

The term 'paranormal' was first introduced in the early twentieth century to replace the more loaded term 'supernatural,' originally used in its Latin form *supernaturalis* by theologians in the thirteenth century to refer to the miraculous events documented in the Bible (Bartlett 2008). Miracles, such as Moses' vision of the burning bush, and Jesus' transformation of water into wine, curing of the sick and resurrection of the dead, for example, were interpreted as manifestations of the power of God, with the aim of producing faith in those who bore witness to them.

This association with the direct action of God, and the idea that such phenomena were somehow separate from nature, did not appeal to those who sought to investigate similar claims (such as visions, apparitions, telepathy and psychokinesis), using scientific methods in the late nineteenth century. By implementing the term 'supernormal,' and later 'paranormal,' defined as referring to phenomena beyond the scope of current scientific understanding, as opposed to 'supernatural,' which implies phenomena firmly beyond the laws of nature, researchers were attempting to demonstrate that paranormal occurrences, if real, were as much a part of the natural world as anything else, and as such were amenable to scientific investigation (Hansen 2001:21).

Anthropological fieldworkers, immersed in the lifeways of different cultures, have regularly highlighted the inadequacy of Western distinctions between the 'natural' and the 'supernatural' when addressing the beliefs of their informants. In considering Sudanese Azande beliefs in witchcraft, for example, E.E. Evans-Pritchard noted that:

To us supernatural means very much the same as abnormal or extraordinary. Azande certainly have no such notions of reality. They have no conception of 'natural' as we understand it, and therefore neither of the 'supernatural' as we understand it. Witchcraft is to Azande an ordinary and not an extraordinary, even though it may in some circumstances be an infrequent, event. It is a normal, and not an abnormal happening (Evans-Pritchard 1976:30).

Such distinctions are, therefore, culturally constructed and, as such, are in no way universal. Phenomena that we would classify as supernatural, or paranormal, are not necessarily conceived of in the same way in other cultural, and sub-cultural, systems. Indeed, the founding sociologist Émile Durkheim highlighted precisely this issue when he noted that the modern notion of the supernatural is a recent one in the history of human thought, coinciding with the rise of enlightenment science in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He writes:

In order to call certain phenomena supernatural, one must already have the sense that there is a natural order of things, in other words, that the phenomena of the universe are connected to one another according to certain necessary relationships called laws...But this notion of universal determinism is very recent...This idea is a triumph of empirical sciences; it is their basic postulate and has been demonstrated by their progress. Yet as long as this notion was absent or was not firmly established, the most marvellous events never seemed inconceivable

(Durkheim 2008:28)

In recent decades the term 'paranormal' itself, which had originally been intended as a means to naturalize the supernatural, has also been subjected to similar criticisms. Biologist Rupert Sheldrake, for example, has argued that the paranormal is, in fact, normal, owing to the extremely widespread belief in, and experience of, phenomena such as telepathy and precognition. Sheldrake has, therefore, expressed his preference for the more neutral term 'psychic' (2005:12), which does not aim to distinguish such occurrences from other normal and natural phenomena. Some scholars refer to 'non-ordinary,' or 'extraordinary' (Young & Goulet 1994; Straight 2007), experiences when discussing paranormal experience in an attempt to distance their discussions from the negative connotations of the paranormal, a term by now often associated with notions of irrational thinking and charlatanism.

Similarly, Robert Shanafelt has proposed the term 'marvel,' which he defines as 'an event of extraordinary wonder, thought to have physical consequences, claimed to be the result of ultra-natural forces,' because it 'encompasses divine interventions, supernatural wonders, and other paranormal phenomena without the implied hierarchy of monotheism or traditional anthropology' (2004:322).

Others prefer the term 'anomalous,' or 'anomalistic,' with its implication that such phenomena will one day find a place within our scientific understanding of the universe, whether as genuine occurrences or simple misinterpretations of otherwise mundane events (Wescott 1977:345-346; Holt et al. 2012).

