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## BOOK REVIEWS

### BODY MIND SPIRIT: EXPLORING THE PARAPSYCHOLOGY OF SPIRITUALITY.

Edited by Charles T. Tart. Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing Company, Inc., 1997. Pp. 255 including index. \$12.95 (paper). ISBN 1-57174-073-2.

Psi researchers have long pondered the possible relationships between parapsychological, religious, and spiritual experiences. What, for example, is the connection between prophecy and precognition? Between a miracle cure following a healer's touch and psychokinesis? Between hearing the voice of God or angels, and clairvoyance? What causes these events? Does the Almighty intervene from "out there," or are we biologically hard-wired to produce transcendent, psi-type experiences from within our own brain? Does psi facilitate spiritual understanding or obstruct it? Could psi indicate the demonic instead of the divine? Should we court and cultivate these experiences, or should we run in the other direction?

In this dazzling collection of essays, these and similar questions are tackled by some of the most prominent persons in parapsychology—Charles T. Tart (the book's editor), Stephen E. Braude, William Braud, Hoyt L. Edge, Michael Grosso, Arthur Hastings, Jeffrey Mishlove, Karlis Osis, William G. Roll, K. Ramakrishna Rao, and Rhea A. White. Throughout the book we catch glimpses of the spiritual odyssey of the individual contributors, which imparts an endearing personal quality to many of these essays.

In recent decades, the spiritual side of psi has been largely neglected by parapsychologists as a result of their focus on controlled laboratory experiments. But, for the vast majority of ordinary folk who experience these phenomena, ignoring the spiritual implications of psi experiences eviscerates them and drains them of their vital juices. For most people, psi's importance has virtually nothing to do with dry-as-dust laboratory experiments, but with the spiritual significance they sense in these experiences, such as a felt connection with the Absolute, an intimation of immortality, a sense of contact with those who have died, and so on. This collection of essays honors the power of psi to kindle these feelings. And that is why this book should be read by psi researchers who have lost touch with psi's transcendent side or who ignore it; who have forgotten that the most important laboratory of all is a human life; that the most crucial quest for all of us is not for statistical significance, but for the meaning and

purpose of life.

Editor Charles Tart sets the tone of the book in the first chapter, which is his invited address to the 1993 Second World Parliament of Religions. Tart reviews the scientific evidence underlying parapsychology, and why this evidence points to a spiritual reality.

Psychologist and parapsychologist K. Ramakrishna Rao describes the schizophrenic divisions between science and spirituality within Western culture. "In Western societies," he observes,

religion and science have managed somehow to accommodate each other and coexist. The divinity school and the medical school, for example, situated as they are side by side in the same campus, teach different and often contradictory things about who we are, where we come from, and what happens when we die. The chaplain and the physician in the hospital setting have functions that are based on conflicting assumptions concerning human nature. The same person can be a scientist in the lab, wholly working within a materialistic and rationalistic framework, and a man of faith, devotedly attending church on Sundays and offering prayers to the almighty God.

Rao provides a thrilling description of how these divisions might be healed by attention to parapsychological phenomena. "We find in parapsychology the necessary interface between science and religion," he asserts. Parapsychology "provide[s] the essential grounds for believing in and validating religious experience."

Rao describes how parapsychology actually began as an attempt to test the assumptions of both science and religion, and to form a bridge between the two camps. He notes that J. B. Rhine, the patriarch of modern experimental parapsychology, planned early on to become a minister, but abandoned the "speculative philosophies and authoritarian theologies" following an immersion in science.

Philosopher Michael Grosso, in his essay "The Parapsychology of God," describes how religion might be enriched and made more universal and comprehensive by acknowledging a "transcendent psi factor" in human experience throughout history. He also notes J. B. Rhine's belief in the relationship of psi and religious experience. "Religious communication," Rhine said,

is basically psi communication, pure and simple: it is neither sensory nor motor, it is unequivocally extrasensorimotor. . . . All the physical miracles, whether in the healing of disease, the miraculous movement of objects, or the control of the elements, had to be manifestations of PK.

