

Response to: Brief Comments on “Siddhis and Psi Research: An Interdisciplinary Analysis”

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In his brief comments on “Siddhis and Psi Research: An Interdisciplinary Analysis,” Ed Kelly expresses disappointment that the paper does not mirror his worldview, which includes questioning the reality of psi—especially precognition, accepting post-mortem survival and observational evidence for macro-PK including levitation. In this brief response to Kelly, I provide arguments in support of informational psi, particularly precognition, and in favor of a physicalist, signal-based approach to psi, with brief points against the validity of micro-PK (mind-over-matter) and post-mortem survival.

Keywords: Siddhis; ESP; parapsychology; physicalism; signal-based model of psi

Following an overview of a vast field, *Siddhis and Psi Research: An Interdisciplinary Analysis* examined the empirical evidence for training, personality, and meditation as contributing factors for developing siddhis (Marwaha 2016)¹. Psi theorists have opposing views to address related ontological and epistemological issues, as do string theorists and particle physicists, for example; the final arbiter is empirical validation of the hypotheses. Professor Edward Kelly (2016)² sets out reading the article with the hope that it will mirror his worldview; however, as he states, “unfortunately, [it] is something very different.” He chastises me for “[i]gnoring the widespread sense among psi researchers [...]” However, it suffices to state here that this field of inquiry would not have existed had psi researchers followed the widespread sense in mainstream science that psi does not exist. In my view, Kelly’s apparent disdain for physicalism prompts him to urge readers to take several aspects of the article with “particular reservation.” Ignoring the empirical and protocol issues which are the mainstay of the article, his comments reflect his position. In the following, I encapsulate his position as a bold heading and respond to it.

1 Disagrees: Validity of Anomalous Cognition (AC; a.k.a. ESP/Precognition)

Examining the possibility of precognition, philosopher Richard Corry (2015: 126)³ concludes “there is nothing impossible about ESP, nor is it impossible that we could find good empirical reason to believe in ESP.”

A U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency report states: “[...] the history of application investigations in this field [AC] demonstrates that at least some level of application reliability can be achieved for some types of projects” (1993: 11).⁴

Professor Utts, a member of the panel assembled by the CIA to review the Star Gate remote viewing research and applications program, concludes: “It is clear to this author that anomalous cognition is possible and has been demonstrated. This conclusion is not based on belief, but rather on commonly

accepted scientific criteria. The phenomenon has been replicated in a number of forms across laboratories and cultures” (1995: 3–29).⁵

2 Disagrees: Relevance of Classical Physics and Neuroscience in Psi

In normal perception, information from the external world comes *to* the sensory system; psi information would likely follow the same process. To understand *how* AC occurs, we have to explore the normal modalities. Details of testable hypotheses are discussed in Marwaha and May (2015a,b).^{6,7} Physicalist hypotheses have to be experimentally rejected before considering a dualist/panpsychist approach as a possible explanatory mechanism for psi.

3 Prefers: Observed Macro-PK over Laboratory Investigations

Field observations lead to experimental research if the goal is to understand the processes involved in observed phenomena. Macro-psychokinesis is based on the assumption that the “mind” can causally influence/create external matter; a corollary to that is the mind can affect matter at a micro-level. Micro-PK effects can be measured using well-calibrated instruments, controlling for environmental artifacts that may otherwise confound the results. The Star Gate meta-analysis states there is no evidence to support the micro-PK hypothesis (May, Utts, et al., 1989: 2).⁸ Decision augmentation theory has been successfully applied to micro-PK studies to conclude that informational psi (AC) rather than causal psi (psychokinesis) has led to the observed experimental effects (Bancel 2015,⁹ May, Utts, and Spottiswoode, 1995).¹⁰ To understand how “mind” can ostensibly violate physical laws, as in field observations of putative macro-PK events, controlled laboratory investigations are essential.