Irrespective of the nomenclature we employ, it is clear that we are referring to essentially the same set of experiences and phenomena, regardless of whether we call them supernatural, paranormal, extraordinary or anomalous (Marton 2010:11-13). Parapsychologists have labeled these 'psi' phenomena. Social psychologist and parapsychological researcher Daryl Bem provides a useful definition of psi as denoting 'anomalous processes of information or energy transfer that are currently unexplained in terms of known physical or biological mechanisms' (2011:407).

Psi is, therefore, an umbrella term used in reference to the supposed human faculties of psychokinesis (PK) and extrasensory perception (ESP), which itself encompasses telepathy, clairvoyance and precognition. Such phenomena, if real (as the parapsychological literature would appear to suggest), must be thought of not as somehow separate from the natural world, but rather as inherent aspects of it.

Although he denied the existence of the types of phenomena just mentioned, the anthropologist Gregory Bateson made a salient point concerning our cultural dichotomy between 'supernaturalism' and 'materialism' when he called for a middle way in conceptualizing the mind, which since René Descartes has popularly been thought of as somehow distinct from the natural world (Matthews 2005:9). Bateson called for an interpretation of consciousness that is 'neither supernatural nor mechanical.' He wrote:

These two species of superstition, these rival epistemologies, the supernatural and the

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mechanical, feed each other. In our day, the premise of external mind seems to invite charlatanism, promoting a retreat back into materialism which then becomes intolerably narrow. We tell ourselves that we are choosing our philosophy by scientific and logical criteria, but in truth our preferences are determined by a need to change from one posture of discomfort to another. Each theoretical system is a cop-out, tempting us to escape from the opposite fallacy (Bateson & Bateson 2005:51)

I agree with Bateson's call for a theory of consciousness that is neither supernatural nor mechanistic. The difficulty in this instance, however, lies in developing a model that is able to accommodate the phenomenology of out-of-body experiences and near-death experiences, as well as countless varieties of ecstatic flight, astral travel and remote viewing, which seem to suggest that consciousness is not always permanently located in the body, but can occasionally leave the body and travel to distant locations (Monroe 1972; Muldoon & Carrington 1973 [1951]; Blackmore 1992; Sinclair 2001 [1930] amongst numerous others).

Bateson overcomes this problem by dismissing outright the claims of those who have apparently experienced disembodied consciousness when he writes: 'I regard all such accounts as either dreams or hallucinations or as frank fiction' (Bateson & Bateson 2005:55), but I think this too is a 'cop-out.'

What is required is a model that, rather than bracketing out such experiences, is able to accommodate them in all of their complexity, including apparent veridical perceptions of distant events (Sartori et al. 2006), while also overcoming the difficulties we have in conceptualizing the mind-body relationship, which arose from Cartesian dualism. This model, I speculatively imagine, will likely be based on the principles of quantum physics. Quantum physical effects appear to possess many characteristics that would, if they occurred in the macro-realm, be called paranormal.

Indeed, Albert Einstein famously referred to the quantum phenomenon known as 'entanglement' (whereby two separate particles, after having interacted with one another, continue to possess the same properties, even over great distances), as 'spooky action at a distance.' Given that such properties are seemingly inherent in the structure of the universe at a fundamental level, it is not inconceivable to imagine that they are also integrally present in larger scale phenomena (Radin 2006). If, for example, consciousness was in some sense entangled with other aspects of the universe (whether with other minds or particles), phenomena such as the out-of-body experience could be described in a manner, to use Bateson's terms, that is 'neither supernatural nor mechanical,' and in terms that are able to overcome the philosophical problems of Cartesian dualism without bracketing out the most salient aspects of the OBE (i.e. consciousness beyond the physical body).

Consciousness could, then, be located both within the body and outside of the body simultaneously. Entanglement might also provide a framework through which phenomena such as clairvoyance and telepathy can be understood, indeed recent experiments have begun to test the entanglement hypothesis as it relates to telepathy with promising results (Persinger et al. 2008, for example).

