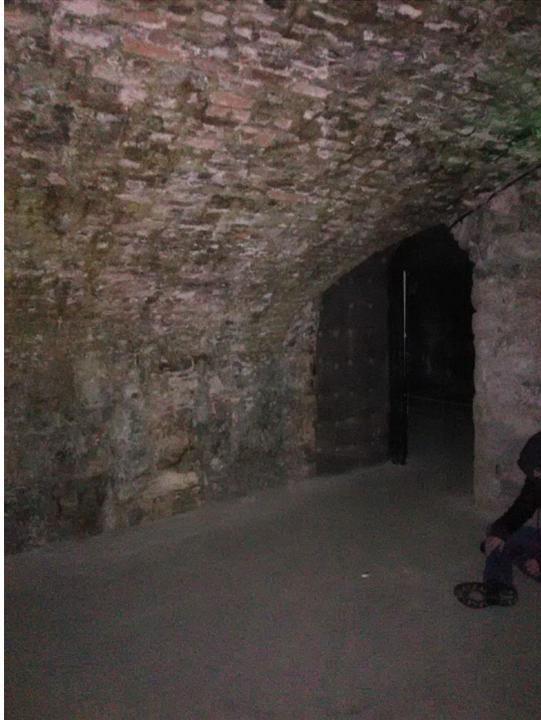




The Validity of Parapsychology as a Science

Why All the Fuss Over Parapsychology?



The answer to why Parapsychology has dealt with such controversy resides in a very fundamental aspect of human existence. In a word, parapsychology threatens the popular beliefs of many scientists (See Framing Effects Below). Although not portrayed as such, science is by no means free of beliefs. On the contrary, the dictates of science require that beliefs in science be backed by scientific evidence and data. However, even scientists sometimes have trouble with data or evidence that is contrary to their personal or public belief systems. In a perfect world, science coldly examines data and limits its conclusions to the available evidence. In some cases, this involves openly stating that science “can’t say yes or no.” However, several fallacies of science are often perpetuated by individuals who are dogmatically opposed to the possibility of paranormal phenomena (and the opposite is sometimes true with devout believers of the paranormal). Some of these commonly mistaken criticisms among skeptics (and particularly non-scientific skeptics) include:

Psi research is not scientific because it is not published in scientific peer-reviewed journals.

In fact, there are several peer-reviewed scientific journals that publish parapsychology (e.g., the Journal of Parapsychology) and several mainstream scientific journals that publish parapsychology (e.g., The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology).

Psi research is not scientific by definition and should not be published in scientific peer-reviewed journals.

This represents, at best, an illogical claim, as peer-reviewed science is published based on the value of its scientific method.



Psi research does not use the scientific method.

All formally published research on parapsychology uses the scientific method.

Only individuals without a scientific background endorse Psi.

Almost all individuals in parapsychology who publish research have doctorates in science-based fields.

The Randi prize for proof of the paranormal has never been awarded.

James Randi is a notorious skeptic, and the million-dollar prize is more of a publicity stunt as opposed to an objective test.

If one or a group of scientists opines something, then all scientists in that field surely must agree with that opinion.

Science is by no means unified. Disagreements over basic theories, let alone Psi, happen all the time. Generalized statements about science that involve black-and-white statements often do not represent scientific findings. Even gravity is only very likely to occur.

Only individuals with poor reasoning skills, cognitive biases, and/or mental disorders support the existence of Psi.

Actually, research suggests that beliefs in general will influence how people respond to Psi-oriented processing tasks. This is an example of simple bias and prejudice against the field.

Psi critics have explained away the statistical evidence for psi.

This statement should actually read, Psi critics have tried to explain away the statistical evidence for Psi, but subsequent arguments and quality mathematics have always supported the existence of Psi. Critics to date have failed to dismiss evidence for Psi.

