

Telepathy, Parapsychology and Psychiatry

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I work as a day centre officer within a progressive mental health day service. My role is to help those who have experienced mental health distress to establish insight and coping strategies such as anxiety management and relaxation skills, which help build resilience and aid the recovery process. I have been a member of the Voice Hearers Network based in Manchester for the past ten years and use the philosophy espoused to guide me in my work; I help to run a group for those that experience voices and visions.

My interest in writing this contribution has been inspired by reading Arthur Koestler's book 'The Roots of Coincidence'. (1989) Many voice hearers classically labelled schizophrenic report their belief that the voices they hear are telepathic communications. They also describe how visions and voices have led them to discover the most extraordinary coincidences that have deep meaning for them as individuals. Within Koestler's work, he comments on the phenomenon of synchronicity, citing examples where scientists believed their research was aided by such events.

I am aware of the serious study being undertaken within the Koestler Parapsychology department at Edinburgh University on the subject of telepathy. I have also become aware of the Special Interest Group within the Royal College of Psychiatrists devoted to the study of spirituality and altered states of consciousness. I wonder if your Special Interest Group might profit from communications on these subjects.

I am driven to correspond out of a sense of moral obligation, since for many years I have witnessed one individual after another suffer the indignity of having their beliefs categorised as symptomatic of mental disorder and treated accordingly with medication. I have also been a witness to the cold and austere reception afforded to service users within psychiatry, individuals who are sometimes interested only in sharing the magic of their experience with someone who will actually listen.

I am aware that psychiatry makes the claim that it is a science, yet it does not study the voice-hearing phenomenon scientifically. It assumes voices are a symptom of a disease process called schizophrenia, something many have criticized. John Breeding in his work 'The Necessity of Madness' (2000) observes that the term mental illness is a metaphor that has attained equal kudos with physical illness. He comments, 'the diagnosis is presented as if it were objective information, simply describing reality. The tendency of most people is to accept this reality without question'. Breeding explains how via school indoctrination and media propaganda the belief in mental illness as a physical disease process is secured. 'Given our cultural background, how can one possibly challenge this belief? And I do maintain that it is a belief, not a fact of science'.

Breeding quotes Ty Colbert: 'The truth is that researchers have never discovered a single defective gene or accurately identified any chemical imbalance that has caused an emotional disorder; nor have they even proven that brain abnormalities are responsible for even one emotional disorder'. Psychiatrist Phil Thomas, a Founder member of The Critical Psychiatric Movement, argues that there is no unequivocal scientific evidence to support

the dopamine theory of schizophrenia. He says, 'We have seen that there is no convincing evidence to support it...People diagnosed schizophrenic gain little or no benefit from neuroleptics. If psychiatry was a rational science, such observations would spawn intensive investigations to find out why this was so'.

Thomas continues, 'Psychiatry is clearly not rational in the scientific sense, or at least its interface with the pharmacological industry is not. But looked at from a different angle, that of the market and profit, the relationship is highly rational'. He appraises M.R Trimble's work 'Biological Psychiatry', responding to Trimble's assertion that 'mental disorders are simply forms of brain disorder' by pointing out that strictly speaking, there is no logical basis in which we can say that this assertion is true. Thomas continues his criticism with, 'He (Trimble) must be able to show that there are no psychiatric disorders that do not have an underlying brain disorder' and concludes by saying, 'The point here is that there are circumstances where people present with mental disorder in the absence of brain disorder. Trimble's assertion is not true'.

Thomas is also an advocate of the voice hearers' network, which encourages us to listen to the voice hearer without prejudice, a Rogerian principal taught on counselling courses throughout the world.

When considering the purpose of science, society is led to believe that its activities will help reveal truths that better our understanding of the universe and ourselves. Within the field of parapsychology the phenomenon of hearing voices or seeing visions is explored within a frame of reference, which includes the subject of telepathy as a possible cause. The science of parapsychology recreates conditions that appear conducive to the apparent ideal template by which such phenomena occur.

It has been observed in Edinburgh that meditative states of mind within a potential recipient of telepathic communication increase the rate of positive results; when the mind is producing more alpha waves and less beta, one would be approaching such a state of consciousness and be more receptive. Now if we juxtapose this approach with the science of psychiatry, we find very different interpretations of the same phenomena. Whether the experience is visual via visions or auditory via voice hearing, the patient under the care of a psychiatrist who reports he/she is having telepathic communications is deemed to be ill and no attempt is made to verify his/her stories. Often such people are then labelled schizophrenic and their experience pathologised. This I see as unscientific. If anything, the pathologising of such experiences without recourse to other possible causes or interpretations is a symptom of a behavioural pattern based on fear (the fear of the loss of power via new challenges to the contemporary scientific paradigm; Koestler observes this kind of behaviour in his book 'Sleepwalkers' (1989)) and a hypothesis yet to be proven. The dopamine gate hypothesis is being strongly challenged, while its alliance with pharmaceutical companies who promote the argument that chemical imbalances produce psychosis in order to sell their products is well established.

