

A Comparative Approach to the Theory of Psychopraxia

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The theory of psychopraxia is described most fully in the so-called psychopraxia monograph (see Thalbourne, 2004). The term “psychopraxia” is derived from two Greek words: *psyche*, which means “soul,” “mind,” or “self,” and *praxia*, from which we get our word “practice” (derived from *prattein*, meaning “to accomplish” or “bring about”). Psychopraxia theory attempts to unify normal and paranormal psychology as well as motor action and cognition so that the conceptual distinction between (i) ESP and PK and (ii) normal information-acquisition and normal motor control might be eliminated, since, for example, both sides of the dichotomy are instances of action.

The theory emphasizes four fundamental aspects of action, whether that action occurs endosomatically (within the body) or exosomatically (outside the body):

1. The self, not defined further than that it is inclusive of the “I” the common denominator of all experience and the co-agent of all action (this description allows for additional agency of the unconscious component of the self).
2. The “pro attitude”: A person may be said to have a pro attitude towards state S when they would prefer S rather than -S (not S) if those two alternatives were to be brought to their attention. Under this heading fall goals, desires, wishes, intentions, needs, preferences, and dispositions, be they conscious or unconscious. Psi missing is also postulated to be the result of a pro attitude, perhaps unconscious, toward obtaining low scores. It is postulated that there is a hierarchy of pro attitudes, and the most potent one wins out. The self is said to “adopt” a pro attitude.
3. The goal-state S that is to be brought about, whether in the so-called “mental” sphere or in the “physical” sphere, is irrelevant.
4. The set of intervening necessary conditions mediating between the self and its pro attitude and the goal-state S [Storm and Thalbourne, 2000, p. 280].

To date, Thalbourne’s (2004) theory of psychopraxia has received only minor commentary from researchers in the field of parapsychology (e.g., Alvarado, 1983;

Beloff, 1985, 1988; Braud, 1983; McBeath, 1985). The major psychological and philosophical analyses that have been made have not been by a broad range of investigators (e.g., Storm, 2003a, b, 2005; Storm and Thalbourne, 2000). The major reason for this deficiency has to do with the fact that the psychopraxia monograph (Thalbourne, 2004) has not yet fallen into a sufficient number of hands. It is also possible that, since 2004, researchers are still grappling with the theoretical and practical implications of psychopraxia which are a challenge to conventional understandings in parapsychology. These problems can only be resolved with time, but in order to muster some kind of momentum that might in turn initiate a debate, this essay seeks to determine the possible contribution psychopraxia theory might make to parapsychology. To do that it would be helpful to crystallize the main thrust of the theory into fundamental statements that can be compared with current theories on offer in parapsychology.

Only theories that are similar to psychopraxia theory (which will become apparent throughout the essay) need be considered in such a comparison. These are Jung's (1960) synchronicity theory and Stanford's (1974a, b, 1990) psi-mediated instrumental response (PMIR) model. Comparative approaches to the different psi theories on offer to parapsychologists might put parapsychologists in a better position to decide for themselves how to go about testing the psi hypothesis. The first comparison made is that of psychopraxia with synchronicity.

Psychopraxia and Synchronicity

In the 1930s and 1940s, the Swiss psychiatrist C. G. Jung became familiar with Rhine's parapsychological work. Jung corresponded with Rhine and knew of the terms ESP, PK, and psi (e.g., see Mansfield, Rhine-Feather, and Hall, 1998). In the early 1950s, Jung (1960) published two major works on the paranormal, and viewed ESP and PK as essentially one process, which he called "synchronicity." Two or more events constitute synchronicity when a meaningful connection a meaningful association can be made between the events, but it is only synchronicity when meaningfulness is the connecting principle between the events, with no mechanically causal connection between the two (Jung, 1960, para. 849–850).

Jung (1960, para. 965) saw synchronicity as being contingent upon an archetype (archetypes are nodal points or structural components of the unconscious that govern or influence our modes of perception and patterns of behavior). The archetype forms the substructure of the synchronicity, connecting at least two events (one exo-psychic, the other endo-psychic) with a common theme, and acting as a defining quality throughout the experience, thereby intensifying the meaningfulness (Jung, 1960, para. 912).

