

BOOK REVIEW

Advances in Parapsychological Research 10 edited by Stanley Krippner, Adam J. Rock, Harris L. Friedman, and Nancy L. Zingrone. McFarland, 2021. 224 pp. \$75 (paperback). ISBN (print): 978-0-7864-7792-0. ISBN (ebook): 978-1-4766-4118-8.

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It's been a long, strange road, especially for those who died but came back for another circuit or remained alive and pursued mystic abilities for secret national intelligence service sponsors, or carefully tried to influence the past or forecast the future, or struggled with quantum theory because it looked eerily similar to magic in its weirdness even though mathematical experts denied any meaningful resemblance.

Since 1977, this tussling with the improbable has been tracked in a series of volumes edited by Dr. Stanley Krippner, a Fellow in five American Psychological Association divisions. They are devoted to essays condensing and confronting claims of paranormal phenomena—to use a term deplored by many who regard such anomalies as *normal*, less Sixth Sense than First but frustratingly skittish.

But the strange long road seems often to be covering the same rutted stretch, and its explorers grow weary. While the second volume appeared a year after the premier, pace slowed in the next seven volumes, and seemed all but exhausted by number 9, published sixteen years after its predecessor. The latest volume paused for eight more years. Granted, Dr. Krippner is now 88 years old, but still diligent and adventurous. So are his fellow editors and contributors, although sadly two of them (Professor William Roll, 1926–2012, and Professor Michael

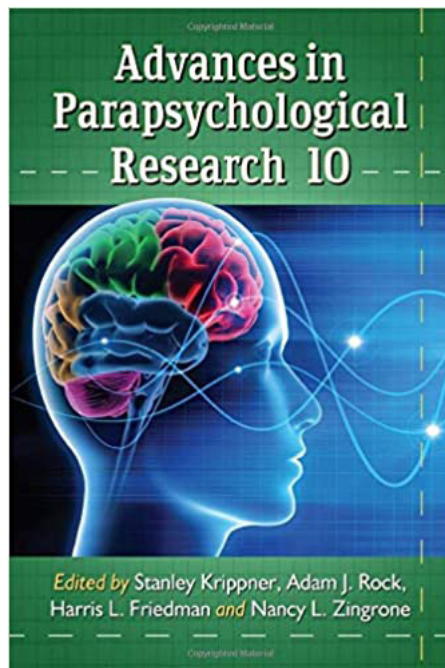
Persinger, 1945–2018) are dead and incommunicado.

The most startling recurrent theme in this tenth volume is how much hard and conscientious empirical work in a number of varieties of psi leads to the conclusion that many psychic phenomena just are not as substantial as researchers have claimed for more than a century.

Consider the beefy concluding essay “Psychics and Police Investigations” (pp. 167–217), by Dutch co-founder of the Parapsychology Laboratory at the University of Utrecht. Technical scientist

Sybo A. Schouten tracks spores of pragmatic police investigations and compares them to claims of psychic information. His final determination is unremitting, based on many detailed accounts of missing or murdered victims and significant details of the perpetrator: “If, when compared to psychics, experienced officers using the results of [conventional] research appears as good or better in predicting the whereabouts of missing persons, then there is little reason to believe that there is anything mysterious about psychic detection” (p. 215). Of course one might try to salvage the reputations of psychics by arguing that police, too, might unconsciously draw upon psi in their hunt for clues, bodies, and wrong-doers. Added to their specialized training, psychic hints might provide a welcome boost without the stigma of acknowledged psi. In the light of Schouten’s detailed case histories, though, this seems desperate handwaving.

In a searching “Meta-Analysis of Autonomous Information by Mediums,” a specific way to test the validity of mediumistic powers is applied by Dr. Adam J. Rock (who has emerged lately as a strong researcher in Australia, often collaborating with Dr. Lance Storm but



in this case two others working in Australia, Dr. Natasha M. Loi, and Associate Professor Einer B. Thorsteinsson (both health psychologists), plus Italian Dr. Patrizio E. Tressoldi who discerns in the mind nonlocality and quantum effects. Here is their executive conclusion: Across 200 trials “the trend showed that mediums performed at chance level, which in turn fail to support the plausibility of both the survival of consciousness and living agent psi” (p. 63). They add: “We imagine that psi-skeptics will be encouraged by our negative findings. In contrast, psi-proponents may bemoan the small number of studies and, indeed, trials that contributed to the heterogeneity of our data base” (p. 65).

Such inevitable contestation was staged most revealingly in a 2018–2019 exchange between notable parapsychologist Professor Etzel Cardeña (of Sweden’s Lund University) and two established and aged skeptics, cognitive scientist Arthur S. Reber (Visiting Professor at University of British Columbia) and James Alcock (a Professor of Psychology at Canada’s York University). In the premier journal *American Psychologist* Cardeña published a defense of the demonstrable existence of psi, which was dismissed sarcastically by Alcock and Reber with no reference to more than a century of empirical evidence, on the absurd grounds that the very notion of psi was ontologically absurd, scientifically impossible, and hence self-refuting.

In an excellent treatment of this dialectic, Bryan J. Williams sets the argument straight while keeping his temper. Regular readers of *JSE* will recognize Williams’ first pass at this commentary, “Reassessing the ‘Impossible,’” which appeared here in 2019, Volume 33, No. 4. His extended essay asks “Too Strange to be True?” He presents a case that psi is not only far from being *too strange* and hence *impossible*, but rather offers a path to “possible insights about the nature and reach of the human mind” (p. 41). Admittedly, summarized so briskly, even so cautious a riposte might be thought the equivalent of depending on messages from angels or the far side of the Moon. Luckily, Williams provides a thought-out deconstruction of the skeptics’ own unsupported mockery which is “based solely upon the personal opinions of the authors themselves, as well as certain assumptions about psi which turn out to be unfounded. *And this turns out to be the ultimate flaw in their argument*” (his Italics). This assertion is best tested by reading Williams’ detailed case (pp. 15–48).

An important addendum to this general critique provides its own quagmire, though, especially for those of us who have carelessly failed to do a Ph.D. in advanced physics. As a research student of the late parapsychologist Dr. William G. Roll, Bryan Williams is well placed to bring together the varied conjectural mechanisms of psi advanced by Roll, Dr. Cheryl H. Alexander (who worked in what is now the Rhine Research Center, on EEG biofeedback), the late Professor Michael Persinger, and Williams' own estimate of the situation. Their substantial composite essay bears the bold title "Parapsychology, Quantum Theory and Neuroscience" (pp. 70–166). As a confessed and often confused autodidact in the boiling theories of both quantum physics and advanced neuroscience, I can only point to this document and hope that others qualified to sport among particle accelerators and cortical scanners will render their informed verdict on the arguments advanced.

I admit that I do get a queasy feeling when people happily claim that only conscious observation of entangled particles can cause them to collapse from a mutual superposition to a sharp-edged single state. Or worse yet, that the entire spacetime universe is built out of primordial consciousness, and that perhaps the Sun is a mighty Mind communing with its own entangled spiritual spaghetti across the entire cosmos and also in your sleeping brain. Or something. Let us hope with all our might that this high-level word salad condenses into a future theory at once robust, difficult but not impossible to comprehend, and perhaps solving the puzzles of psi in time to appear in the next volume of *Advances in Parapsychological Research*, which might bubble up inside our many harmonizing minds (who knows?) with meme messages from the far and enlightened future.