon has occurred at all requires showing that what occurred was not explicable in terms of the entities in the pantheon of contemporary physics and psychology (Scriven, 1976, pp. 184-5).

It is pertinent to remember that, at the beginning of the paper, it was noted how both ESP and PK are defined negatively. It is, therefore, not surprising that a list of how psi contravenes “basic limiting principles” can be made.

Secondly, since Broad published this in 1949, many changes have occurred in theories of mind and causation that would not accord with the certainty of some of his “Basic Limiting Principles” such as recent developments in causation theory, which describe causation as a process or correlation, although it should also be noted that these theories, too, would most likely treat psi as anomalous.

That psi should be able to be explained in terms of forces within the hard sciences at all is questioned by some. Stephen E. Braude points out in his book, *Limits of Influence*,

it is specious to argue that the language of physics is (or will be) able to express all the important facts of human functioning. For one thing, it seems to me that the laws of physics (including conservation laws) strictly speaking apply only to impersonal or mechanical forces—i.e., to physical systems and interactions abstracted from the realm of intention (Braude, 1986, p17).

He questions the assumption that psi should be analysed in conventional scientific terms, specifically physics, due to the assumed “mental” nature of the phenomena (Braude, 1986, p17).

These issues are still unresolved. In a recent edition of *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, a special called “Psi Wars” was compiled in which the problems surrounding the evidence for psi were examined again. It had articles from high-profile academics who had participated in the debate about psi in recent years. The problems surrounding theoretical speculation involving psi are re-examined, and Jean E. Burn notes that “it would seem that psi needs either a recipe for reliably producing it or an experimentally verifiable theory of its relationship to known physics before it will be considered an established phenomenon” (Burn, 2003, p. 25). Like Braude, Burn also points out that psi, because it involves the human mind, encounters similar problems to other areas of consciousness studies regarding explanation. But Burn is hopeful that

regardless of the ontological status of consciousness—emergent physicalism, dualism or anything else—it seems likely that the principles which govern it **will** differ from known physical laws. Psi phenomena may be giving us an advance view of some of these principles (Burn, 2003, p. 25).

There is a point to be made here regarding explanation and psi that does not limit it to issues in philosophy of mind and highlights the problem between the accumulation of evidence and the lack of supporting theory. The point is that there is something that physics can explain about someone picking up a pencil and feeling the weight of the pencil in their hand and something that physics cannot even *conceive of how* to go about explaining an event such as someone making a pencil move on the table without touching it or in any other way exerting a known force on the pencil or table.

The build up of data for psi that indicates the latter is possible and the continued perception of psi as impossible because of the degree to which it is counter to what science expects it can explain is a problem. Broader issues in philosophy of mind aside, at some point, those who maintain that psi cannot exist, that it is “impossible,” must account for this evidence; at some point those scientists who use the evidence for psi must account for how it can be understood in scientific terms.

This is a tension that might be resolved using David Ray Griffin’s analysis of the foundations of the modern worldview. This will be used to help provide an understanding of why such phenomena cannot be explained by the scope of science as it is currently understood to be and what direction such an explanation may be found in.

Sketch of trends of explanation of psi

David Ray Griffin¹ presents a case that there have been two relatively recent traditions that have changed the western perspective of science and are particularly important to the place of the investigation for explanation of psi phenomena. The first was the transition from the medieval world to the modern worldview, and the second a transition from a dualist/supernatural ontology to a materialist-dominated scientific one. Figure 17.2 depicts a sketch² of the transitions that he sees as important to the creation of the modern worldview and a discussion of the reasons why it has had an influence on anomalous phenomena such as psi. This chart is explained in more detail in the following section.

The first transition started in the 14th century and was ongoing for four centuries. During this time, according to Griffin “the idea began to grow of God as a separate being, acting on the world from outside. Immutable, impassible, independent were attributes generally given to God” (Griffin, 1990, net). At the time the modern worldview was formed, Griffin maintains, there were important social and theological (and therefore political) reasons to support this notion of a mechanistic law-abiding world separate from the divine. Griffin spells this out:

the mechanistic view of nature was also used, for example by Boyle and Newton, to argue for the existence of God: if nature

was devoid of self-motion, there had to be a supernatural being to have put it into motion and also to have imposed laws of motion upon it. Newton also argued that the mechanistic materialistic conception of matter, according to which it has no hidden powers and acts only by contact, shows the need for a cosmic spiritual being to explain the mutual attraction of bodies (gravitation) and the cohesiveness of atoms in solid bodies (Griffin, 1988, p. 10-11).