Mansfield, Rhine-Feather, and Hall (1998) argued that synchronicity is characteristically different from psi (i.e., ESP and PK) because psi is "scientifically"

causal (for example, it has been repeatedly demonstrated in the laboratory), whereas synchronistic phenomena are too “sporadic and unpredictable” (p. 20) to be considered scientifically causal (i.e., experimentally, they escape detection). Storm (1999, pp. 262–264), however, argued that experimental synchronicity is possible, and gave reasons and examples.

Not only may synchronicity and psi have much in common (Storm, 1999, pp. 264–266), but Jung’s theory also draws attention to psychological variables that have heretofore been ignored in parapsychology, particularly the meaningfulness in paranormal events whereby emotional and/or cognitive states of mind can be represented in the physical world as meaningfully similar events (either ESP or PK). Thus, although Jung used Rhine’s categories, he helped move theoretical parapsychology forward somewhat by proposing a fundamental similarity between ESP and PK that was overlooked by Thouless and Wiesner (1947). However, the only way of determining that ESP and PK might be a unitary synchronistic process, as Jung’s theory suggests, is to show how they are consistently contingent upon coincidence and meaningfulness. Currently, evidence is limited, but certainly the experimental approach to synchronicity (e.g., see Braud, 1983) does not require that ESP and PK terminology be evoked.

Irwin (1999) noted how, in Jung’s mind, synchronicity dispenses with causes. Psi events (since Jung classed ESP and PK as special cases of synchronicity [Jung, 1960]) happen like chance events, and their occurrence is characterized only by their meaningfulness. Storm (1999) argued that archetypes are contingent with paranormal effects that are not mechanically causal in their own right, but nevertheless work in a “meta-causal” way (p. 259). He further argued that psi-conducive and psi-inhibitive conditions were also meta-causal in that they relate to the facilitation of psi but are not causes in themselves:

If ... a cause is only a cause when it “contains” the conditions necessary for an effect to take place, then psi-permissive and psi-conducive conditions are meta-causal, being the necessary conditions of an actual cause or causes still unknown. It is these and possibly other conditions that give causes their causal properties [Storm, 1999, p. 260].

This argument fulfills the requirements of conventional physics which only requires that the philosophical *if A, then B* axiom be sufficiently demonstrated. Conditions, therefore, are scientifically causal (i.e., meta-causal) but not mechanically causal.

Contingence of archetype(s) in synchronicity is paralleled in psychopraxia by the necessary condition (i.e., the meta-cause). (Note that archetype and psychopractic condition may not always be equivalent.) Therefore, it appears that the fundamental psychopractic principle of the necessary condition may not be dissimilar to the synchronistic principle of contingency. This parallel between crucial factors of psychopraxia theory and synchronicity theory may be of considerable interest to parapsychology since Storm (1999) has argued that experimental synchronicity is possible and, in fact, has already taken place (Beloff, 1990; Irwin, 1999).

By way of the above feasible reworking of the terminologies used in both theories, it is suggested that they have in common the meta-cause. These two theories thus share a common ground in synchronicity, there is the meta-causal archetype; in psychopraxia there are the meta-causal conditions. To the degree that the parapsychologist identifies a meta-cause to be both an archetype and a condition which brings about a goal (be it a psychopractic or synchronistic goal), synchronicity and psychopraxia are more than compatible both theories are essentially speaking to the same phenomenon: the meta-causal factor underlying the psi process.

There is another similarity between synchronicity and psychopraxia: that both Jung and Thalbourne regard the paranormal process as goal-oriented. (Note, however, that Thalbourne prefers “pro attitude serving” to “goal-oriented.”) Jung (1960) gave a clear indication that the goal of synchronicity was primarily a transformation of personality. Jung (1987) clarified this point:

... the likelihood of healing or change in outlook may result [when synchronicity occurs].... Ultimately the result is a transformation of personality in some way, which Jung saw as the embodiment of the individuation process, “having for its goal the development of the individual personality [para. 757].

Few would argue that paranormal experiences do not affect personality, and this would include experiences of exo-psychopraxia. The question is: What is the goal being served? Thalbourne’s definition of a goal refers to a mental representation of the goal rather than the manifested goal itself. Jung would be in agreement with Thalbourne because the transformation of personality was always seen as an ongoing process of “individuation” (becoming whole or integrated) rather than a thing in itself achieved at the end of a span of years or a lifetime. Therefore, for Jung, the goal would be a mental representation of what could be achieved, without any guarantee that the person would actually reach that goal.

