articles

Head Light: Taking the Psychology out of Parapsychology

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The existence or otherwise of psi, ESP or whatever you want to call it, is one of those key controversies at the centre of the great consciousness debate concerning whether mind somehow exists beyond the confines of the brain. Hardened materialists say such a notion is nonsense, that psi phenomena such as telepathy simply do not exist and that parapsychology is a sham. Are such critics correct in their dismissal of psi? Well, there is a chance that there is the glimmer of chance that some remarkable experimental evidence is not only indicating such scepticism to be misplaced, but that the whole nature of the debate may be about to be superseded.

Parapsychology generally provides its evidence in the form of statistics, and so is all too readily subject to the charge of "lies, damned lies and statistics" – how reliable is monitoring lots of subjective responses to laboratory tests, and why isn't psi robustly repeatable in experimental conditions? When it comes to actual, real-life psi experiences – telepathic or precognitive events, apparitions and so forth – critics tend to level accusations of misperception or dishonesty against the claimants, and point out that in any case such reports are merely anecdotal, and not acceptable as scientific evidence. Mainstream scientists demand "hard" evidence (whether or not their idea of that is applicable to the mercurial nature of psi phenomena). But now, research by the redoubtable Michael Persinger, with Blake Dotta and their team at Laurentian University, Ontario, makes it look as if the hard-nosed sceptics can perhaps be confronted on their own ground. To do so, the Laurentian researchers have taken a different track to standard parapsychology – and it is all to do with light.

Meet the Octopus

Persinger is famous (or infamous) for his so-called "God helmet", a helmet that holds electrodes in place on the wearer's temples that generate programmed patterns of weak magnetic fields which massage the temporal cortex producing sensations of unseen "presences" and other strange perceptions. (In fact, Persinger had developed this procedure to explore the neurological use of magnetism in therapy in place of pharmaceutical products.) But on the heels of this device, he and his co-workers developed a further instrument, nicknamed "the octopus" on account of all the wires involved. More properly known as a circumcerebral magnetic stimulation (CMS) device, this basically is comprised of solenoids (coils) set at intervals on a headband fitted around a person's cranium. The solenoids are controlled by a computer program that enables them to rotate precisely configured weak magnetic pulses around the head. This magnetic stimulation can affect the brain in certain ways, including partially disrupting the 40 Hz so-called "binding factor" of the brain which normally seems to help pull all our sensory inputs together into a smooth, seamless perception of the world. Put in non-technical language, this disruption allows normally curtailed or masked information from "Mind-at-Large" to reach awareness. Some of this information can seemingly possess psi properties, whatever they turn out to be.

Entanglement

I have been a long-time fan of this CMS device ever since I tried out a prototype at Laurentian. It gave me an unambiguous, veridical remote perception or telepathy experience, which I have written about on and off over the years. Now the Laurentian researchers have gone a stage further and carried out tests using *two* synchronised CMS devices, one worn by the "sender" in a telepathy experiment type of set up, and the other by the "receiver" sitting in a separate, distant, lightproof room. And here's the quirky bit: the receiving participant is monitored by a photomultiplier – a device so sensitive it can detect individual photons, minute specks of light invisible to the naked eye.

In fairly recently published research papers, the experimenters describe in detailed technical terms some results of these tests. Put in simpler language, two types of experiment were involved. In one, a volunteer wearing a CMS device sat in a room and was subjected to flashes of light. In the distant lightproof room, a second volunteer wearing another, synchronised, CMS device was monitored for biophoton activity ("biophotons" are emissions of ultraweak light produced by all living cells). What the experimenters found was that in exact time with the flashes of light in the first room, there was an increase of biophoton emission from the head of the second, "receiving" volunteer: the increased activity was picked up by the photomultiplier tube set a few centimetres from the right side of the person's head, at the level of the temporal cortex (roughly, just above the ear). This was a repeatable effect.

The other experiment was the same basic design, except this time instead of people, two petri dishes of cells were used, each set within a separate ring of synchronised rotating magnetic fields, with one dish being stimulated by light flashes. Again, the cells in the second, lightproof room

registered greater biophoton emission in synch with the light flashes in the first room. It seems the cells like the human brains were somehow communicating with one another without regard to space or time. When the rotating magnetic fields were not present, there were nil correlations.

Clearly, none of this has a direct bearing on psi itself, but, crucially, the experiments do apparently show that given the appropriate environment, some mysterious means exists for cells, and especially neurons, to directly interact with one another at a distance without any identifiable intermediary mechanisms. (Persinger tells me that preliminary experiments show the effect still works at distances of up to about 2 km, and the distance limit has not yet been defined.) The Laurentian researchers ascribe the effect to "entanglement", to non-locality: when an atom is suitably stimulated and two of its electrons fly off in different directions, changes made to one instantly affect the other, irrespective of how far apart they are. The electrons are said to be "entangled", but nobody truly knows what that means. It is "spooky action at a distance" to hi-jack Einstein's memorable phrase.

Psi phenomena like telepathy or remote perception would require consciousness to possess non-local properties. If the Laurentian work holds up under further study, then the researchers will have demonstrated that there is a biophysical framework within which psi can occur. They will have stripped the psychology from parapsychology and moved the whole issue of psi research onto a different level altogether. Be in no doubt, the Laurentian research is potentially game changing, and Persinger is under no illusions – he knows mainstream materialists will resist it, and ignore and shun it for as long as possible. This is understandable, because it challenges the very philosophical plank on which the Western view of reality is based. Identifying the workings of psi will be merely a sideshow to the deeper implications. It makes one feel positively light-headed.

[This is a slightly edited version of a blog that first appeared on the USA-based Reality Sandwich website a few years ago.]

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References

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Further information on a version of the "Octopus" CMS device can be obtained from Dr. Todd Murphy at http://www.shaktitechnology.com/shiva/index.htm