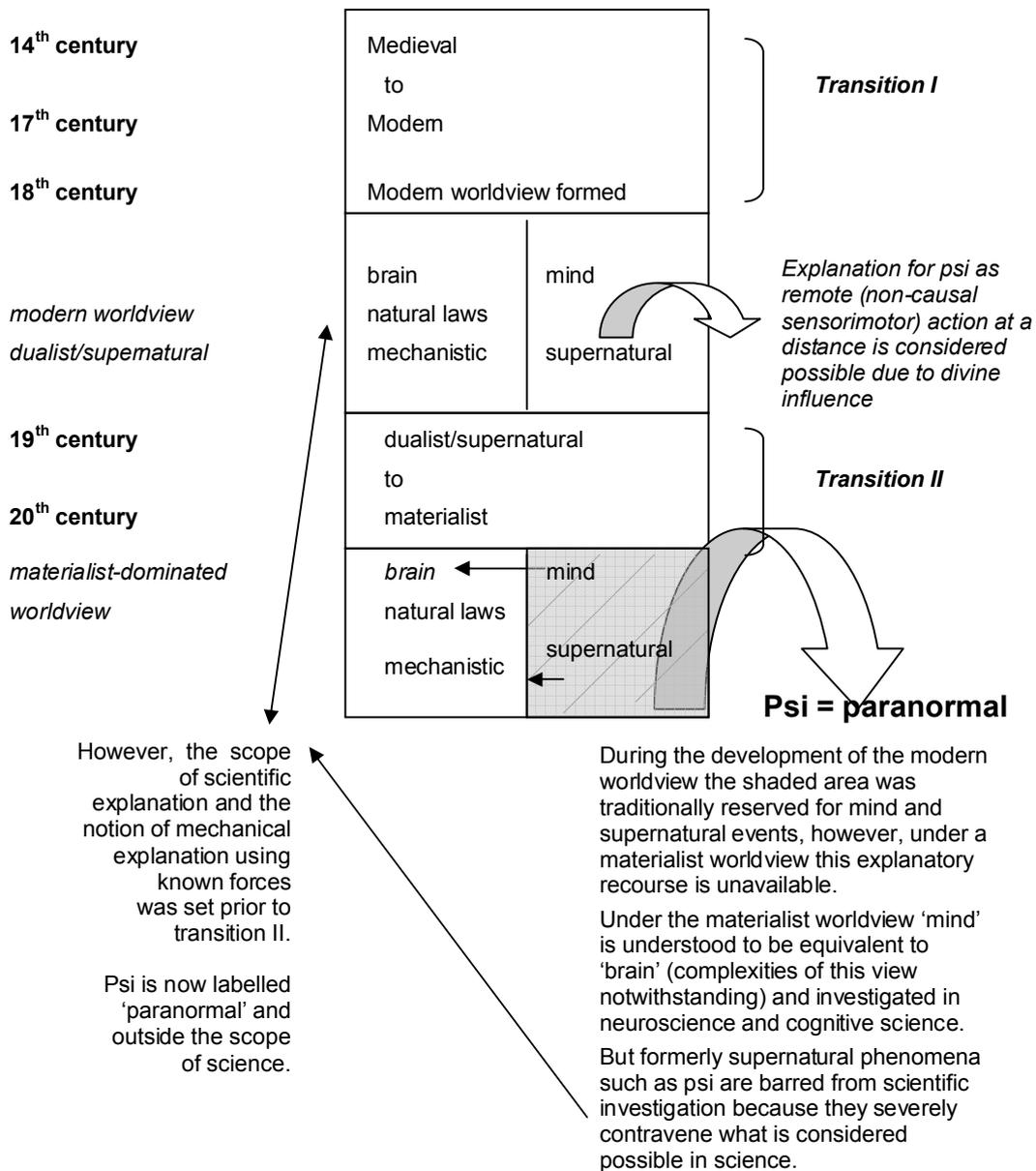


Fig. 20.2 Sketch of psi trends, 14th – 20th centuries.

He contends that phenomena such as psi, which involve anomalous action at a distance, are so controversial because “the modern worldview...not only excludes this kind of causal influence, but was in part *created to exclude it*” (Griffin, 1997, p. 17). This has a consequence not just for action at a distance (an interesting area in itself and one that poses problems of its own such as non-locality in quantum physics), but especially for psi because it places firmly this kind of action at a distance in the supernatural realm for explanation.