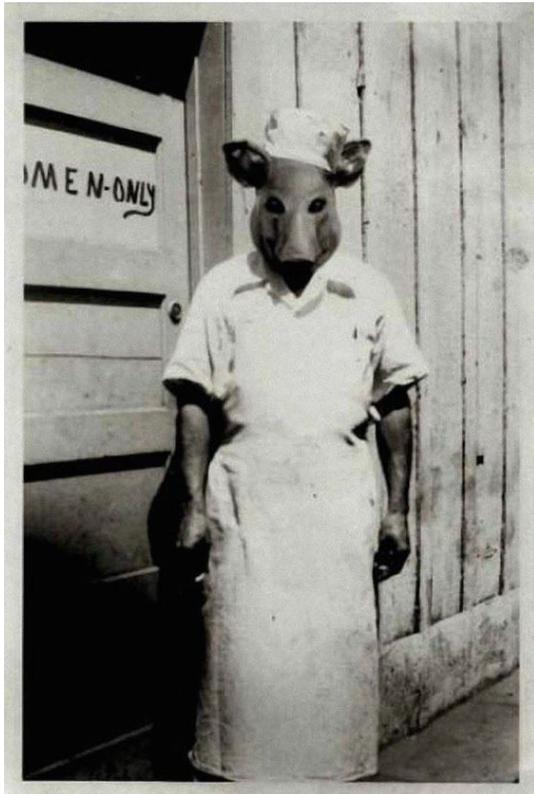
Psi requires exceptional evidence because it is an exceptional claim.

This is a culturally dependent claim. What is deemed extraordinary is a function of culture and society. It is not necessarily appropriate to label Psi in this way, demanding extraordinary evidence, when popularity rather than evidence can dictate what people believe. By any current scientific standard, the research on Psi is as good as, if not better, than most mainstream scientific fields.

From Palmer, (2015)



Is Prejudice Toward Parapsychology That Severe?



The short answer to this question is that in some but not all cases, yes. A somewhat famous case of blatant prejudice on the part of scientists was the National Research Council's 1988 report on parapsychological research. These reviewers' conclusions claimed that, despite 130 years of ongoing research, there remained no evidence of parapsychological phenomena. Parapsychologists were notably disturbed. Upon examination of the methods of the report, Parapsychologists John Palmer, Charles Honorton, and Jessica Utts discovered:

1. Despite the claim that 130 years of data were reviewed, in fact, only the most recent 20 years of data had been reviewed.
2. The committee contained strongly committed skeptics and pseudo-skeptics who had preexisting bias towards the field.
3. The committee selectively ignored and removed reports from participants in the council that provided a positive assessment of parapsychological research.

Unfortunately, heated debate often occurs over parapsychology findings, and in some cases, blatant bias becomes obvious in the critiques of the field. Often, the mathematics will be questioned and reperformed, and much of the debate among scientists is over the quality of the research and the fair application of the mathematics behind the analysis. As a recent example, Baptista and Derakhshani successfully countered a supposed debunking of PSI research by correcting several series of mathematical errors used to make the claim that PSI was invalid. As we shall see, parapsychologists have won many of these methodical and mathematical debates by the standards of any objective observer. However, the refutation of these debunking claims often do not get circulated in mainstream science, resulting in many fields of science mistakenly believing that scientific evidence for parapsychology does not exist.

Separating Skepticism from Pseudoskepticism



An important distinction in parapsychology is an understanding of science and the role of skepticism in the field. Whereas parapsychology endorses and encourages skepticism, it does not endorse pseudoskepticism. The difference in these terms (skepticism versus pseudoskepticism) was first clarified by Truzzi. It is worthwhile for the



student to compare the two, as a good understanding of the correct philosophy of the scientific process can be understood by contrasting skepticism with pseudoskepticism.

According to Truzzi (1987) Pseudoskepticism is defined as:

1. Denying, when only doubt has been established
2. Double standards in the application of criticism
3. The tendency to discredit rather than investigate
4. Presenting insufficient evidence or proof
5. Assuming criticism requires no burden of proof
6. Making unsubstantiated counterclaims
7. Counterclaims based on plausibility rather than empirical evidence
8. Suggesting that unconvincing evidence provides grounds for completely dismissing a claim

Skepticism is defined as:

1. Acceptance of doubt when neither assertion nor denial has been established
2. No burden of proof to take an agnostic position
3. Agreement that the corpus of established knowledge must be based on what is proven, but recognizing its incompleteness
4. Even-handedness in requirement for proofs, regardless of their implication
5. Accepting that a failure of a proof in itself proves nothing
6. Continuing examination of the results of experiments, even when flaws are found



We close this section with an emphasis to the student and layperson that skepticism is fully endorsed by parapsychology. However, pseudoskepticism is a personal belief hiding behind a veneer of science and cannot be considered appropriately scientific in any domain.

General Content From Watt (2016)