However, since Jung was more interested in the development of the personality, the interesting psi phenomena that occur along the way may be secondary to the enterprise of individuation (Jung gives examples of ostensible psi phenomena that merely serve as meaningful interpretations of how the inner life is enmeshed with the outer world [e.g., Storm, 1999, pp. 251–253].) The difference here is that the parapsychologist, in the role of “proponent of synchronicity,” would regard psi as the goal (a paranormal outcome), whereas the Jungian psychologist, psychiatrist, or analyst, also as “proponent of synchronicity,” would regard individuation as the goal (a normal outcome).

This difference reflects more than just personal prejudice about the nature of goals, but also the very concept of how a goal should be defined and interpreted. This conundrum may be just as much a problem for the theory of psychopraxia as it is for the theory of synchronicity or for personality theory. In any case, whatever the perspective, we can talk of goal achievement if we do not get too specific! This problem does not mean synchronicity and psychopraxia are necessarily incompatible on this point, but whereas experimental synchronicity will look for

meaningfulness in the synchronistic event, experimental psychopraxia looks for a pro attitude that is focused towards bringing about a goal, whatever that may be. (Note too that Stanford [1990] had a problem with the vagaries of the goal *per se*: “What really represents a goal”? [p. 58]; see below.)

To summarize, neither theory can really replace the other. Notwithstanding the possibility that terminology to do with contingencies, conditions, and causes may be more a question of semantics than anything else, synchronicity *does* require that meaningfulness be identified, whereas psychopraxia is not focused on identifying a meaningful relationship between an internal image and an external goal. However, to the extent that a manifested psychopractic goal is identified as being meaningful because an internal image has been categorically identified (as, for example, a pro attitude that is either conscious or, by the evidence, unconscious), psychopraxia and synchronicity become one. In such cases, then, as Jung believed, ESP and PK (and therefore exo-psychopraxia) share the same phenomenology as synchronicity. Thus, on occasion, the traditional parapsychologist may be given the option of calling his/her psi effect an example of ESP, PK, exo-psychopraxia, or synchronicity depending on the circumstances.

Psychopraxia and the Psi Mediated Instrumental Response (PMIR) Model

Decades after Jung proposed his synchronicity theory, Stanford (1974a, b) came close to merging ESP and PK together with his PMIR model; although, at that stage, he did not see ESP and PK as the same process. In describing the PMIR model, Stanford (1974a) proposed that

the organism nonintentionally uses psi to scan its environment for need-relevant objects or events or for information crucially related to such events, and when obtained, the organism tends to act in ways which are instrumental in satisfying its needs in relation to the particular object or event in question [p. 35].

(Note that the “scanning component” was later discarded from the PMIR model; see Stanford, 1990, pp. 57–59.) Stanford (1974b) extended the above definition to include PK phenomena. He then developed his *conformance behavior* model which “subsumes both ESP and PK” events under one model (Stanford, 1978, p. 198). Any paranormal process was thereby typified as a “conformance” (i.e., a disposition-serving outcome) respondent to the “need or other disposition” of an individual (p. 207). Conformance behavior theory regards both ESP and PK as “goal-oriented rather than information-based” (pp. 203, 208). Kennedy (1995) argued:

The basic goal-oriented psi hypothesis assumes that psi phenomena (a) depend on a person’s motivation for or benefit from the outcome of a random event, and (b) do not depend on the complexity or information-processing aspects of the random process [p. 47].

Irwin (1999) described goal-orientation as non-mediational (i.e., not requiring a flow of information by various means such as is posited in the “cybernetic” theories which require some kind of mechanical transference, or processing of information, for an effect to take place).

At a later date, Stanford (1990) was “less than fully convinced about the goal-oriented character of psi processes” (pp. 58–59), but maintained it for the most part in his resurrected PMIR model. Stanford (1990) also abandoned the conformance behavior model; but even though the PMIR model now maintains that the same underlying elements are necessary for ESP and PK effects (e.g., a “disposed” system), he still discussed them as discernibly different processes (cf. Stanford, 1990, on ESP, with Stanford, 1974b, on PK).² For example, Stanford (1974b) holds that “implicit extrasensory guidance” is “part and parcel” (pp. 326–328) of many PK events and that “active-agent telepathy” (p. 344) may really be a special form of PK. He thus appears to identify qualitative differences between ESP and PK, thereby failing to merge acceptably the two into a truly unitary process.

