

Even Better the Second Time 'Round

JAMES E. ALCOCK

The Psychology of the Psychic (Second edition). By David Marks. Prometheus Books, Amherst, New York, 2001. ISBN 1-57392-798-8. 336 pp. Softcover, \$23.

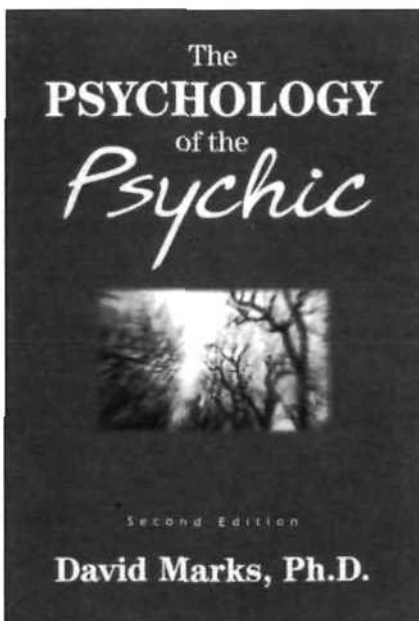
The original *Psychology of the Psychic* (Marks and Kammann, 1980) is a classic in the field of critical inquiry into parapsychological claims. It not only discussed and critiqued a wide range of supposed evidence for the paranormal, but it also presented the authors' careful exposé of Uri Geller, described their own unsuccessful efforts to replicate some of the key studies in remote viewing, and reported their discovery of crucial flaws in the remote viewing research paradigm. Perhaps even more important, that book was outstanding in its analysis of cognitive factors that are likely to give rise to "psychic experiences"—factors such as population stereotypes, the power of coincidence, illusory correlation, and subjective validation.

It was therefore with some trepidation that I approached this review of the second edition of the *Psychology of the Psychic*, authored by David Marks alone, and dedicated to his original coauthor, the late Richard Kammann. How has he tampered with it, I wondered? Too many "second editions" are simply the same old first editions with an extra chapter tagged on at the end, and with a few new references thrown in to suggest freshness. Would this be the case with this one? Or worse, have important

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parts of the book been cast aside to make room for new material? I feared that any fiddling with the original would only lead to disappointment.

My fears were for naught. Almost all the original book has been retained with



only minor editing. The only major deletion is the material dealing with The Amazing Kreskin (two chapters), eliminated on the grounds that Kreskin's "psychic" magic act is no longer relevant to the study of the paranormal, a view shared by this reviewer. A full third of the material in the second edition is new, and it not only updates the original, but it presents a critical analysis of areas of parapsychological research that have

come into prominence since the original book was published.

My aim in this review is in part to assess the value of the changes that have been made to the original. However, given that that book appeared over twenty years ago, many readers of this review, unfamiliar with the original, will want to know about the value of the new edition as a whole. Therefore, I have tried to provide information on both old and new in this review. I have organized the review around the key themes of the book.

Cognitive Psychology

The material on cognitive factors underlying supposed psychic experiences has been strengthened in this new edition by an excellent new chapter about the emotional impact of personally relevant coincidences, which Marks refers to as "personal oddmatches." This chapter, plus the information which derives from the original, makes an important contribution to our understanding of why so many, many people are convinced about the reality of the paranormal on the basis of their own experiences, experiences that seem to them to defy any rational explanation. The reader is offered a valuable lesson in how to minimize the likelihood of being misled by others' claims or by one's own experiences.

Remote Viewing

Still included in this book is the original

definitive critique of the Targ and Puthoff remote viewing (RV) studies that had at their outset persuaded many people, both within and outside parapsychology, that good evidence had finally been gathered that would establish the scientific validity of psychic phenomena. Those remote viewing experiments typically involved this procedure: A subject and an experimenter sat in a room that had been constructed to be impervious to electromagnetic energy. A second experimenter then travelled to a target site, a geographical location that had been randomly selected from a set of twelve possible targets. Once enough time had elapsed for the second experimenter to reach the target site, the subject was asked to report whatever sensations he or she was experiencing. This procedure was repeated a number of times, each time with a freshly selected target. At the end of the series of trials, the transcripts of what the subject had said on each trial were given to a group of independent judges, along with the list of the targets that had been used, and the judges then visited each target site and rank-ordered the subject's various descriptions in terms of how well they corresponded to the site. On this basis, highly significant correspondences between descriptions and targets were found, and this was the case for a number of different subjects.