Quantum models of consciousness are gradually proliferating in the field of consciousness studies, and are beginning to receive a degree of serious thought amongst philosophers, psychologists and physicists. It is entirely possible that such models will be able to shed light on many so-called 'paranormal' experiences (Jahn & Dunne 1986; Radin 2006), and as such an awareness of these theories may be of vital importance for anthropologists dealing with accounts of such experiences in the field. In highlighting the potential for an explanatory framework for the paranormal grounded in quantum physics, however, it is not my aim to suggest that quantum physics provides the only means through which we can approach these issues.

Different cultures across the globe have developed perfectly workable systems for the interpretation and explanation of the paranormal as an integral aspect of reality. Rather, what I am attempting to do is to demonstrate that there is room for the paranormal even within the most rigorously tested dominant philosophy of Western culture.

Having discussed different modes of conceiving of the paranormal, we will now examine more closely anthropology's relationship with it, from the early theories of its founders to more recent approaches.

Anthropology's Founders and the Paranormal

Since its earliest incarnation in the nineteenth century, anthropology has expressly concerned itself with attempting to understand the supernatural and religious beliefs of human beings around the world. E.B. Tylor, who held the first chair of anthropology at Oxford University, argued that religion could best be understood through an examination of the supernatural beliefs of 'primitive' cultures, because in beliefs about spirits and supernatural powers could be found the seeds of the great world religions (Tylor 1920 [1871]:426; Bowker 1973:9-10).

These beliefs, Tylor thought, could be explained by the assumption that so-called 'savages' were unable to make accurate inferences about their experiences of the world around them, even if their interpretations were founded on a rational effort to understand the world (Evans-Pritchard 1972:26). He suggested, for example, that primitive man had great difficulty distinguishing real death from sleep and trance states and so, from observations of such phenomena, erroneously posited the existence of a personal life-force, or spirit, that was able to both enter and leave the physical body under certain conditions (Tylor 1930:88-89).

Progressing from the inference that human beings possessed an immaterial centre of life-force and personality, Tylor argued that it was not a huge leap to believing that other entities, such as animals, plants and rocks, also possessed spirits/souls, and so the supernatural realm was born. Tylor labeled this way of living in, and thinking about, the world 'animism,' and deduced that it was from animism that all religious ideas ultimately stemmed.

Andrew Lang, a pupil of Tylor's, criticized his emphasis on misinterpreted experience, arguing that 'savage man' might not have been the irrational observer Tylor made him out to be. By

drawing comparisons between ethnographic accounts of supernatural beliefs and contemporary reports of psychic phenomena (an approach Lang termed 'comparative psychical research'), such as those investigated by the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), Lang argued that the perceived cognitive gap between Europeans and Non-Europeans was not quite as wide as had initially been thought. If modern, rational, Europeans of high respectability, like the early members of the SPR, had experienced phenomena which they considered to be genuinely paranormal in nature, then why should the experiences and beliefs recorded in the ethnographic literature not also be taken seriously?

Lang suggested, in contrast to Tylor's misinterpretation theory, that supernatural beliefs might have their foundations in genuine anomalous experiences (Lang 2010 [1894]:260). Indeed, in his book *The Making of Religion* (1900 [1898]), Lang went so far as to hypothesize that paranormal experiences might have been major contributing factors in the early development of religious ideas. In other words, Lang suggested that supernatural beliefs need not be considered irrational if they were founded upon genuine paranormal experiences, rather than on misinterpreted experiences (de Martino 1972:183).

Of the two interpretations of psychical experience and belief proposed by Tylor and Lang, however, it was Tylor's that became dominant within academic anthropology, and its influence can still be felt today in cognitive theories of religion, which essentially see supernatural beliefs and experiences as byproducts of misinterpreted cognitive processes (Guthrie 1980; Boyer 2001).