Grosso acknowledges that "conservative religious feeling is bound to recoil" from such a view, because it sounds as if transcendent religious

experience is being equated with mundane material processes. But Grosso considers this a needless fear. Like many other contributors to *Body Mind Spirit*, he believes that parapsychology validates and empowers religious experience instead of explaining it away. Psi, he believes, provides “a kind of rosetta stone for re-deciphering and re-validating encounters of the god-like kind.”

Editor, reference librarian, and parapsychologist Rhea White discusses the power of exceptional human experiences to enrich and transform life by expanding our concepts of what we are capable of, and what our origins and destiny may be, which are also the perennial concerns of religion.

Philosopher and parapsychologist Stephen Braude examines how psi operates in ordinary life, often unconsciously, in ways that validate the age-old adage “you can’t fool God.” Braude courageously addresses a side of psi which is too often ignored, but which has obvious ethical and moral implications—our potential to manipulate, control, and harm one another through the use of psi as a result of “our psychic interactions [which] link us closely into a kind of global community.” Braude also sees support in the data of psi for the efficacy of prayer.

Parapsychologist Jeffrey Mishlove explores how our capacity for intuition—“the direct perception of truth, fact, etc., independent of any reasoning process”—not only plays a role in scientific insight, but also bridges the realms of consciousness that have previously been relegated to philosophy, mythology and theology.

Hoyt Edge, another philosopher/parapsychologist, describes how psi points to a relational, unified view of human life, which is inherently compatible with many great spiritual traditions.

Karlis Osis tackles the question of whether our consciousness survives death in some form, which is a concern of all the great religions. Osis believes that modern neuroscience, with its dismal, presumptuous declaration that bodily death represents the total annihilation of consciousness, has overreached and become irrational because it denies the evidence for various survival scenarios.

The theme of survival of bodily death is taken up also by editor Tart in another provocative essay. If something indeed survives, who or what is it? Tart asserts the likelihood of survival, but reasons that the surviving entity will probably bear little resemblance to the personal “I” with which we are familiar in waking consciousness.

Transpersonal psychologist Arthur Hastings examines the evidence for revelation—communications from ostensible nonmaterial, spiritual beings. Although he finds most so-called channeled material trivial and pretentious, Hastings believes that, in the best of the messages, there is an intelligence and perspective that can help us live our lives according to redeeming spiritual principles.

Tart articulates a conviction that runs through all these essays:

I am proud to call myself both a scientist and a "spiritual seeker," and *I am not being unscientific in doing so*. Given the intense, irrational feelings that so often dominate the advocates and debunkers of both science and the spiritual, this is not an easy position to come to or find social support for, but it is a sound, scientific one.

I found this book personally quite meaningful. Like several contributors to this volume, I have endured long periods of unhappiness resulting from the assumption that science, psi, and spirituality are incompatible. I was taught that science and the spiritual are immiscible and that one must choose between them in ordering one's life. I did not realize, when I fell in love with science, that this was a false, artificial, and unnecessary choice. Had this book been available to me during these struggles, I would have enjoyed earlier consolation as a result.

Those who attempt to reconcile in their lives the triple vectors of science, religion, and psi often discover that rebukes can come not just from dogmatic scientists but from narrow religionists as well. As a result of my work in the field of intercessory prayer and its role in modern medicine, my books, along with those of my wife, Barbara, a cardiovascular nurse and prolific author in the field of holistic nursing, have been condemned as "occult" and "New Age" by a healthcare journal published by professionals of a Christian persuasion (Fish, 1995). In addition, I have a sizable collection of letters from religious "true believers" who consider my views about prayer and the spiritual side of psi to be heretical and blasphemous. These letters often contain offers to pray for my soul, although some of the letter-writers suggest that I may be beyond redemption because of my flirtation with psi. My experience is not unique; anyone who deals publicly with psi is likely to experience rejection from the religious community, which can be as vehement as anything launched by so-called skeptics from within science.