Stanford (1978) described situations that are similar to synchronicity, in which “intriguing spontaneous occurrences, while they provide no compelling evidence that they are anything other than ‘coincidences,’ might be instances of psi-mediated responses working in the service of the individual’s needs” (p. 201). In fact, Stanford (1977) very clearly showed that PMIR experiences are meaningful: “Odd coincidences of everyday life ... seem to have meaning and importance for persons involved in them” (pp. 840–841). Stanford regards such “fortuitous coincidences” as “psi mediated” (1977, p. 841); hence the term psi mediated instrumental response (PMIR). As shown, the parallel of PMIR with Jung’s synchronicity theory is clear (in fact, Stanford, 1977, p. 851, admits this parallel), and it will be seen that there are also occasional parallels between PMIR and exo-psychopraxia. However, there are some differences between PMIR and synchronicity and between PMIR and exo-psychopraxia.

Stanford (1977) initially proposed that “the organism uses psi (ESP), as well as sensory means, to scan its environment” (p. 841) in order to maximally fulfill its needs but, as stated above, he (Stanford, 1990) later rejected the “scanning component” (pp. 57–58). Although Stanford (1978) never did offer a reason “how” the organism brings about a favorable change of circumstances but only stated that it “does occur” (p. 208), there would have been at least some suggestion of a psi mechanism if the scanning component was maintained. Nevertheless, as it stands, the PMIR model might be classified alongside Stanford’s (1978) conformance behavior model as another example of a noncybernetic theory (Irwin, 1999, pp. 169–170).ⁱⁱ

Following directly from the above, the PMIR model (Stanford, 1990, p. 59) describes psi as a goal-oriented process, yet Stanford is critical of the goal-orientation hypothesis (while, ironically, still showing some sympathy for it). He sees a need for “considerable high-quality evidence” before “goal-orientedness” can be endorsed with greater confidence, and, thus, he keeps the goal-oriented hypothesis as a “working assumption” (Stanford, 1990, p. 59). He has “considerable misgivings

[about the goal-oriented assumption] because of its vagueness and magic-sounding qualities" (Stanford, 1990, p. 157) and, therefore, stated that he would "develop mechanisms for the occurrence of PMIR that do not depend on this assumption" (p. 59). He actually goes further than that by clearly stating that "the psi factor, whatever that is, supplies information that can influence the organism" (p. 60). Thus, the deception in the PMIR model is that it is not clearly an information-processing model.

The attraction of goal-oriented psi, of course, lies in its elegance as a model that eliminates the problem of positing and describing a "filtering mechanism" that cuts off extraneous, redundant, and irrelevant noise and lets in only the psi signal. However, Stanford (1990, p. 59) cannot escape resorting to evidence to the contrary (e.g., Vassy, 1986, showed that informational complexity affects psi). While Jung saw synchronicity as goal-oriented, and Stanford holds an "each-way" bet, Thalbourne (2004) clearly allows for the possibility that information may facilitate psi. Thalbourne does not put himself in the same position as Stanford because he defers to the unique position of calling psi a "pro attitude serving" process as opposed to it being a "goal-oriented" process. Thalbourne argued that some paranormal phenomena merely present in such a way as to suggest the goal-orientation hypothesis, leaving open the possibility that subtle information processes may well occur in psychopractic action. It can be concluded that the PMIR model leaves the researcher unclear as to whether cybernetic or noncybernetic processes underscore the psi process, whereas the psychopraxia model suggests a cybernetic process.

Continuing from previous statements, even if the self does not "scan," Stanford did not reject unconscious agency (cf. Stanford, 1977; see also Stanford's, 1974a, references to intentional and nonintentional, i.e., unconscious, psi) which, therefore, does not conflict with Thalbourne (2004, p. 53) who is clear that the pro attitude can be held consciously or unconsciously. For Jung (1960, para. 912) too, unconscious agency is inherently self-evident in synchronicity where archetypes are concerned.