Social-Functionalism

Although Tylor's interpretation of supernatural beliefs as 'primitive survivals' became orthodox within anthropology, there still remained room for a theory that explained the purpose of irrational beliefs in ghosts, witchcraft, magic, spirit possession and the like, if they were nothing more than the products of delusional speculation. After all, according to the Darwinian theory of natural selection, around which the early anthropologists constructed their theories, only the 'fittest' ideas should have persisted through the development of human societies. As Evans-Pritchard writes of Herbert Spencer's theory for the origin of religion:

It does not seem to have occurred to him to ask himself how, if the ideas of soul and ghost arose from such fallacious reasoning about clouds and butterflies and dreams and trances, the beliefs could have persisted throughout millennia and could still be held by millions of civilized people in his day and ours (1972:24)

An attempt at a solution to this problem came in the form of social-functionalism, a theory which suggests that supernatural beliefs (as well as other social institutions such as kinship systems, economic systems, and so on), persist only because they perform specific functions for a given society. This position developed from the writings of Émile Durkheim, who argued that religious beliefs and practices are essentially a form of social glue that help to ensure the cohesion and solidarity of social groups.

Durkheim conceived of religion as a means for social groups to maintain cohesion through collective worship of the sacred, which he defined as nothing more than an abstract expression of society itself (Durkheim 2008:159-160). To Durkheim, then, religion was essentially a means for society to worship itself, providing its members with a common ideal and sense of social unity.

Perhaps the best example of a social-functional approach to paranormal belief is I.M. Lewis' theory of peripheral spirit possession, which sees spirit possession as a means for repressed individuals, usually women, to protest against their conditions in a socially acceptable manner, allowing for a controlled venting of frustration while maintaining the social status quo (Lewis 1971). Similar models have been applied to other systems of supernatural belief such as witchcraft, for example, which has been interpreted as a means by which incidences of misfortune can be understood and dealt with (Evans-Pritchard 1976), and as a method for ensuring civility between group members for fear of being labeled a witch (Van de Castle 1977:28).

The social-functional perspective, then, combined with the Tylolean misinterpretation hypothesis, seemed to provide an all-encompassing explanation for the persistence of apparently irrational supernatural beliefs. The traditional social-functional approach fundamentally ignored both the significance of subjective experience for believers (attributing any psychical experiences that might be had purely to self-delusion), and the possibility that genuine psi phenomena might exist.

The standard social-functionalist approach assumes from the outset that the objects of supernatural beliefs, in line with Tylor's view, could not possibly possess any form of independent ontological reality. While social-functionalists were happy to accept that ritual practices engaging the world of the supernatural might perform an essential social function, they were unwilling to entertain the possibility that the supernatural realm was anything more than delusional fantasy, or the product of outright fraud. Through interpreting belief systems and their associated practices in this way, anthropologists were attempting to reduce the complexity of social phenomena into manageable schematic systems, but in order to achieve this the most fundamental aspects of the cultural system were bracketed out and negated.

John Bowker provides a good illustration of this flaw in social functional reductionism in the context of funerary rites:

The fundamental mistake of social-functional explanations conceived as primary is that they take as axiomatic [the] argument that funerals benefit the living not the dead...But this is an over rationalistic comment to the effect that the dead clearly cannot be benefitted, because in the [twenty-first] century we happen to know that nothing continues through death. (Bowker 1973:69)

The fact is that funerary rites, in the majority of the world's societies, are geared towards the benefit of the dead in the afterlife and are experienced in that way by those who participate in them. The ritual behaviors associated with funerary rites cannot be truly understood without an appreciation of the beliefs that underlie them, and none of this can be divorced from the

experiences of those who participate in them.

