

Introduction

Psychokinesis, or PK, is defined as “the influence of mind on external objects or processes, without the mediation of known physical energies or forces” (Dale and White 1986, 931). Stories have been told of individuals possessing these wondrous powers since the dawn of time, and one only has to look at the shelves of a local bookstore, or turn on the TV, to see that PK is still a subject of intense fascination today.

No one place or era has a monopoly on these tales. Reports of both intentional and spontaneous PK come to us from all parts of the globe (Gauld and Cornell 1979; Goss 1979; Robinson 1981). The fact that these occur in similar patterns regardless of culture or time suggests that something universal underlies these accounts, although what that something actually is remains obscure.

Considering the basic curiosity of humankind, and how long stories have been told of individuals possessing apparently extraordinary abilities, it should be no surprise that we are not the first generation to ponder their meaning. In fact, the veracity and significance of these purported phenomena have been questioned for thousands of years (Gauld and Cornell 1979). One can even find dedicated debunkers as far back as ancient China (McClenon 1994).

In the beginning, investigation involved listening critically to people’s stories and/or carefully observing possible events—both of which are still fundamental methods of evaluation used today. The earliest recorded investigations were mostly archival research or case histories of saints, “demons,” poltergeist phenomena, trance mediums, and healers. The vast majority of these were written by individuals who were either associated with the Church or were wealthy enough to have an education and be able to indulge in a hobby of collecting psychical stories (Ebon 1974; Gauld and Cornell 1979).

A number of factors probably helped to change the situation, including the advent of the printing press, greater access to education, and improved travel and communication. Spiritualism also played an important role in not only vitalizing interest in the field, but also making purported psi phenomena available for study. The high incidence of fraud and trickery in the séance parlor only increased the fervor of investigators to uncover the truth. However, there was only so much that could be done in the uncontrolled setting of the real world.

At the turn of the century, PK research began to move out of the séance parlors and into the laboratory under the auspices of eminent scientists, such as Sir William Crookes and Charles Richet (Braude 1991; Rogo 1986). These men had a good grounding in the scientific method of the day and sincerely did their best to design good experiments. Unfortunately, there was still a great deal of motivation for fraud, as mediums sought to get endorsements that would promote their own careers.

In the 1930s, J. B. Rhine took experimental proof research one step further by not only limiting his work to the controlled laboratory setting, but also by avoiding “star” subjects (Stanford 1986). He began the effort to demonstrate that ordinary subjects could influence matter in a small, but statistically significant, manner. In many ways, this completely changed our whole understanding of psi. Although a weak talent for most people, it was suddenly realized that psi was not limited to a few select individuals, but instead was a universal ability. Anyone could participate in a study.

Since then, proof experiments have been performed by a great many researchers in a variety of laboratories with a large number of subjects. The same results occur repeatedly. The mental intention of ordinary individuals is capable of influencing a large variety of targets, including dice, spheres, and computer outputs, to name just a few (Radin 1997). The effects may be small, but they are statistically significant.

As Radin (1977) noted, it is time to put the question of “Does psi exist?” behind us. Better questions at this point are “What is it?” and “How does it work?” Gertrude Schmeidler (1988) was one of the first to point out that parapsychology has long held the unspoken theory, “simply, that psi is a psychological function” (6). This idea that PK could be a general, if often latent, human ability seems to be supported by the apparent widespread occurrence of similar forms of PK activity, which appear across cultures and times (Gauld and Cornell 1979; Goss 1979; Robinson 1981). As with other human abilities, it is only to be expected that some individuals might have more “talent” (or practice) than others, and thus be able to perform what appear to be extraordinary feats.

If we look at the experimental literature, we see that it too supports the psychological nature of PK. Psi responds in similar ways to other human abilities (Schmeidler 1988; Stanford 1986; White 1986). It appears to be influenced by normal psychological variables, such as mood, emotion, motivation, and belief. Recurrent findings of the decline effect, sheep-goat effect, experimenter effect, and goal-oriented nature of PK in psi studies also seem to suggest that PK has psychological attributes (Palmer and Rush 1986; Schmeidler 1986; Stanford 1986). More importantly, the average college student or person off the street can often

successfully perform psi. Together, these facts support the notion that PK is a normal, rather than a supernormal, human ability.

Despite over a hundred years of research, we still find ourselves wondering about the nature of PK and how it works. In the past, psi was considered to take one of two forms (Eisenberg 1977). The first, ESP, was deemed to be “passive,” with the receiver simply allowing in, or accepting, information. PK, on the other hand, was thought of as “expressive,” since it acted upon the external world. PK was also considered to occur along a spectrum from large (macro PK) to small (micro PK) scale phenomena.

