

Brief Comments on »Siddhis and Psi Research: An Interdisciplinary Analysis«

I began reading this paper in hope of finding an unbiased introduction to the scientific literature on psi phenomena, recognition of parallels in the vast Indian literature regarding »siddhis« or »attainments,« and an open-minded entertainment of the possibility that the Indian philosophical schools might have something useful to say about how the world must be constructed in order that such phenomena can occur. What we get, unfortunately, is something very different.

The paper begins well enough, with an informative introduction to psi-like phenomena in the context of Indian thought, supported by many useful references. Problems begin to surface in Section 3 on contemporary psi research, where Dr. Marwaha tilts sharply toward views held primarily by herself and her American physicist colleague Ed May, who are unusual in combining acceptance of the reality of psi – especially precognition, curiously enough, which most philosophers find particularly challenging conceptually – with an expectation that everything will ultimately prove explainable in terms of classical physics and neuroscience. I urge readers to take several aspects of Marwaha's survey with particular reservation: First, the largely implicit presumption that laboratory experimentation is the primary or only path to valid scientific knowledge; second, and dependent on that presumption, denial of the reality of macro-PK, for which there exists an abundance of high-quality observational evidence (see e.g. Steve Braude's *The Limits of Influence*, and a forthcoming book by Michael Grosso entitled *The Man Who Could Fly*, detailing the massively witnessed levitations of Joseph of Copertino)¹; and third, the suggestion that evidence for post-mortem survival can justifiably be set

¹ S. Braude, *The Limits of Influence: Psychokinesis and the Philosophy of Science*, Lanham: University Press of America, 1997 [revised edition]; M. Grosso, *The Man Who Could Fly: St. Joseph of Copertino and the Mystery of Levitation*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, forthcoming.

aside on grounds that some of it can likely be explained in terms of psi abilities in living persons (for serious introductions to this literature see e.g. Alan Gauld's *Mediumship and Survival*, Steve Braude's *Immortal Remains*, and Ian Stevenson's monumental *Reincarnation and Biology*)².

Having now artificially contracted the scope of her discussion to *informational* forms of psi, Marwaha goes on in the balance of her paper to advocate for what she regards as the best existing theory of such phenomena, namely a signal-based model of precognition recently advanced by herself and Ed May. Ignoring the widespread sense among psi researchers that the world portrayed by quantum theory is inherently friendlier to psi than that of classical physics (see e.g. Dean Radin's *Entangled Minds*³), she summarily dismisses quantum theory as irrelevant to the macro-world. More importantly, she also seeks to dismiss all dualist, panpsychist, and idealistic notions deriving from the Indian philosophical traditions themselves; indeed, the main point of her paper seems to be that although Patanjali and his peers were correct in recognizing the empirical reality of (some) psi phenomena, their theoretical and practical views regarding the production of such phenomena are of little or no value. Section 4 presents weak empirical arguments to that effect, when the basic fact of the matter is that we have barely scratched the surface in terms of relevant research, and the concluding Section 5 offers up a transparently circular argument against the possibility of a non-physical consciousness, coupled with the false suggestion that no such theory could explain its interactions with the brain, or the normal dependence of conscious experience on brain processes (see Chapter 9 of Kelly et al., *Irreducible Mind: Toward a Psychology for the 21st Century*⁴).

In sum, and contrary to the stated aims of *Confluence*, Dr. Marwaha's paper remains fundamentally subservient to the dominant

² A. Gauld, *Mediumship and Survival: A Century of Investigations*, London: Heinemann, 1982; S. Braude, *Immortal Remains: The Evidence for Life After Death*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003; I. Stevenson, *Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect*, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1997.

³ D. Radin, *Entangled Minds: Extrasensory Experiences in a Quantum Reality*, New York: Paraview Pocket Books, 2006.

⁴ E. F. Kelly, »Toward a Psychology for the 21st Century,« in E. F. Kelly et al. (eds.), *Irreducible Mind: Towards a Psychology for the 21st. Century*, Lanham etc.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010, pp. 577–644.

physicalist paradigm, and seeks to continue the silencing of »deviant« views. For a radically different kind of engagement with non-Anglo traditions along lines sketched in my introductory paragraph, see Kelly, Crabtree, and Marshall (eds.), *Beyond Physicalism: Toward Reconciliation of Science and Spirituality*⁵, the central thrust of which is that interconnected phenomena including psi, post-mortem survival and mystical experience necessarily drive us toward an expanded metaphysics having much in common with traditional mystically-informed religious philosophies of India and the Middle East.

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⁵ E. F. Kelly, »Introduction: Science and Spirituality at a Crossroads,« in E. Kelly, A. Crabtree, and P. Marshall (eds.), *Beyond Physicalism: Toward Reconciliation of Science and Spirituality*, Lanham etc.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015, pp. xi-xxix.