What understanding has really been gained of a culture if these fundamental aspects are bracketed out and negated? The same can be said of spirit possession practices, as Janice Boddy has highlighted in her study of the Sudanese Zar spirit possession cult:

Such approaches [physiological and social-functional] may prove fruitful in assessing and translating specific cases of possession illness, but since they neither account for possession forms, nor adequately credit the taken-for-grantedness of spirits in the everyday lives of the possessed, ultimately they distort and impoverish what they propose to understand. If the aim of the enterprise is to comprehend the scope of possession phenomena, to situate them in their cultural contexts, ethnographers must attend to their informants' experiences of possession and not seek merely to explain them away as something at once less dramatic and more clinical than they appear (Boddy 1988:4).

This is where the central significance of respect for the experiences of our informants comes into the anthropology of the paranormal. If we really wish to understand the lifeworlds of our informants, to comprehend the meaning of their beliefs and practices, and through this to further our understanding of what it means to be human, then we need to treat experience seriously:

...if the anthropologist's creed rejects a basic factor of man's nature, much of the work of the anthropologist must fail to be meaningful. If what is rejected by that creed is essential to man's nature and central to his cultures, the efforts of the anthropologist will not have significance (Walker 1977:54)

The idea here is not to dismiss social-functional interpretations completely, but rather to highlight the fact that social-functionalism cannot provide an absolute explanation for such complex human phenomena as, for instance, shamanism and spirit possession, which have, at their very core, a significant experiential component, which in itself is potentially bound up with the issue of psi.

Social-functional explanations should not, therefore, be seen as complete explanations, rather they need to be supplemented by other approaches (Donovan 2000). It wasn't until the late 1960s and early 1970s that certain anthropologists began, like Andrew Lang over sixty years previously, to question whether reductionist and functionalist frameworks really were the optimum, and only, models for understanding supernatural beliefs and experiences.

Castaneda's Influence and the Return of Experience

For many it was the publication in 1968 of Carlos Castaneda's infamous book *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge* (Castaneda 1976 [1968]) that rekindled the paranormal debate in anthropology (Schwartz 2000:5-7; Schroll 2010). Castaneda's book describes his experiences as a young anthropology graduate, learning the ways of the brujo (sorcerer/medicine-man/shaman) with Don Juan Matus a Yaqui Native American in Mexico.

The book documents the author's unusual experiences while consuming sacred psychoactive plants and presents them in an autobiographical ethnographic account. There has been a great deal of debate as to whether Castaneda's book represents a genuine ethnographic description of real events and experiences, or whether it is simply a work of imaginative fiction. Nevertheless, and regardless of its veracity, the influence of the book on subsequent anthropologists was enormous and inspired many to follow similar courses of ethnographic fieldwork in other societies (Schwartz 2000).

Once ethnographers began to participate, in an immersive manner, with the belief systems and ritual practices of their hosts, a whole new world of experience (or in Castaneda's terms *A Separate Reality* (1978 [1971])) emerged as a valid field of ethnographic inquiry. Such an approach was to become known as the anthropology of experience, or the anthropology of consciousness.

In his introduction to *The Teachings of Don Juan*, Walter Goldschmidt highlighted the importance of this development in anthropological thought when he wrote:

The central importance of entering into worlds other than our own -- and hence of anthropology itself -- lies in the fact that the experience leads us to understand that our own world is also a cultural construct. By experiencing other worlds, then, we see our own for what it is and are thereby enabled also to see fleetingly what the real world, the one between our cultural construct and those other worlds, must in fact be like (in Castaneda 1976:10).

The experiences of anthropologists entering into the lifeworlds of other cultures do indeed seem to provide tantalizing glimpses of the underlying nature of reality, a world occupied by spiritual beings, non-physical intelligences and paranormal powers, as we shall now see.

Anomalous Experiences in the Field

Ethnographers such as Joseph Long (1977), Bruce Grindal (1983), Paul Stoller (1989) and Edith Turner (1998) composed detailed ethnographies in which they described not only the beliefs and practices of their hosts, but also their own anomalous experiences while immersed in the lifeways of different cultural systems.