Having suspected that the fly in the ointment was in the judging procedure, Marks and Kamman requested copies of the original transcripts from Targ and Puthoff, in order to see whether there were cues in the transcripts that would bias the judging. In this new edition, Marks reports that now—twenty years later—this request has never been answered, a serious omission on the part of anyone claiming to be a scientific researcher. However, they were able to obtain these transcripts in a roundabout way, from a consultant to the project. They discovered that comments made by the experimenter to the subject, and which were included in the transcripts, clearly indicated where in the overall

series a given session fell, and that this information could cue the judges, who were given a set of targets in the order that they had been presented, to correctly match the subject's descriptions to the targets. Indeed, when Marks and Kamman had their own research participants try to match which response went with which target, they had no problem in doing so. However, when these cues were edited out, such matching did not surpass a chance level. This was skeptical inquiry at its best, and through it, Marks and Kamman effectively demonstrated that the Targ-Puthoff research had been so poorly controlled that their data could not be taken seriously as evidence for the existence of paranormal processes.

In this second edition, in a new chapter entitled "The Sloppiness Continues" (he doesn't mince words!), Marks brings us up to date regarding subsequent research that attempted to replicate the Targ and Puthoff findings. Marks reports that, to this day, "Well-controlled experiments never find the RV effect, while poorly controlled experiments nearly always do. Data suppression, flawed methodology, and lack of replication lead to the conclusion that Targ and Puthoff's RV effect was a cognitive illusion, an artifact of human error and wishful thinking" (68).

This should write "Closed" to the Targ and Puthoff era of parapsychological research.

Marks has added two chapters on other, more recent, remote viewing research, focusing on the so-called "Stargate" research conducted between 1985 until 1995, under the direction of parapsychologist Edwin May, and sponsored by the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) of the United States government. The thrust of the research was to try to demonstrate that remote viewing could be harnessed for intelligence-gathering purposes. Marks finds good reasons to be deeply troubled by the Stargate research, not the least of which was the refusal by May to allow him to have access to the raw data, or to the

names of significant participants in the research, or to do his own independent judging of the Stargate transcripts. Mark concludes that, "In all probability, the data collection procedures and the data themselves are faulty and do not support what is claimed for them. Unfortunately, we will probably never know for sure" (82).

Uri Geller

In the original edition, a full five chapters were devoted to the feats and exploits of Uri Geller, the "superpsychic of the seventies." All five chapters are fortunately retained, virtually unchanged but for minor editing. Geller had not only thrilled much of the world with his "psychic" powers, but he had made considerable inroads in terms of persuading some members of the scientific community—whom we might have been expected to know better—that his feats were paranormal in nature. One of the key achievements of the book was to show how one can apply a version of the control group, so commonly used in experimental methodology, to the analysis of the claims of supposed psychics. Marks and Kamman observed Geller during his tour of New Zealand, but he refused their invitation to submit to their proposed controlled tests, and so they used what they called delayed control groups, groups of presumably nonpsychic subjects who were instructed to attempt to perform a specific psychic feat that had earlier been performed by Geller. For example, whereas Geller astounded many people by his reproductions of drawings contained in sealed envelopes, the authors found that some of their subjects could match Geller's performance, without need of paranormal ability. (Obviously, delayed control groups cannot be expected to rule out all fraud, because many fraudulent methods are known only to professional conjurers, and in such cases, control groups would be unable to match the performance of a psychic using such methods.)

