

upon his presence. Parapsychologists have tended to let their good subjects continue far too long with whatever experimental routine proves successful, fearing to branch out into new approaches in case this should hasten the day when the subject ceases to perform successfully. This may account for the fact, noted by Dr. Slater, that electronic testing methods and high-scoring subjects have not been brought together; Tyrrell's work with Gertrude Johnson was an exception. The U.S. Air Force tests, using electronic recording, merely served to confirm what parapsychologists had themselves found, namely that random trials with unselected subjects, electronic or otherwise, rarely produce consistent results.

Continued accusations of fraud by experimenters are inevitable so long as results depend upon scarce and undependable subjects. Even if Pratt had had Pearce closely guarded, Hansel would have explained away the results on the basis of prearranged collusion between experimenters and subjects, as he did in the case of the Soal-Shackleton series. It could be regarded as a point in favour of the parapsychologists that Hansel had to go back to Victorian times to discover an instance of a supposed collaborator giving the game away by confessing. But Blackburn, the man Hansel quotes, was a shady journalist who was several times taken to court for publishing sensational lies.

On other aspects of parapsychology Hansel is even more unfavourably selective. He does much less than justice to the third line of evidence from E.S.P., the attempt to elicit responses from ordinary people. These have been mainly group tests in which individuals have been shown to produce different scoring patterns according to belief, attitude, mood and other psychological variables. He quotes one series of my own in this connection, which produced null results, but makes no mention of two others, conducted jointly with G. W. Fisk, which produced significant results.

On the admittedly dubious topic of "materialization" the reviewer makes much of Trevor Hall's theory that William Crookes colluded with the medium Florence Cook in return for illicit sexual favours. He fails to mention the many reasons for doubting this theory set out by Medhurst and Goldney (*Proc. Soc. psychical Res.*, 1964, 54, 25-157).

Progress in this controversy will not come by trying to please critics like Hansel, but by developing some more dependable experimental technique. At present two methods of approach seem promising. Dr. Montague Ullman at Maimonides Medical Centre has developed a method, using electronic means for monitoring dreams, for trying to influence dream content telepathically with picture targets,

the resulting correspondences being scored by blind matching. Douglas Dean, at Newark College of Engineering, is developing techniques using the plethysmograph, on the hypothesis that a subject's non-verbal responses should be more susceptible to E.S.P. influences than conscious guesses. Both methods have given statistically significant results, but it remains to be seen to what extent they are capable of repetition by other experimenters with different subjects.

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DEAR SIR,

Until such a time as parapsychologists achieve control over the phenomena they purport to study the status of these phenomena must remain a matter of opinion. The important question, however, is to decide whether or not it is still worth while to pursue the problem. On this point Dr. Slater is entitled to his opinion as I am to mine, but the issue cannot be settled merely by regaling us with large chunks from Professor Hansel's polemical book. May I therefore be permitted to point out where, by following Hansel, Dr. Slater has unwittingly distorted the picture?

(1) *The Pearce-Pratt Experiment of 1933*

Here everything hinges on whether Pearce, the subject, could have cheated in the way that Hansel has suggested. Dr. Slater writes "The room in its original state had a large clear-glass window that would have enabled anyone to see into the room at the time of the experiment. This window was about 5 ft. 10 in. from the floor at its bottom edge . . ." Now, I do not know how tall Dr. Slater imagines Hubert Pearce to have been, but it is obvious from this statement that it would have been necessary for him to have stood on a chair to gain a view of the desk where Pratt was seated. How this was done in the corridor of a university department without attracting notice Dr. Slater does not explain, but he goes on to say "Another possibility was offered by a room on the other side of the corridor; from here the line of vision looking through the transom above the door was through the window into Pratt's room and down onto his desk." So it is in Hansel's diagram on p. 77 (which he admits is not to scale). However, Professor Ian Stevenson of the Department of Psychiatry, University of Virginia, who, unlike Hansel, did succeed in obtaining plans of the building as it was at the time and who then visited the site in

the company of the maintenance engineers, assures us that this diagram is "grossly inaccurate" (1). Stevenson found that there was only one room from which such a view could have been possible and that was designated for research and would scarcely have been the safe vantage point that Hansel suggests. Finally Dr. Slater alludes to the discovery of possible spy-holes from the attic but omits to mention that this refers to a quite different building, one that was used for only a quarter of the test series. Since Hansel himself draws attention to the fact that "a statement has not been made at any time by the central figure, Hubert Pearce", I would like to mention, for what it may be worth, that since his book appeared Pearce, now a minister of religion, has made a signed declaration in the presence of a notary public the concluding words of which are: "I certainly made no effort to obtain a normal knowledge by peering through the window of Dr. Pratt's office—or by any other means."