Long documented an unusual apparition in Jamaica in which a self-propelled coffin was seen to move through a busy market square accompanied by vultures and a disembodied voice (Schwartz 2000:7-8)*; Bruce Grindal vividly described the reanimation of a corpse during a traditional Sisala death divination in Ghana:

What I saw in those moments was outside the realm of normal perception. From both the corpse and goka came flashes of light so fleeting that I cannot say exactly where they originated...A terrible and beautiful sight burst upon me. Stretching from the amazingly delicate fingers and mouths of the goka, strands of fibrous light played upon the head, fingers, and toes of the dead man. The corpse, shaken by spasms, then rose to its feet, spinning and dancing in

a frenzy (Grindal 1983:68-69).

Paul Stoller became a sorcerer's apprentice amongst the Songhay in Niger, only to be forced to return home for fear of magical attacks from rival sorcerers:

Suddenly I had the strong impression that something had entered the house. I felt its presence and I was frightened. Set to abandon the house to whatever hovered in the darkness, I started to roll off my mat. But my lower body did not budge...My heart raced. I couldn't flee.

What could I do to save myself? Like a sorko benya, I began to recite the genji how, for Adamu Jenitongo had told me that if I ever felt danger I should recite this incantation until I had conquered my fear...I began to feel a slight tingling in my hips...The presence had left the room (Stoller & Olkes 1989:148).

Edith Turner described her climactic experience of a spirit-form at the culmination of the Ihamba healing ceremony of the Ndembu in Zambia:

I saw with my own eyes a giant thing emerging out of the flesh of her back. This thing was a large gray blob about six inches across, a deep gray opaque thing emerging as a sphere. I was amazed-delighted. I still laugh with glee at the realization of having seen it, the ihamba, and so big! We were all just one in triumph.

The gray thing was actually out there, visible, and you could see Singleton's hands working and scrabbling on the back and then the thing was there no more (Turner 1998:194).

Other ethnographers, past and present, have also claimed anomalous experiences in the field. To name just a couple of high profile examples; Bronislaw Malinowski described an occasion on which, while walking at night, his guides heard the distinctive sound of a Kosi (a trickster ghost) in a yam garden on the island of Kiriwina (1916:365), and Evans-Pritchard described anomalous lights, believed to be 'witchcraft substance' out on an errand to devour the organs of innocent victims, amongst the Azande in Sudan (1976:11). These are just two amongst many other examples (Devereux 2007; Hunter 2011).

Transpersonal Anthropology and the Anthropology of Consciousness

Such experiences are often referred to as 'transpersonal.' Charles Laughlin defines transpersonal experiences as 'those experiences that bring the cognized-self into question' and transpersonal anthropology as 'the cross-cultural study of the psychological and sociocultural aspects of transpersonal experience' (Laughlin 1994:5). A transpersonal anthropologist is, therefore, 'one that is capable of participating in transpersonal experience; that is, capable of both attaining whatever extraordinary experiences and phases of consciousness enrich the religious system, and relating these experiences to invariant patterns of symbolism, cognition and practice found in religions and cosmologies all over the planet' (Laughlin 1997).

Through participating fully in the host culture, to the extent of accessing culturally relevant experiences, the transpersonal anthropologist is able to gain a perspective on a particular culture that could not be attained through any normal means of objective observation.

Writing on his experiences with the Yanomami of the Orinoco Valley, Zeljko Jokic, for example, describes how his own subjective experiences under the influence of the hallucinogenic snuff Yopo represented a point of intersubjective entry into the Yanomamo life-world (Jokic 2008:36). In attaining such culturally significant experiences as, for example, witnessing the extraction of a malignant spirit from the back of an afflicted patient (Turner 1993; 1998), the ethnographer is essentially, at least for the duration of the experience, becoming one with their informants.

Following her experience during the ihamba ceremony Edith Turner explained how, in order to fully understand a culture, 'anthropologists need training to see what the Natives see' (1993:11).