*Body Mind Spirit* is a template for transcending these differences. Its publication suggests that something is in the air these days—a new hope, a real possibility that a rapprochement between psi, science, and spirituality may be closer than we think. My optimism is based in no small measure on what is currently happening within medicine. There is a remarkable willingness, even eagerness, within medical science to examine the effects of religious devotion and spiritual practice on health. Four years ago, for example, only three medical schools in the United States had courses devoted to exploring this area; currently, nearly thirty schools offer such courses (Levin, Larson, & Puchalski, 1997). Compelling data shows that people who follow some sort of religious path (it does not seem to matter

which kind) generally live longer and enjoy better health in the process (Larson & Milano, 1995). A decade ago, there was an unspoken taboo among medical scholars against investigating intercessory prayer because of its resemblance to "mental action at a distance," which was considered utterly implausible. Now, however, this "anti-tenure factor," as it has been called, is virtually nonexistent. Controlled experiments are underway at several prestigious medical schools and hospitals exploring the power of distant, intercessory prayer to affect health outcomes. These effects are not trivial, but can be of life-or-death magnitude. "Spirituality and medicine" conferences have become commonplace in medical schools across the country. They attract standing-room-only audiences, including great numbers of physicians. Indeed, if *Body Mind Spirit* enters a second edition, it would be wise to include a chapter focusing on these landmark developments, because they suggest that modern medicine may be the area within our society where science, spirituality, and psi first achieve a dramatic reconciliation.

In 1997, a survey of American biologists, physicists, and mathematicians found that 39 percent not only believe in a supreme being, but in a supreme being who answers intercessory prayer (Larson & Wilson, 1997). This shows that the prevalent view that reputable scientists are necessarily hardened agnostics impervious to the spiritual side of life is a piece of stereotypical nonsense that should be laid to rest. If scientists believe in distant, intercessory prayer, is it unrealistic to suppose that they may also entertain the nonlocal manifestations of consciousness represented by psi events, the evidence for which is provided in *Body Mind Spirit*?

These inspiring essays show why, in my judgment, an eventual reconciliation between science, psi, and spirituality is inevitable: they are based on good science, and they resonate with the experience of vast numbers of individuals, including first-rate scientists.

If the commonplace prejudices toward psi can be neutralized, the peace between psi, science, and spirituality will come sooner, rather than later. Urgency is involved. As André Malraux once said, the twenty-first century will be spiritual or it will not be at all. Tart and his colleagues have contributed to this development, and that is why this fine volume deserves a wide reading.

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LARRY DOSSEY, MD

*Executive Editor, Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*  
 223 N. Guadalupe, Box 169  
 Santa Fe, NM 87501

ENCOUNTERS WITH THE PARANORMAL: SCIENCE, KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF. Edited by Kendrick Frazier. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1998. Pp. 426. \$22.95 (paper). ISBN 1-57392-203-X.

*Encounters with the Paranormal* is the fourth in a series of collected readings from the *Skeptical Inquirer (SI)*, a magazine that serves as one of the chief publishing vehicles of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), an organization of scientists, philosophers, and other persons who are largely skeptical of the claims of parapsychology and other "fringe" disciplines. Kendrick Frazier is the editor of the *Skeptical Inquirer*, and *Encounters with the Paranormal* contains articles published in *SI* during the years 1990-1997. In some cases, the articles have been updated for the purposes of inclusion in the present volume, and, in some cases, letters of rebuttal of the original article that were published in subsequent issues of *SI* have been included in the relevant chapters.

The first six contributions fall under the heading "Science, Imagination, and Responsibility." The late Carl Sagan (one of the reviewer's former college teachers) leads off in typical Saganesque fashion, recalling how he stared in childhood wonder at the stars and planets in the Brooklyn night sky. Sagan argues that, unlike many areas of human endeavor, science and the scientific establishment reward those who challenge accepted ideas. I wonder how many parapsychologists would agree with this assessment. (Surely not billions and billions.)

The second contribution is by Leon Lederman and is entitled "A Strategy for Saving Science." Lederman laments the rise of what he sees as an antiscience backlash in the media, in society in general, and in academia. He particularly decries the increasing number of postmodern deconstructionists and epistemological relativists within the academic establishment who attack the very notion of objective truth altogether. He acknowledges that science has caused some problems in society through the sometimes