There is a sense in which there is little point in arguing over whether there is any disagreement amongst the three theorists on conscious and unconscious agency, but it cannot be settled here whether the self (a) can scan unconsciously (using normal senses and psi) or (b) does not need to scan to "perceive" its proximal and distal environment because it is relatively omniscient (i.e., the "Cognitive Unconscious never ceases to function"; cf. Parker, 2001).

However, there is a terminological problem that must be resolved. Stanford's relative concept of "nonintentional" psi is only correct insofar as the organism is unconscious of the psi process that is to occur. Certainly, for the purposes of experimentation, it is necessary to qualify which aspect of the agent the conscious ego or the "potentially" empirical self that uses the "cognitive unconscious" is being tested. But there are situations in which the term becomes problematic. There would be cases where the self, in its unconscious aspect, is quite clearly intentional of a psi effect. Thalbourne's (2004) idea of the pro attitude allows this

possibility because pro attitudes can be unconscious. In fact, there is no psi event that could be regarded as nonintentional because, in terms of the organism's preference for an outcome, the successful pro attitude is always the pro attitude most preferred by the self-system which is not limited to the conscious ego. An example illustrating this point is given in the normal case of rolling over in one's sleep. The behavior is pro attitude serving because it serves to minimize cramp and discomfort during sleep. Even though it is unconscious behavior and, therefore, not intentional, it is, at another level, never nonintentional. It is fully intended by the organism or, more precisely, by a self-system that is capable of perceiving and monitoring its environment to a degree far superior to that of the sleeping ego.

Thus, it appears that the concept of intention is related to the concept of the pro attitude. Insofar as PMIR is "disposition-serving" (Stanford, 1978, p. 197) and psychopraxia is "pro attitude serving" (Thalbourne, 2004, p. 54), Stanford and Thalbourne come close to agreeing with each other. Stanford originally (1977) referred to "need-strength" or "need-importance" of achieving a "goal-object" or "goal-event" and proposed a relationship between these needs and the "disposition" of the organism. He then generalized the term "need" to "response disposition" (p. 851), although he did not drop the term 'need' altogether (see Stanford, 1990, p. 91). Stanford introduced the term "disposition" on the grounds that some manifestations of psi do not necessarily occur just to fulfill needs *per se*, but the organism may nonetheless be disposed to receiving psi information because it has relevance to that organism (1990, p. 60). Thalbourne (2004) agreed and gave an example where a coincidence was a "result of psi" but "was apparently *not* the result of a present volition or motive or *need* [emphasis added] on [his] part, yet it *was* something towards which [he] can be said to have had a pro attitude" (p. 54).

Finally, a consideration of the psychopractic necessary conditions from the perspective of Stanford's PMIR model is needed to bring these two theories into perspective. Stanford not only mentioned inhibitive conditions (see Stanford, 1977), but he also allowed for the fact that certain conditions bring about or help bring about PMIR (Stanford, 1977). For example, he referred to "emotional arousal," "attention-focusing," and other *psychophysiological* motivations that may be, or are, triggered to make "preparation for or production of PMIR" (p. 842), and he cited evidence for these effects (Stanford, 1977, p. 842). Given that these conditions were deemed preparatory or productive, they must be necessary or conducive since it is implied that their absence halts or hinders PMIR. Thalbourne (2004) expressly supported the idea that necessary and conducive conditions may be "psychophysiological" (p. 61). Thus, there is agreement between Stanford and Thalbourne on the issue of conditions.

Summary of the Three Theories

The three theories discussed above tend to vary in subtle and not so subtle ways. Similarities have been drawn between exo-psychopraxia and synchronicity

and between exo-psychopraxia and PMIR. Stanford, while uncertain, tentatively prefers that PMIR be regarded as a goal-oriented noncybernetic theory (as is synchronicity), but Thalbourne (2004) regards exo-psychopraxia as cybernetic. However, ambiguities seem to exist in Stanford's statements, leading us to wonder if he prefers that PMIR be described as cybernetic or noncybernetic.

All three theories acknowledge unconscious processes, but the PMIR concept of nonintentionality might, on occasion, be misleading. Disposition-serving seems similar to pro-attitude-serving (*qua* psychopraxia). The disposition and the pro attitude are both seen as necessary, and Thalbourne and Stanford agree that there are psychophysiological conditions that can be regarded as conducive, necessary, or even sufficient. Synchronicity theory speaks of archetypal patterns underlying, but not causing, the synchronistic event. There may be a sense in which all manner of conditions are meta-causal and may even be underscored by archetypal structures that extend our concept of the self beyond the limits and definition of a biological organism.