I wonder why the science of psychiatry is not being more powerfully challenged by the science of parapsychology? If telepathy has been proven to exist, how can another science be allowed to continue to ignore the evidence? The cost to the individual due to such ignorance is vast. Suicide, stigma,

discrimination, loss of family, friends and lovers, career and social death are real outcomes for those that are labelled with a psychiatric diagnosis. Faculties engaged in the study of parapsychology would glean immense insights by conducting field-based research programmes that included the so-called psychotic.

If we open the aperture of our reasoning and extend our research to include other parapsychological phenomena such as synchronicity, links between apparently diverse events such as telepathy and synchronicity may become apparent. One theme binds these experiences together and encourages us to ask questions such as how and why these events occur at all. This is the theme of consciousness. It is the conscious mind which perceives events and it is consciousness that is guided by outside stimuli via sense perception and possibly by extrasensory perception, whether voices, visions or synchronicities. Are they all interlinked via consciousness? The potential web of their construction may just be tangible to a science that absorbs as much from the subjective frame of reference as the objective field of reference. If the stories of the so-called psychotic were collated and the themes extrapolated, patterns of activity, whether telepathic or synchronistic may become apparent. Universal or cross-cultural themes may emerge.

Issues regarding the ambiguous nature of telepathy may begin to be understood: an obvious ambiguity revolves around the issue of the peaceful meditative alpha wave state and its increased receptivity to telepathic contact, juxtaposed with twins who can telepathically identify injury to their siblings in another part of the world. Or, when a family member falls ill, it has been shown that loved ones telepathically perceive on occasions the moment of death of their relative. Further, in therapeutic relationships, clients have been known to pick up the thoughts of the therapist and vice versa, during sessions charged with beta and not alpha waves. In the book 'Accepting Voices', written by Professor Marius Romme (1993) there is a chapter on parapsychology in which a psychologist reports that a client interpreted his thoughts telepathically.

Romme discovered that there were many people who heard voices who didn't use psychiatric services. He observes that they appeared to have coped better than those using services due to having support networks that value their interpretations of why they hear voices. He says 'These are people with socially active lives; all have succeeded in making contact with other people who were able to understand or recognise their experiences, and this has enabled them to avoid the dangers of isolation. They have managed to integrate the voices with the rest of their lives, and are more inclined to adopt a parapsychological or spiritual perspective'.

There does exist within the Royal College of Psychiatrists a potentially empathic contact for those genuinely interested in parapsychological events; the Spirituality Special Interest Group is open to looking at the correlation of consciousness and the findings of quantum physics. While Neuroscience is helping to inform psychiatric practice physiologically, it is also helping to illuminate just how vastly complex the physical brain is. Yet paradoxically it is also highlighting how limited contemporary psychiatric frames of reference truly are.

The 'new' physics may have more answers for the psychiatric patient than their doctor in the future. Is there a matrix of consciousness that exists

outside normal space-time paradigms? Aldous Huxley speculates in his work 'The Doors of Perception' (1954) that there may well be, arguing that there appears to be a mind at large that encapsulates everything, interconnecting all things. He suggests that the so-called schizophrenic could be the soul who perceives this mind at large and either tolerates it (heaven) or is overwhelmed by it (hell) (Huxley 1956). He asks some very prudent questions in relation to the conditions under which an individual may begin to perceive that which is beyond our contemporary consciousness, heavenly or hellish. Lyall Watson in his book 'Lifetide' (1979) refers to a contingent force that appears to hold life together, a universal force which is intelligent.

Carl Jung, who was deeply interested in parapsychological events, (Jung 1983) describes the collective unconscious, which serves as man's repository for all history's archetypes (symbols of universal meaning). He comments in 'Psychology and the Occult' (1977) that 'anyone who has the least knowledge of the parapsychological material which already exists and has been thoroughly verified will know that so-called telepathic phenomena are undeniable facts'. He describes how synchronicity occurred in his own life and served to guide him to his discoveries, very much like those Nobel Prize winning physicists noted in Koestler's book 'The Roots of Coincidence', who believed they had been guided to answer scientific problems via synchronistic events, even while attempting to discern the phenomena 'scientifically'.

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