

The Sovereignty of Science[#]

Corollary: Scientific Belief is Obedience to Authority

The Pronouncements of Science

In today's world, most knowledgeable persons concede the authority of science. Since the **findings** of science are vast, knowledgeable persons, including scientists, accept the **pronouncements** of science in lieu of a personal mastery of its evidential structure. The "pronouncements of science" are the consensus generalizations expressed by the leaders of science either as individuals or through their professional organizations or without dispute in most of the relevant textbooks.

The pronouncements of science, thus understood, are accepted by persons who wield power in the First World. Being intelligent but often scientifically illiterate, the movers and shakers have little choice but to accept the sovereignty of science in all those areas where science makes pronouncements.

In most areas of science, "pronouncements" are broadly based on empirical observations that have been widely and repeatedly made and that are often embodied in unifying theories of great eloquence. In some cases, however, the pronouncements of science may depend upon observations that have been made by only a few specialists whose findings are tentatively accepted by the scientific community because of the credentials of those specialists. In other words, science allows itself some laxity in awarding its approval.

The Opposition of Science to Psi

With regard to the occurrence of psi (psychic) phenomena, however, science makes a clear pronouncement, namely, that such phenomena do not occur (McConnell and Clark, 1991). What needs explanation is why this negative consensus of science persists despite the volume and quality of evidence favoring the phenomena and the outstanding credentials of some of those who vouch for that evidence (Radin, 1997).

What demands attention, however, is not the absence of a consensus that psi phenomena occur but the presence of a consensus that they do not! It is--to say the least--unusual that science should make a pronouncement on the non-occurrence of a phenomenon in any area of current observation (as opposed to theory, e.g., Creationism). Moreover, in view of the supporting evidence and the importance of psi if real, it might have been expected that some of the leaders of science would have disassociated themselves from this know-nothing attitude of their colleagues. The only living leader who has done so is Nobel Prize winner Brian D. Josephson, Professor of Physics at Cambridge University (McConnell, 2000, 364-365).

Scientifically pretentious denunciations of belief in psi as a superstitious pox upon humanity usually end with the justification: "There is insufficient evidence to prove the occurrence of the phenomena." This suggests that the evidence, while currently inadequate, would be accepted if it were not deficient. My intention herein is to explain

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why the evidence can never be "adequate" unless, psychologically speaking, the modern world morphs to a very different future state.

While positive evidence for psi is occasionally reviewed in a respected journal of science, it is usually done by an incompetent critic and, as a result, is generally scientifically misrepresented--often with ideological fervor (McConnell, 2000, 359-364). Any realistic examination of the literature will show that the competent spokesmen for the evidence favoring psi are denied access to the respected journals of popular science such as *Scientific American* and to the leading research journals of general science (*Science* and *Nature*), while at the same time there is an international organization devoted to the disparaging of "paranormal phenomena."

This organization is called the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP). Among its 77 listed sponsoring Fellows are five Nobel Prize winners in science. CSICOP publishes *Skeptical Inquirer: The Magazine for Science and Reason* with a circulation of 50,000. In the past, this magazine has attacked all psi phenomena. Recently, it has softened its attacks but remains generally unfavorable to parapsychology as the serious study of psi. If *Skeptical Inquirer* were to adopt a neutral attitude, e.g., by fairly reviewing Radin (1997), it would offend most of its subscribers and risk economic collapse. To understand the subtle role of this journal in blocking the progress of science in this area, it will be necessary to go back a long way.

Religion and Psi

From the beginning of consciousness, man has encountered phenomena and situations whose cause or significance was not apparent to him. Fearing the unknown as a threat to his existence, he invented reassuring explanations to calm his mind and allow him to think constructively or even enjoyably about his immediate activities.

Many of his feared experiences seemed related, and these he lumped together and explained by a variety of otherworldly myths. This led to organized religion which reached the peak of its political power among Western European people in the Middle Ages.

As men became more sophisticated in their thinking, in the 16th and 17th centuries, religion was rejected by many in favor of materialist science, which, however, was unable to encompass certain of the nonmaterial aspects of experience. These aspects, therefore, remained in the domain of religion.

By the time of the 18th Century Enlightenment, materialist science was in its ascendancy, while the beliefs of religion were increasingly recognized as fraught with self-contradictions. An intellectual movement was set afoot to dispense with religion.

In our own time, the majority of educated people in the First World reject most of the superficial, irrelevant aspects of religion, which however continue to hold sway among the less educated. This has led to the interclass religious conflict in which we are embroiled today.

The author believes that the ultimate solution for this dilemma is for the better educated people to recognize the reality of psi phenomena, and, under the guidance of scientific method, to make a place for them in their own belief systems. Then, having regained credibility with the masses, they might hope to eradicate truly superstitious beliefs. This is what your author believes should be the long-range goal of parapsychology.

Science and Psi

In this paper the author will explain how the materialists, in their struggle to be free of anything smacking of superstition, have adopted a defensive ideology that denies reality and betrays their own intellectual principles.

The author has subscribed to *Skeptical Inquirer* for many years, and regards CSICOP as the foremost instrument of the arch materialists in their fight against superstition.

In their zealotry they have opposed those few scientists today who are struggling with the difficult, perhaps impossible, task of discovering the nature of non-materialist phenomena and of explaining them in the materialist language that we speak. These visionaries seek no less than the reconciling, through the use of the scientific method, of the material and the non-material: of science and religion!