Thus, again, the traditional parapsychologist may be given the option of calling his/her psi effect an example of synchronicity, exo-psychopraxia, or PMIR, provided certain criteria are met. There must be a meaningful component in the psi effect for it to be called synchronicity. If one cannot be found, one resorts to either exo-psychopraxia or PMIR for an explanation.

If the effect seems not to be meaningful, but may be noncybernetic, the indecisive researcher might tentatively regard it as evidence of PMIR, but that would be saying nothing in itself because the conclusion is merely cashing in on Stanford's "each-way" bet. If, however, the psi effect seems to be cybernetic because "the psi factor ... supplie[d] information that can influence the organism" (Stanford, 1990, p. 60), the researcher could more confidently regard it as evidence of PMIR. However, a theory should propose that psi is a cybernetic process (or not) in advance so that the experimenter can test this hypothesis. Otherwise, the theory tells nothing of the psi process. It stands to reason, where there are two choices — that an effect could be goal-oriented or mediational; cybernetic or noncybernetic — that a theory has to speak to these factors to claim the effect. Thus, in the case of Thalbourne's theory, if a psi effect is cybernetic, it would support the theory of psychopraxia, but if it is not cybernetic, at least there would be no room for doubt that the effect is not psychopractic. Theoretically, in terms of the fundamental propositions of both psychopraxia and PMIR, there are no other major differences.

Psychopraxia and Its Contribution to Parapsychology

Having presented above a formal comparison of the theory of psychopraxia with synchronicity and PMIR, I will now provide answers to the following ques-

tions in order to assess further the theory's contribution to the field of parapsychology:

1. Does the theory of psychopraxia avoid saying essentially the same thing as synchronicity theory and/or the PMIR model?
2. Does the theory of psychopraxia simplify our understanding of psi compared to synchronicity theory and/or the PMIR model without losing any qualitative detail?
3. Does the theory of psychopraxia introduce terminology that more accurately describes psi than does synchronicity theory and/or the PMIR model?
4. Does the theory of psychopraxia offer methods of testing and interpreting psi that synchronicity theory and/or the PMIR model do not?

Answers in the affirmative to one or more of these questions may be sufficient in themselves to draw a conclusion as to the merits of the theory of psychopraxia.

1. *Does the theory of psychopraxia avoid saying essentially the same thing as synchronicity theory and/or the PMIR model?* (Answer: "Uncertain.") This question seeks an answer to the possibility that the theory of psychopraxia is "operationally equivalent" to other paranormal theories (Stokes, 1987, p. 78). It must not be forgotten, of course, that Thalbourne's theory is proposed to explain normal phenomena as well. If a theory is found that is similar to Thalbourne's theory, it would necessarily have to speak to normal phenomena. Thus, synchronicity and PMIR are excluded. These facts notwithstanding, there is nothing stopping parapsychologists from preferring a workable theory that explains psi only, and many may not see the relevance of a paranormal theory that speaks to normal phenomena as well, regardless of the fact that it unifies the two types of human action. Be that as it may, the theoretical component of exo-psychopraxia (ostensibly the component of the theory of psychopraxia that speaks to paranormal phenomena) can still be compared to synchronicity theory and the PMIR model.

It was already stated that exo-psychopraxia and synchronicity describe psi in similar ways, but synchronicity stands alone in proposing that meaningfulness must be prevalent alongside the psi phenomenon. Psychopraxia, on the other hand, proposes a more sophisticated mechanism than synchronicity which seems to be a phenomenon that just happens. However, given the strong similarities between Thalbourne's and Stanford's theories, parapsychologists might have difficulty expressing a preference for either, and they might argue that the two theories are operationally equivalent to a large degree. However, Stokes (1987), in speaking of psi theories in general, points out that "to regard such theories as equivalent may be a bit chauvinistic on our part" (p. 78), as our "limited senses and investigative techniques" may not be able to draw a distinction at this stage, but it may eventuate that "some privileged observer may be able to distinguish between them" at some other time (p. 78).