(2) *The Smith-Blackburn Experiment of 1882*

Your readers may find it odd that Dr. Slater should have had to go back to such ancient history in order to discredit present-day parapsychology. What Hansel's readers will not know, however, is that Blackburn's "confession" conflicts at many vital points with the contemporary record as set forth in the first volume of the *Proceedings of the S.P.R.* One example: Blackburn speaking 28 years after the event, talks of "pacing the room", a necessary manoeuvre if he was going to get the message to Smith under the blanket as he claims to have done. But the contemporary record describes Blackburn as seated behind Smith and "as perfectly still as it is possible for a human being to sit . . .". This, I may say took place in front of about twenty spectators. Now it could be that Blackburn and Smith contrived to hoodwink the S.P.R.; all I want to point out is that we cannot automatically accept the word of Blackburn for it (a blackguard if ever there was one) against that of Smith who vigorously denied it. For a detailed examination of this case the reader is referred to J. F. Nicol (2) and T. H. Hall (2a).

(3) *Dr. S. G. Soal*

Dr. Slater speaks of "Soal's *volte-face*" of 1939 "when he started to find that almost everyone he tested had remarkable powers". In his published reply to Hansel's book Soal asks (3): "Is not Hansel aware that from the end of 1954 onwards Mr. Bowden and I tested over 60 students at Birkbeck College without a gleam of success? Or that we organized in 1955 the nation-wide *Sunday Pictorial*

experiment without discovering even a minor E.S.P. talent, let alone a Shackleton?" The truth is that, in a long life-time of devotion to parapsychology Soal has never claimed to have found more than three persons who had this guessing ability, namely Basil Shackleton, Gloria Stewart and Glyn Jones. I note that Dr. Slater says nothing whatever about Hansel's attempt to dispose of the Shackleton and Stewart evidence, which I would regard as still the most impressive experimental evidence we possess for the reality of E.S.P. Can it be that Dr. Slater realizes that a theory which has to assume the complicity of not less than five persons poses some very awkward questions? How, on such a theory, could Soal have known that his overtures would be accepted and that he was not laying himself open to blackmail or exposure? The fact is that everything we know about both Shackleton and Mrs. Stewart, from their initial discovery after a re-analysis of their data from tests many years before to their willing submission in recent years to tedious and fruitless testing, argues overwhelmingly against the supposition that they were never anything other than Soal's compliant stooges. Yet by demonstrating that nothing *less* than a conspiracy on this scale can explain away the results Hansel has, in effect, strengthened the case for E.S.P.

(4) *Sir William Crookes*

Dr. Slater writes: "After the Katie King seances [1874] Crookes suddenly and absolutely abandoned any activity of a spiritualistic kind." This happens to be quite untrue. Crookes never lost interest either in Spiritualism or in Psychical Research. Between 1888–1890 he took part in an S.P.R. committee concerned with physical mediumistic phenomena (4). From 1896–1899 he was President of the S.P.R. After his wife's death in 1916 his interest in the problem of survival increased and we even find him attempting to obtain a spirit-photograph of his deceased wife. Personally, I would agree that Mr. Trevor Hall's thesis about his relationship with the medium Florence Cook is the least implausible interpretation of a very puzzling episode, but if Hall is right then this would constitute a case of sexual corruption of such singularity that it is hard to see what it can be used to prove.

I must ask your forgiveness, Sir, for taking up so much of your space, but I have tried to show that the misguided enthusiasm we hear so much about in this connection is not all on one side.