Parapsychologists have no quarrel with the anti-superstition program of CSICOP and the *Skeptical Inquirer*, but they are frustrated by CSICOP's blanket denial of the experimental evidence for psi phenomena.

Spontaneous Psi: Its Characteristics

Psi occurs spontaneously as well as in the laboratory, and the evidence for its spontaneous occurrence (as well as for its laboratory occurrence) overwhelmingly affirms its reality (McConnell, 2000). In this paper, spontaneous psi is where we shall focus our attention.

From all accounts, it would appear that spontaneous psi occurs more often among less educated persons, and this is commonly used as an argument that the evidence supporting psi must be fallacious. On the other hand, it is possible that psi effects are occurring with equal frequency at all levels of society but are recognized more easily by the less educated who are not subservient to the sovereignty of science and are under little social pressure to accept the common wisdom of science, according to which, psi does not occur.

Spontaneous psi occurs in many forms and with all degrees of intensity and frequency, depending on the person. The most common form of psi is extrasensory perception (ESP) in which a percipient acquires information through other than sensory-motor means. Spontaneous ESP is most obvious when it reveals information from a distance or about the future.

Reasons Science Gives for Ignoring Psi

If, indeed, psi occurs equally at all levels of education, why is its reality not obvious to the world? The answer is multifold. For most people, ESP occurs only as a weak and infrequent effect, readily deniable as coincidence if one so wishes, or readily recognizable as anomalous if one has low evidential standards.

Also, those professional psychics who make a living using psi, which is at best a thoroughly undependable phenomenon, must often supplement their performance by cheating to maintain their business reputations. This leads to the supposition that all exhibitions of spontaneous psi are mistaken or fraudulent.

Add to this the treatment of psi as entertainment on television. Powers far beyond those scientifically demonstrated to be possible are daily fare on television, enhancing the disbelief in psi among educated people.

Some parapsychologists believe that psi occurs more readily in minds that have a limited ability to think analytically but whose mental forte lies in their right cerebral hemisphere, i.e., in those who are artistically inclined rather than in those who are logical by nature. If so, this merely strengthens the prejudice of scientists against the reality of psi.

The real puzzle is why ESP is not universally acknowledged when it occurs, as it occasionally does with some people, as a dramatic and undeniable effect. For high-powered psychics who happen to be highly educated there is an escape hatch from the embarrassment they might otherwise cause to their professional-class friends. To avoid cognitive dissonance, these individuals usually join their less educated fellow psychics and quietly assign psi to a realm of spiritual belief that is commonly conceded to be outside the realm of science.

Thus, as regards psi experience, religion serves two purposes. For those deeply devoted to an organized sect, psi may be considered either as a gift of God or as a manifestation of His presence. For those rare others, seeking escape from their own undeniable psi, religion provides a haven to put psi safely out of mind. In both functions, psi strengthens the legitimacy of religion. Quite aside from those who recognize themselves as psychic, the existence of a nonphysical realm--call it what you will--must ultimately strengthen the beliefs common to most religions.

Rewriting the Textbooks of Physics and Psychology

There is another and more encompassing explanation for the failure of the Scientific Establishment to examine carefully the empirical evidence for the occurrence of psi. To understand the undying opposition of scientists to psi, one must consider the hypothetical consequences of psi's universal acceptance. All general textbooks of psychology and physics would have to be rewritten. For physics, this might require no more than an acknowledgment that there exists a nonphysical realm with which the physical realm can interact, both spontaneously and experimentally. The exploration of these interactions would attract the interest of theoretical physicists even while experimental physicists might be frustrated in their misguided attempts to demonstrate psi as though it were a new form of electromagnetic radiation.

In psychology, the fallout from a universal recognition of the reality of psi would be catastrophic. Most of present and past psychological research would be recognized at once as trivial. Much of the rest would lose its claim to validity because of the possible confounding effects of ESP or of psychokinesis (e.g., by the direct mental action of "wishing" upon measuring instruments). Experimental psychology as now practiced would be destroyed as a scientific enterprise. Psychiatry, for its part, would have to go back and start from the beginning.

A Revisionist Worldview

The foregoing practical considerations do not, however, come to grips with the philosophic heart of the matter, namely, the shattering of the materialist worldview of physics. This worldview governs not only the physical sciences, but also psychology and postmodernism, and justifies the aggressive behavior of much of the First World's ruling class.

It is not possible for the average layman to understand what the acceptance of psi would mean to a thoughtful scientist. The acknowledgement of the reality of psi by physics departments, implying as it would, philosophic dualism, would be comparable to the

denying by Rome of the reality of God. Any attempt by a thoughtful scientist to reconcile the established facts of parapsychology with his understanding of his philosophic commitment to his profession would encounter an emotional block. Occasional direct uninferable knowledge of the future, for example, which is accepted matter-of-factly by parapsychologists, would be horrifying to the scientist who accepts the materialist view of reality.

Conclusion

Since the sovereignty of science extends to most persons who wield power in the First World, including most of those in middle management, its collapse could result in social chaos. The materialist scientist's adamant denial of the existence of psi can perhaps best be explained by his fear of the consequences that might follow in the event of its acceptance.

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