2. *Does the theory of psychopraxia simplify our understanding of psi compared to synchronicity theory and/or the PMIR model without losing any qualitative detail?*

(Answer: A tentative “Yes.”) Stokes (1987) refers to the fact that, if two theories are similar, at least one of them should seek “not to multiply entities beyond necessity” (p. 79). The theory that achieves that end may be the theory that draws more attention. In the case of PMIR, Stanford (1990) spends a substantial amount of time (pp. 62–153) on qualifying aspects of his theory. Such an exercise may leave Stanford more vulnerable than other theorists who have less to say about psi, simply because Stanford may have multiplied his entities beyond necessity. Stanford may be right about all he says, and his contribution would, therefore, be worthy by embracing all aspects that surround psi phenomena, but it also means that Stanford has not allowed for the possibility that psi may prove to be less complicated than he thinks.

Jung’s synchronicity theory, on the other hand, may be a simpler concept in the sense that it requires an understanding of only one single concept that of meaningful coincidence regardless of whether it can be accepted by theoreticians as really saying something about how psi might work or what psi really is (for contrasting arguments on this aspect of the theory, see Braude, 1979, and Storm, 1999). The theory of psychopraxia with its four basic concepts (i.e., the self, the pro attitude, necessary conditions, and the goal-state) may also be simpler to understand than the PMIR theory, with the many diverse contingencies surrounding the occurrence of PMIR as expressed by a panoply of possible scenarios in which psi may be mediated (again see Stanford, 1990, pp. 62–153).

However, there is no guarantee that Thalbourne’s concepts are easier than Stanford’s in essence. The ontological question,^{iv} for example, is an enormous challenge to conventional investigators who cannot get out of a dualistic mindset. Also, as far as both theories are concerned, the nature of the goal needs further work. Parapsychologists have also to decide whether to investigate and/or support the simpler “pro attitude serving” model of psychopraxia or wait until the goal-oriented/information-based dichotomy of PMIR is resolved. At the moment, Stanford’s “each-way bet’ on the issue of goal orientation works against, not for, the PMIR model.

3. *Does the theory of psychopraxia introduce terminology that more accurately describes psi than does synchronicity theory and/or the PMIR model?* (Answer: A tentative “Yes.”) Apart from the oft-used term “coincidence,” synchronicity theory has one major term that is descriptive of psi, and that is the concept of “meaningfulness.” While meaningfulness may accurately describe psi (as agreed by Stanford, 1977), and meaningfulness may well depict a crucial aspect of psi, it is too much to claim that Jung’s description of psi is more accurate than Stanford’s description. Thus, apart from the philosophical and psychological terminology used to present his theory, Jung has kept things comparatively simple (perhaps to a fault). Where he does borrow Rhine’s terms (i.e., ESP and PK), it is only to subsume them under the rubric of synchronicity.

Like Jung, Stanford also borrows Rhine’s terms, ESP and PK. The mistake in using these terms, however, lies in the way Stanford (1974b), to his credit, compared and criticized them but failed to address the identified ESP-PK

dichotomy successfully. In other words, the PMIR model maintains the use of the terms ESP and PK even though they may lack precision. Thalbourne refers to Rhine's terms to illustrate the point that the ESP-PK dichotomy can be unworkable, but he at least tries to resolve the dichotomy by introducing new terminology.

Stanford relies on the terms "psi-mediated instrumental response" and "goal-orientation." His original term, "psi-mediated instrumental response," is almost tautological in that its definition describes what psi brings about through the processes of psi without explaining how, as Stanford admits (see the next question). The other term, "goal orientation," is still being tested experimentally, so we are no wiser as to the hypothesized goal-oriented nature of psi just yet.

Thalbourne presents two major terms (i.e., "pro attitude" and "necessary conditions"; his use of established terms, such as "self" and "goal-oriented" are not original). Thalbourne's two original terms seem logically to describe psi as a process inherently dependent upon the agent, but the difficulties associated with the concept of agency and whether conditions are necessary, conducive, or sufficient, need resolution (see Storm, 2005).