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REFERENCES

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3. SOAL, S. G. (no date). *E.S.P.: A Scientific Evaluation by C. E. M. Hansel: A Reply by S. G. Soal*. The Colwyn Bay Press.
4. MEDHURST, R. G., and GOLDNEY, K. M. (1964). "William Crookes and the physical phenomena of mediumship." *Proc. of the S.P.R.* 54, 25-158, see especially Section 10 "Crookes's later work with physical mediums".

DEAR SIR,

Of parapsychologists it may now be said: "Cet animal est très méchant: quand on l'attaque il se défend." Parapsychologists are by no means so numerous as their critics, but they are now asking editors to see that books in the field are reviewed by persons informed about parapsychology. I wonder if you would send out for review a book on, say, the genetics of schizophrenia to a parapsychologist. Almost certainly you would not. Then is it not fair to ask that the reviewer of a book on parapsychology be able to draw to the attention of readers the deficiencies of a book as well as its merits?

Professor Hansel's book, *E.S.P.: A Scientific Evaluation*, equipped as it is with some bibliography, tables, figures, and a laudatory foreword by Professor Boring, appears to be a scholarly and accurate guide to parapsychology. In fact, however, it is riddled with errors and biases of which it will only be worth while to point out a few.

In the first place, I draw attention to the foolishness of saying that the four experiments criticized by Hansel are "crucial" to the case for E.S.P. This is Hansel's judgment, not that of parapsychologists. The case for investigating E.S.P. rests on a large number of observations and experiments and would hardly be weakened at all by the demolition, if Hansel had accomplished this, of the four experiments which he selected for attack.

Secondly, Hansel first published his criticisms of these experiments in the specialty journals and was answered there. Not satisfied with where these answers left his critiques, he wrote a book taking his case to laymen. That his book is addressed to laymen is quite clear from his style and various pejorative phrases (e.g. "Salad Days at Duke University"), and explanatory comments, such as those telling the reader what a superscript numeral means. If a reviewer has not informed himself about the reports

in the specialty journals and if he finds Hansel's position congenial he can easily persuade himself, as you seem to have done, that a sound authority has finally disposed of parapsychology.

Hansel constantly reproaches parapsychologists with inattention to detail, carelessness in their reporting, and similar offences. But his own book contains numerous errors of names, places, and details, which, if one wielded his own weapon, would destroy his book utterly and deprive us of some of its helpful features. For example, in describing parapsychological experiments conducted in Prague with the subject Pavel Stepanek, Hansel makes nine errors of details in the space of 22 lines. Surely he can never have read the original reports of these experiments, and if so what right has he to refer to them as an "act" put on by the subject Stepanek? On the other hand, if he has read the reports he is far more guilty of lapses of memory and carelessness with details than any parapsychologist he criticizes.

Since you give attention to the Pearce-Pratt series in your review of Hansel's work and evidently believe Hansel to be a reliable guide to this experiment, permit me to inform your readers that this is far from the case. Hansel printed in his book a diagram of the lay-out of rooms for this series of experiments which was so inaccurate as to be almost fictional. Although Hansel said he could not obtain plans of the buildings at Duke University, I had no trouble in doing so, and with these as a help I went over the main site of the experiments myself. If I had not had Dr. Pratt's personal testimony that Hansel had also visited the site, I would have had difficulty in believing that he had, so inaccurate are his statements and his plan. Room 311 could under no circumstances have been used for inspecting the cards on Pratt's desk as Hansel surmises Pearce did. Nor could any other room in that hall, with the exception of one room somewhat down the hall which was then assigned for research. Is it to be supposed that its occupants would not notice someone standing on a chair peering through the transom into another room? The window of Pratt's office to the hall with clear glass was actually two inches higher than Hansel says it was. It could not have been used except by a very tall man or one standing on a chair. (Hubert Pearce, the subject under suspicion, is not a tall man.) The room with the trap door was used for only one of the four series of experiments.

Hansel himself seemed to realize that in the end it all boiled down to the honesty of the participants, and he called peevishly for a statement from Pearce, without saying whether such a statement would alter his (Hansel's) convictions on the matter. So I obtained and published a firm denial of cheating from