Macro-PK is typically defined as those effects that are large enough, or strong enough, to be apparent to the physical senses, and do not need statistics for their demonstration (Palmer and Rush 1986). This would include all of the PK noted with mediums and poltergeists in the pre-J. B. Rhine era. Levitation, bilocation, object movement, raps, teleportation, metal-bending (PKMB), deliberately caused bodily damage (DCBD), fire-immunity, and thoughtography, would all be considered forms of “macro” PK using this description.

Micro-PK, on the other hand, is traditionally defined as either PK effects that: 1) are slight or weak in magnitude and require statistics for their demonstration, or 2) involve atomic or subatomic processes (Palmer and Rush 1986). The Random Event Generators (REGs), which were developed by Schmidt to emit a “1” or a “0” on the basis of radioactive decay, would appear to be a clear cut example of “micro” PK (Schmeidler 1987; Stanford 1986). The target system is, in essence, an atomic level process, and statistics are required to demonstrate any effect that deviates it away from what would be expected by random decay.

Unfortunately, if we use these definitions, many PK targets, such as dice, can be considered both macro and micro depending on the magnitude of the results (Palmer and Rush 1986). Even if the item one is trying to influence is large enough to be seen by the naked eye (which would suggest it is a “macro” target), if the results were weakly positive and required statistics for their proof, then “micro” PK was performed. Other targets, such as biological systems, which may involve atomic or sub-atomic processes, but create visible results, are equally problematic.

Yet another problem with the field is the lack of a good theory. Although energy theories, observational theories, and the conformance model have all been proposed, none of them fully explains observed PK behavior (Varvoglis 1984). This may be due in part to the relative dearth of process-oriented research. For a long time parapsychologists felt the need to “prove” to skeptics that psi exists (Radin 1997). Proof-oriented research thus became a priority, despite the fact that some disbelievers, particularly those who have an economic interest in their

opinion, will never be willing to look at the facts with an open mind. Nonetheless, the long push for evidence that psi exists has served a purpose. Radin noted:

The reality of psychic phenomena is no longer based solely upon faith, or wishful thinking, or absorbing anecdotes. It is not even based upon the results of a few scientific experiments. Instead, we know that these phenomena exist because of new ways of evaluating massive amounts of scientific evidence collected over a century by scores of researchers Psi has been shown to exist in thousands of experiments. There are disagreements over how to interpret the evidence, but the fact is that virtually all scientists who have studied the evidence, including the hard nosed skeptics, now agree that something interesting is going on that merits serious scientific attention. (Ibid. 1-2)

This thinking has been reflected in the parapsychological literature as a gradual shift towards process-oriented research. Unfortunately, the database of qualitative studies is still a small one. Most qualitative researchers have taken an indirect approach, looking at what is, or is not, a successful training method. It is only in the last few years that we have started to see phenomenological studies and surveys of what PK performers say about their experiences (Barrett 1996; Gissurarson 1997a; Heath 1999). Clearly there is a great deal of work yet to be done in this area, as well as unexplored directions of research.

PK is a fascinating area of study. Long shrouded in myth and mystery, it tantalizes us with our own potential. We are far from understanding this topic. Nonetheless, this book is an attempt to put together all the pieces—*anecdotal, experimental, and experiential*—that we currently have of this complex puzzle. Part I focuses on the historical and cross-cultural perspectives of PK. We will look at stories of intentional and spontaneous PK from around the globe. Fraud and fantasy tend to intermix with any human behavior. However, after these elements are weeded out, an interesting mix of stories still remain (Rogo 1982). These show recurrent themes across both cultures and times, which give us clues about the nature of PK and how it can manifest.

Part II covers PK research and theory. This cannot be considered a complete or exhaustive review of the literature, but instead focuses on the highlights. For a more detailed coverage of the experimental literature, the reader is encouraged to read the *Handbook of Parapsychology*, edited by B. Wolman. Although published in 1977 (reprinted in 1986), it remains one of the most in-depth and insightful works on the field today.

The rich backdrop of how PK has manifested cross-culturally over the millennia, along with what has been learned from experimental research, allows

the reader to more fully appreciate the final section of the book. Part III is a phenomenological examination of the lived experience of performing PK—what it is like for the people who actually do it. The result is a fascinating look at the complex, interwoven nature of mind-matter manipulation.

One might ask, why should we care about PK? Even though the average person's ability to do it is small, it exists, and cannot be explained by known factors (Radin 1997). There are those who say that psi can be ignored because it is a minor effect. However, they are missing the point. The real significance of PK is that it indicates that there are gaps in our way of conceptualizing the world, which have to be explained. If we can grasp the meaning and significance of these phenomena, it may bring us one step closer to a more true and complete understanding of not only ourselves, but reality itself.