A second transition then occurred that changed the place in which explanation for such phenomena is sought. Griffin makes a case that from the mid-18th century and during the 19th century, supernaturalism and dualism were gradually replaced by the now currently dominant (in western society) materialist worldview. This worldview is underpinned by the notion that everything—at least in theory—should be explainable mechanistically using the known forces. The result of this second transition was that

the supernaturalistic theism of early modernism transmuted into the naturalistic atheism of late modernism. Accordingly the mechanical philosophy’s implication that events not understandable in terms of action by contact cannot happen naturally came to mean that they cannot happen at all (Griffin, 1997, p. 23).

The phenomena from spontaneous instances of psi, such as in the catalogues from the 1880s and Roll’s poltergeist catalogue as well as biblical, historical and early Greek reports of psi-like phenomena, indicate that the phenomena themselves are not new to human experience. However, if Griffin’s analysis is valid, then these two transitions are pertinent to how the phenomena are perceived and what realm of explanation is considered appropriate for them at different times.

The founding of the Society of Psychical Research is a perfect case in point for the latter transition. The society was founded in the late 1880s by a group of academics at Cambridge University headed by the philosopher Henry Sidgwick. It was set up:

to investigate that large body of debatable phenomena designated by such terms as mesmeric, psychical and spiritualistic without prejudice or prepossession of any kind, and in the same spirit of exact and unimpassioned inquiry which has enabled science to solve so many problems, once not less obscure nor less hotly debated (Haynes, 1982, xiii).

This is often cited as the first official acknowledgment that phenomena previously considered supernatural are to be explained using the scientific method. Psi phenomena thereafter have made the slow transition as

phenomena for which no further explanation was necessary because supernatural explanation covered this realm to phenomena that required scientific explanation (at least by a small group of scientists and other academics). At this stage, even though they were seeking a scientific account for the phenomena, many of the early researchers assumed that psi was immaterial. This was to prove problematic. What they did not foresee was the ongoing debate about the validity of the evidence for these phenomena under a materialist worldview or the development of mainstream scientific demands that the phenomena be reduced mechanistically or remain “paranormal” and, for all intents and purposes, an impossibility.

How this interpretation impacts on current debate about psi

The timeline sketched out above indicates a plausible resolution to the problematic position that the evidence for psi is currently in. It helps to explain why psi cannot be accounted for under the current scientific scope of lawful relations. To explain the influence that the modern worldview still has on the scientific perception of anomalous phenomena like psi, Griffin comments that:

In the dominant thinking of the time [Newtown et al.], the connection between the desire to exclude action at a distance in physics, on the one hand, and the desire to rule out all paranormal influence on and by human minds, on the other, was evidently something like this: given the dualism between (spiritual) mind and (physical) nature, excluding action at a distance from nature did not, strictly speaking, rule out the possibility that human minds might either receive or exert causal influence at a distance (Griffin, 1997, p. 20).

Psi was therefore excluded in order to keep distant interaction with the world, in the spiritual or mental realm under a supernatural/dualist worldview. That is, under this worldview the evidence for psi, whether anomalous action at a distance or anomalous communication, tended to be explained as supernatural and, therefore, as outside of the realm of scientific inquiry. With the development of the predominance of the materialist worldview, combined with the decline of the supernatural/dualist worldview, evidence for such things as being able to move an object without touching it or communicating without the use of the five senses were left without recourse to either supernatural or mainstream scientific explanation.

If this is accepted as a valid interpretation, it can help resolve the debate about the use of psi as “real” within the sciences and philosophy by resolving the tension between the build up of evidence for psi and the view

that psi is so counter to what is expected in science that it cannot be conceived of as a plausible, explainable phenomena. It does this by showing that notions of what is physical or what is a cause and effect were limited in their scope when the modern scientific worldview was formed and that they were limited deliberately to exclude the idea that anomalous action at a distance or anomalous communication required a natural explanation. A re-evaluation of the phenomena with this in mind might make them, as Stephen E. Braude has already asserted, not such an anathema to current scientific theory.

Even if this analysis has not completely resolved the debate about the use of psi in science, it has at least allowed for an understanding of the beliefs behind the debate and the change in the worldview that may have led to psi phenomena being left in limbo between supernatural and scientific explanation. This places psi in a particularly difficult position in regard to the dominant mode of explanation at this time in science: materialism.