4. *Does the theory of psychopraxia offer methods of testing and interpreting psi that synchronicity theory and/or the PMIR model do not?* (Answer: "Yes.") It has already been stated that experimental synchronicity is possible (Storm, 1999), and Stanford's (1990) theory has proven itself to be testable. The present essay has also shown that psychopraxia is testable. As far as interpretation is concerned, however, Stanford's explanation of how PMIR works is vague (see, in particular, Stanford, 1990, p. 102). A close reading of Stanford does not actually give any idea of a mechanism. He is really setting up the conditions conducive, necessary, and/or sufficient for psi (much as Thalbourne does), and it is almost as though (in some cases of PMIR) we are required to accept without question that we must invoke a trust in our intuition without consciously knowing why and act on it in order for psi to be manifested always and without fail (viz., his "expressway" story Stanford, 1990, pp. 102–103). In a sense, intuition (at least in the examples given by Stanford) comes over as an infallible function, but there must surely be cases where trust in the supposedly unquestionable reliance on intuition can have dire consequences.

On this same point, Stanford's theory relies heavily on anecdotal material in its construction. Thalbourne (2004) does this on occasion, but Stanford (1974a, 1978) depends on it continually, yet such theory-building ultimately seems to come over as generalized or formalized statements about psi that are more descriptive than explanatory. Thalbourne's theory sometimes presents in the same way, but at least his propositions are often openly speculative (see especially, Thalbourne, 2004, Chapter 5).

It is also important that a theory gets attention from investigators on the basis of its terms and definitions being clearly understood so that the operationalization of experiments is easily enabled. If a theory does not stimulate interest it may be because its terms are unclear. Synchronicity has received little attention

over the decades, but operationalizing experiments that test meaningful coincidence have not proved to be difficult at all (cf. Braud, 1983). Stanford (1990), though, has criticized experiments that have been conducted to test nonintentional psi (pp. 96–102). It seems it is very difficult to really know what Stanford means if experimenters keep getting it wrong, in spite of his great efforts to clarify every last detail. Of course, a new theory cannot be judged by such standards — psychopraxia has not been around as long as PMIR, but findings so far (e.g., Storm, 2002, 2003a, b; Storm and Thalbourne, 2005) have not put psychopraxia in a bad light, though support for its hypotheses has not always been found (e.g., Storm and Thalbourne, 2003; Thalbourne and Storm, 2005).

There are other questions that may be asked of a theory to ascertain its merits, but the above four would be amongst the most important. It is debatable whether the actual task of assessing theories this way is even a fair or ethical thing to do. However, in time, all theories are assessed one way or another, so no theory escapes this process. It is, of course, noted that there would be other ways of arguing the case for each of the three theories. Thus, there is no guarantee that the answers would come out the same way if the questions were put to another critic.

Conclusion

It is hoped that the comparisons made above have identified the potential strengths and weaknesses of the three paranormal theories that were analyzed. Even though the different theories can lead to different interpretations of psi, which might be an advantage when ambiguous outcomes need theoretical explanation, it is most important that parapsychologists understand the limitations of the various theories. They will then proceed with caution and make their theoretical summations with some degree of discretion.

Of course, the truth of the matter is that parapsychologists are free to test any theory they choose, and there should be no limits on which theory is or is not suitable for testing. The object of this essay was not to make proclamations about the theory of psychopraxia at the expense of the other two theories. Nevertheless, from the arguments put forward above, the suggestion is that the theory of psychopraxia deserves some kind of attention from parapsychologists, but the criticisms that were made above should be given just as much attention. In the final analysis, only further testing of the theory's basic precepts will help decide the issue on whether the theory can make further contributions to parapsychology than it has made thus far.

NOTES

1. The author thanks Michael A. Thalbourne for his helpful advice on earlier drafts of this essay which was adapted from an essay in Lance Storm's (2001) PhD thesis. Research reported in the current essay was made possible by a grant from the Bial Foundation, Portugal.
2. Stanford (1990, p. 57) regards Stanford (1974b) as the definitive reference for PMIR in terms of psychokinetic effects (see especially Stanford, 1974b, pp. 348–351).
3. Cybernetic or mediational processes involve some kind of mechanical transference, or processing of information, which is considered necessary for an effect to take place.
4. Edge (1985) noted that current thinking in parapsychology is essentially Dualistic. Some forms of Dualism, such as Substance Dualism and Interactionism, posit a nonphysical property of mind, which thus allows for the nonspatial/nontemporal effects of ESP and PK. However, the other two ontologies, Idealism and Materialism, also feature in the debate over terminology from time to time, but it is argued here that the tendency is to defer to the more favored Dualistic model. The theory of psychopraxia offers parapsychologists an ontology-neutral approach to interpretations of psi.

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