4 Favors: Survival Hypothesis over Living Agent Psi (LAP), a.k.a. Super-Psi, Hypothesis

Researchers engaged in the question of post-mortem survival need to ask questions such as ‘what is the nature of what survives?’ and ‘where is memory stored in the non-material discarnate?’ The LAP hypothesis refers to “psychic functioning of an extent and complexity without bounds” (Rock 2013: 12).¹¹ According to Beischel (*ibid.*: 14) “the source of psi problem seems insurmountable [...]. No amount of scoring data and no type of mediumship content can definitively distinguish between these two explanations [LAP and survival].” Braude (2013: 38)¹² states: “[...] LAP hypothesis remains a formidable obstacle to accepting the survival hypothesis as the best rational explanation of the data from mediumship.” In my view, since we do not know when, where, and for how long psi happens, the medium can, in principle, accumulate sufficient psi-mediated information *prior* to the ostensible communication with a discarnate spirit, thus addressing the concerns about the volume of information that can be acquired. The operational remote viewing of a submarine base in Severodvinsk, Russia from Fort Meade, MD, USA, is a case in point (McMoneagle 2015: 285–316).¹³

5 Prefers: QM in Psi over Signal-Based Model

While it is appealing to use quantum mechanics (QM) as a metaphor in the behavioral sciences, it is important to note that QM deals with the behavior of matter and light on the *atomic and subatomic scale*. The

buzz words in the QM-psi relation are consciousness, correlations, and entanglement. The definitional problem of consciousness and “non-material” consciousness is an impediment in positing that it is causally linked to quantum correlations and, by extension, consciousness is the fundamental fabric of the universe as without it nothing exists. It is sufficient to state here that classically one cannot obtain information from a correlation; even if possible, such information will still require signals to interact with the sensory systems (See Marwaha and May 2015c).¹⁴ Thus, positing a signal-based model for psi becomes a necessity for determining how information from there/then comes to here/now.

6 Condemns: Dismissal of Indian Dualist/Panpsychist/Idealist Traditions and Subservience to Physicalism

It is appropriate to end my response citing philosophy professor Pradeep Gokhale’s conclusion to his recent work: “[...] if we want to study Indian philosophy today as a relevant and meaningful subject, then we should highlight its secular and rational aspects, rather than its other-worldly and religious aspects [...]. [Its] importance [...] should not be highlighted any more by guaranteeing eternal disembodied liberation as the fruit of philosophical inquiry, but [its] relevance for a happy and meaningful life in this world itself should be sought for and emphasized [...]. [It] should become more relevant to common sense and science and should establish a critical dialogue with them. In this sense a *Lokāyatic* turn in Indian philosophy is very much necessary” (2015: 198).¹⁵

Although *Lokāyatā* does not accept ESP as a valid form of perception, based in the dualist/idealist trend in Indian philosophy, a physicalist theory of psi is compatible with the *Lokāyatā* view.

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- ¹ Sonali B. Marwaha, “Siddhis and Psi Research: An Interdisciplinary Analysis,” *Confluence: Online Journal of World Philosophies* 4, no. 1, (2016): 33–58.
 - ² Edward F. Kelly, “Brief Comments on ‘Siddhis and Psi Research: An Interdisciplinary Analysis,’” *Confluence: Online Journal of World Philosophies* 4, no. 1, (2016): 59–61.
 - ³ Richard Corry, “ESP, Causation, and the Possibility of Precognition,” in *Extrasensory Perception: Support, Skepticism, and Science, Volume I—History, Controversy, and Research*, ed. Edwin C. May and Sonali B. Marwaha (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2015), 107–27.
 - ⁴ Directorate for Scientific and Technical Intelligence, DIA, *Star Gate Project: An Overview*, 30 April 1993. DIA.
 - ⁵ Jessica M. Utts, “An Assessment of the Evidence for Psychic Functioning,” in *An Evaluation of Remote Viewing: Research and Applications*, Michael D. Mumford, Andrew H. Rose, David A. Goslin, and American Institutes for Research, 3.2–3.40 (Palo Alto, CA: American Institutes for Research, 1995).
 - ⁶ Sonali B. Marwaha, and Edwin C. May, “Rethinking Extrasensory Perception: Towards a Multiphasic Model of Precognition,” *SAGE Open* 5, no. 1, (2015a) (DOI: 10.1177/2158244015576056).
 - ⁷ Sonali B. Marwaha, and Edwin C. May, “The Multiphasic Model of Precognition: The Rationale,” *Journal of Parapsychology* 79, no. 1, (2015b): 5–19.

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 - 14 Sonali B. Marwaha, and Edwin C. May, “A Refutation of the Dualist Perspective in Psi Research,” *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 22, no. 5–6, (2015c): 70–95.
 - 15 Pradeep P. Gokhale, *Lokāyatā/ Cārvāka: A Philosophical Inquiry* (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2015).