To these five chapters, Marks has

added an additional chapter of new material on Geller, unabashedly entitled "The Great Psychic Lie." This chapter not only brings the reader up to date on Geller's activities, but also addresses the distortions and lies that characterize what Marks calls "the new religion of the paranormal," and provides trenchant commentary on New Age religion in general. In Marks's view, this new religion of the paranormal, "... is totally fake. It has untrustworthy prophets, phony miracles, and foundations of quicksand. Unproven claims cleverly mask the truth with false doctrines about nature's workings that distort unsuspecting perceptions of reality. New Age prophets exhort their sheeplike followers to carry out all sorts of home truths that beggar the imagination of any thinking person." Marks's style of writing is a joy, and the price of the book is almost justified by that paragraph alone!

Other New Material

Marks has added several other new chapters dealing with parapsychological research that has occurred since the original edition was published. There is a chapter on Ganzfeld research, another paradigm that promised the breakthrough into scientific respectability that parapsychologists have so long sought. This chapter focuses particularly on the controversy over the quality of the Ganzfeld research, including the famous exchange between Ray Hyman and Charles Honorton in the *Journal of Parapsychology*, and the later exchange between Hyman and Daryl Bem in the pages of the prestigious *Psychological Bulletin*. Marks concludes that the twenty-five years of Ganzfeld research, like other parapsychological research before it, has failed to demonstrate the existence of any paranormal effect.

Another new chapter is devoted to psychic staring, the supposed phenomenon whereby people claim that they can "feel" when someone is staring at them from behind. This "phenomenon" has

recently been garnering the attention of some researchers, Rupert Sheldrake in particular. Marks reviews the available research, and concludes that claims that people can detect unseen staring have not been substantiated.

In another new chapter, Marks discusses the supposed "sixth sense" of animals that reputedly helps them to find their ways home after having been abandoned miles away, in unfamiliar surroundings. He concludes that there are many anecdotes but no solid evidence to support the psychic pet hypothesis.

This is an excellent book—and I must say, it is actually an improvement on the original. Not only does the new material add to its value, but the physi-

cal presentation is also much improved: This book is visually more attractive, both in terms of the cover, the typeface, and the quality of paper. More important, new headings have been inserted into the material carried over from the first edition, providing an easier read, and, unlike its predecessor, this book has an index.

In conclusion, whatever your approach to the paranormal—be it a skeptic, believer, agnostic—you should read this book. For those who have the original, read the new chapters, both for the information contained and for Marks' style of writing ("So British!"). For those unfamiliar with the original, you have a treat waiting for you!



**Psychoanalysis:
Anything There?**

PETER LAMAL

How To Make A Paranoid Laugh: Or, What Is Psychoanalysis?

By François Roustang (Translated by Anne C. Vila).

University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia. 2000.

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Some belief systems never die, such as creationism. Acceptance of other belief systems declines, but they linger on indefinitely, witness psychoanalysis.

Many critics of psychoanalysis have argued that it is not a science, and they will not get any argument about that from François Roustang. Says he: "If we wish to speak correctly of psychoanalytic epistemology, we must recognize that our belief in no way helps to give the fiction [of psychoanalysis] a scientific status." For Roustang it is an "elementary observation" that psychoanalytic theory is a mythology. Furthermore, this observation is systematically ignored in psychoanalytic circles.

Another attack on psychoanalysis by

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another benighted outsider? No. Roustang is a distinguished French psychoanalytic clinician and theorist. And he says that the theoretical texts of psychoanalysis should unequivocally be classified as mythologies. Such texts do not help psychoanalysts in their practice "and they turn psychoanalysts into the faithful adherents of a sect whose obscurantism rivals that of some religions or political ideologies." What a stunning admission. Is there any other discipline in which foundational texts are so denigrated by a member of the discipline? How can there even be a discipline if there are no texts to guide and promote further development of theory and practice? Roustang says that psychoanalysts "carefully avoid wondering about the foundations of our knowledge." But psychoanalysts, in my view, are not unique in that regard.

In his discussion of the importance of