Psi and materialism

In a paper written in 1949, the philosopher Harry Price famously declared, “There is no room for telepathy in a materialistic universe” (in Thakur, 1976, p. 197). And for some years, there was a popular thought that evidence for psi might itself have provided a legitimate challenge to materialism (Scriven, 1976, p. 183). However, as the current debate about psi indicates, it is also quite firmly within the materialist framework that the outcomes for the acceptance or non-acceptance of psi phenomena are currently judged.

OUTCOME	ENTAILS
Psi falsifies a physically reductive materialism (but not necessarily a naturalistic approach)	Further development of other ontologies such as dualism or pantheism which incorporate psi
Psi will encourage as yet unknown developments in science that will eventually explain the currently anomalous phenomena.	Further investigation within the sciences and theoretical development in philosophy for issues such as time and causation and mind
Psi does not challenge the materialist approach because the evidence for it is not truly anomalous.	Further investigation of the evidence for fraud or ‘normal’ means of explanation

Table 20.3. Views regarding the interpretation of possible outcomes for acceptance of psi within a materialist framework.

There is a complexity of views regarding interpretation of the possible outcomes for the acceptance of the phenomena within the materialist framework. They are provided in Table 17.3.

Some, such as John Beloff and Stephen E. Braude, have decided to adopt dualism as a framework on the basis of accepting as valid the evidence for psi. Others, such as David Kay Griffin, do not think that either materialism or dualism provide a suitable ontology and advocate instead a pantheistic view and a “re-enchantment” of science that includes the evidence from parapsychology as part of its framework.

On the other hand, the philosopher Michael Scriven makes a convincing case that materialism has embraced and accepted formerly unknown and mysterious forces, such as electromagnetism, and it is the second option that is most reasonable to pursue. This is on the basis that:

It seems hard to define materialism in any logical way, other than with respect to a particular historical epoch, so as to exclude materialism which would fully countenance parapsychological phenomena. Putting it another way, it seems that the only materialism that can be really disproved by substantiation of parapsychologists' claims is yesterday's materialism, since the very act of substantiation demonstrates that the phenomena are indeed part of the material world, and hence that a current version of materialism must embrace them (Scriven, 1976, p. 183).

It is the second option that I also think is the more reasonable one to develop. This is because if Griffin's analysis is correct, then it explains two things about psi. The first is that it provides an explanation as to why it is that scientific theories at the moment cannot even conceive of how to explain psi phenomena—which is partly what keeps them relegated to “paranormal” status and such a maligned area of inquiry—and it also provides an indication of the areas that were limited by the scope of science during the formation of the modern world view, which impact what is considered “explainable” now.

The third option encounters problems because it is very difficult to “explain away” the growing batik of evidence for the phenomena both spontaneous and laboratory. It starts to appear irrational to postulate that so much self-delusion and fraud could have been perpetrated in multiple laboratories and, hi the case of spontaneous evidence, over the course of centuries.

Instead, it is more reasonable to accept the well-documented phenomena as part of human experience and the well-researched laboratory evidence as valid scientific evidence and explore them with an understanding that it is self-imposed definitions and limits of scientific scope that have labelled the phenomena initially “supernatural” and subsequently “paranormal.” In due course, they will then have a chance to be accepted into the mainstream of thought in both science and philosophy.

Theoretical development with this historic understanding can provide clues as to how to develop a framework for the inclusion of psi with current science and philosophy. A start could be to look at how acceptance of psi might impact on current theories of time and causation and a new model that sets the scope of science to include phenomena such as anomalous action at a distance could be made. This could in turn help experimental development in parapsychology and physics laboratories which will further theoretical understanding of psi.

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Notes

¹ David Ray Griffin is a process philosopher. He is not used here to make a defense of the materialist interpretation of psi, rather the analysis of the debate within the scientific (materialist) framework has been dictated by the scope of this paper. During the course of his career he has developed complex arguments against both materialism and dualism and is in favour of a pantheistic ontology. Therefore, at this stage and in this paper, the use of his work is limited to his analysis of the formation of the modern scientific worldview without addressing these complex philosophical debates.

² This is intended as a rough sketch of major trends-there have been, and of course still are, major thinkers who have held different views on these trends during the course of these transitions.

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available.

ISBN: 0-9762630-1-7

Printed in the United States of America.