Methodologies and Approaches

In order to 'see what the Natives see,' as Edith Turner puts it, and to make use of transpersonal experiences as ethnographic data in the anthropology of the paranormal, it is necessary to immerse oneself fully in the culture under investigation.

Jean Favret-Saada has highlighted the necessity in the study of supernatural beliefs, for the ethnographer to participate in another mode of conceiving of the world. Writing on her research into witchcraft beliefs in rural France, she suggests that: 'one cannot study witchcraft without agreeing to take part in the situations where it manifests itself, and in the discourse expressing it' (1980:20).

Similarly, Fiona Bowie (2010) proposes a methodology, which she terms 'cognitive empathetic engagement,' as a means to achieve this goal. Cognitive empathetic engagement is defined as a method by which 'the observer...approaches the people or topic studied in an open-minded and curious manner, without presuppositions, prepared to entertain the world-view and rationale presented and to experience, as far as possible and practical, a different way of thinking and interpreting events' (Bowie 2010: 5).

Patric Giesler (1984) has proposed a methodology more geared towards the verification of psi phenomena as objective events during ethnographic fieldwork in an approach referred to as 'psi in process,' which 'studies ostensible paranormal functioning in a natural cultural or subcultural context with the rigor of experimental control and statistical evaluation...without (or minimally) altering or disturbing the context' (Giesler 1984:289).

The emphasis in these approaches is on the necessity for ethnographers to participate in the cultures they study in an effort to understand the processes through which transpersonal experiences arise, and are interpreted, in their natural setting.

If psi phenomena are real, as the evidence from parapsychological research and ethnographic accounts would appear to indicate, traditional anthropological theories of magico-religious beliefs and practices will, by necessity, require some very significant revisions.

The blanket dismissal of ostensible paranormal phenomena advocated by early anthropologists such as E.B. Tylor and J.G. Frazer, for example, would no longer be useful. Similarly, as has already happened to a certain extent, the old evolutionist schemes that see supernatural beliefs as somehow 'primitive' or 'irrational' would be rendered meaningless.

Social-functionalist interpretations of supernatural beliefs and practices would need to be adjusted to include the notion that the magico-religious practices and beliefs of a society do more than simply maintain its structure and are actually directed towards psi-conducive goals, which may perform significant social functions in themselves.

Psi and the Universe

Writing at the dawn of the twentieth century, the philosopher and early pioneer of psychology, William James, summed up what I consider to be, potentially, the most important contribution of the anthropology of consciousness, and the anthropology of the paranormal, to our understanding of the universe as a whole, when he wrote that 'no account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded.'

The unusual phenomena investigated by parapsychologists, and the range of altered states of consciousness and supernatural beliefs encountered during ethnographic fieldwork, are aspects of the world in which we live and the cultures that have developed in it, and as such should not be ignored by the social sciences. Although we are a long way from the outright acceptance of paranormal phenomena as valid subjects for serious investigation by mainstream anthropology, it is promising to see that both contemporary anthropologists and parapsychologists are coming to realize the mutual benefits each discipline can receive from the type of interdisciplinary collaboration suggested by Andrew Lang at the end of the nineteenth century (Giesler 1984; Young & Goulet 1994; Goulet & Miller 2007; Bowie 2010; Luke 2010; Wilson 2011; Young 2011).

Over the course of the discipline's development, anthropology has shifted its focus from attempting to explain away supernatural beliefs to an approach that accepts the significance of subjective anomalous experience in the development of such beliefs without applying a reductive interpretation.

This is a positive step forward for our understanding of the ways in which consciousness and culture interact to create reality/realities, and I look forward to further research in this direction.

Notes

Supernatural or Natural? Anthropology and the Paranormal

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* It was Joseph Long's unusual experience in Jamaica that ultimately led to the publication of Extrasensory Ecology in 1977. I think of this anthology as a companion to Long's groundbreaking book on the connections between anthropology and parapsychology.