

Parapsychology and the Study of Religion and Spirituality

An Online Symposium
August 28-29, 2021

Abstracts of
Presented Papers

Program Chair
Everton de Oliveira Maraldi



Parapsychological
Association

THE MISSING LINK: PARAPSYCHOLOGY AND THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Frederic Myers once stated that the chief purpose of psychical research is “to prove the preamble of all religions”. Rhine, in his turn, argued that “parapsychology has in a real sense confirmed the spiritual (i.e., extra-physical) nature of man”. On the part of theologians and other religious studies scholars, many have also recognized the profound interconnection between parapsychology and the study of religion. Curiously enough, few studies have investigated the relationship between psi and religious or spiritual variables, and the study of the relations between

these two fields does not feature as a prominent aspect of contemporary psi research. Some parapsychologists might see such topics as problematic, perhaps because of criticisms raised by skeptics that parapsychology is a spiritual movement (rather than a science), or because of their own views regarding the relevance of spiritual or religious issues in experimental investigation. Some parapsychologists might even prefer spirituality over religion. However, one can hardly deny the influence (even if only implicit) of different religious traditions over the history of parapsychology including Christianity, Spiri-



Everton de Oliveira Maraldi is associate professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (Study of Religion program, Faculty of Social Sciences). He has master's and doctorate degrees in Social Psychology from the Institute of Psychology of the University of São Paulo and a bachelor's degree in psychology from Guarulhos University. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the Parapsychological Association (PA) and a regular member of the International Association for the Psychology of Religion. He was a postdoctoral research fellow at Coventry University and the University of Oxford. In 2018, he served as the Program Chair of the annual convention of the PA. In 2021, he was awarded the Eileen Coly Research Grant from Parapsychology Foundation. His research interests include topics such as the psychology of religious experiences; altered states of consciousness; dissociation and dissociative disorders; spirituality and health; historical approaches to psychological and psychiatric studies on religion and spirituality; parapsychology and the study of religion and spirituality. He has published papers in several scientific journals including, among others, the *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, *Journal of Religion and Health*, *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, *History of Psychiatry*, *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, *Journal of Parapsychology*, and *Psychology of Consciousness: Theory, Research, and Practice*.

tualism, Eastern mysticism (particularly Indian philosophical traditions), shamanistic practices, esoteric and psychedelic religions.

In this presentation, I will review and critically discuss the variety of perspectives embraced by parapsychologists over time concerning religion and spirituality (R/S), pointing out their implications for research on psi phenomena, as well as for the interdisciplinary dialogue with scholars interested in the study of religious experiences. I will start by arguing that parapsychology cannot be simplistically stereotyped as a religion disguised as science – as some critics have suggested. Instead of unifying all religions in a superordinated, rational system of thought (as often attempted by representants of New Age spirituality), parapsychology may in fact boost disbelief and skepticism, even if unintended. Parapsychology is a daring, frontier endeavor designed to submit religious and other exceptional claims to scientific scrutiny, which means such claims can be contradicted. In this sense, parapsychology is both a product of and a response to the disenchantment of the world.

I will then show how varied are parapsychologists' conceptions of R/S and how they have influenced their understanding of psi phenomena over time. I provide a brief overview of at least five major models of R/S and the ideas of their main representants: a spiritual revolution model (Myers), an illuminist/positivistic model (Richt), a pluralistic model (James), an agnostic/naturalistic model (Flournoy), and a pragmatic model (Rhine). More recently, some authors have also endorsed transpersonal and culturally sensitive models based on the dialogue with shamanistic/indigenous practices or traditions. I argue that these different models coexist today and have a significant impact on how parapsychologists develop their studies and theorize about psi. However, I also point out that few studies have actually investigated the relationship between psi and variables related to religiosity/spirituality. Parapsychologists may also evidence superficial knowledge of R/S. I propose that the remedy for such problems can be found in the interdisciplinary conversation with psychology of religion and the broader field of the study of religions. I provide a brief review of the existing literature on psi and R/S and conclude by suggesting some possible areas for further inquiry.

NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES AND THE ORIGINS OF AFTERLIFE BELIEFS

Like any experience, a near-death experience (NDE) is rooted in the culture of the person having it. It is processed, interpreted, and expressed in different ways depending on religion, language, society, and environment. In other words, how the experience is experienced varies by individual. While no two NDEs are exactly alike, however, they are virtually always interpreted as revealing what happens when we die. NDEs are known across cultures

and throughout history, and there are numerous examples of the phenomenon generating new religious beliefs and practices, and even new religious movements. In this talk I will discuss some of these examples in order to explore how NDEs impact the afterlife beliefs of different societies around the world, and examine the interactions between individual, culture, and extraordinary experience.



Gregory Shushan, PhD, is the author of *Near-Death Experience in Indigenous Religions* (Oxford University Press 2018), and *Conceptions of the Afterlife in Early Civilizations* (Bloomsbury 2009). He has conducted research at Oxford University's Ian Ramsey Centre for Science and Religion, the Religious Experience Research Centre at University of Wales Trinity Saint David, the Centro Incontri Umani at Ascona in Switzerland, and the Institute of Archaeology at University College London. His forthcoming books are *The Next World* (White Crow 2021), and *The Historical Anthology of Near-Death Experiences*.

WHAT SURVIVES DEATH? A SURVEY OF PEOPLE'S BELIEFS

Several categories of evidence such as near death experiences, apparitions and haunting, mediumship, and reincarnation suggest that consciousness in some form persists beyond physical death. However, a persistent problem in interpreting this evidence is that virtually all of it is based on data, reports, or inferences by living persons. As a result, arguments for survival of consciousness based upon any one body of evidence may be intriguing, but skeptics find this evidence insufficiently persuasive because numerous counter arguments can be posed, including the natural psychological urge to believe that death is not the end of us. At this point, it is unlikely that we can add any completely new form of evidence for survival. And more importantly, it is unlikely that any experimental evidence will be able to discern between survival psi and non-survival psi (living agent, super, or reservoir).

While the evidence is strong that some aspect of our

consciousness may exist beyond physical death, the ideas about exactly what persists are varied. Do our personalities with memories, thoughts and emotions remain intact indefinitely, or does our consciousness merge with something larger or something else entirely? World religions certainly have much to say about this topic. But what do people believe? To evaluate this question, we developed a questionnaire to assess people's beliefs on what survives physical death. The survey also included questions on demographics, and on childhood and current religious and spiritual affiliations. Interactions between their beliefs about what survives and these other factors were explored to gain insight on why and what people believe.

We surveyed English-speaking adults through an anonymous online survey entitled, 'What Survives? A survey of people's beliefs', hosted on SurveyMonkey.com. Data were collected from 28 July 2020 through 21 March 2021. The survey introduction was as follows: 'In



Helané Wahbeh is the Director of Research at the Institute of Noetic Sciences and an adjunct assistant professor in the Department of Neurology at Oregon Health & Science University. Dr. Wahbeh is clinically trained as a naturopathic physician and research trained with a Master of Clinical Research and two post-doctoral research fellowships. She has published on and spoken internationally about her studies on complementary and alternative medicine, mind-body medicine, extended human capacities, stress, posttraumatic stress disorder and their relationships to physiology, health, and healing. Dr. Wahbeh is especially known for her research around — and noetic approach to — channeling.

the following responses, 'I' and 'me' refer to your everyday sense of self, including your personality, memory, thoughts, and experiences. The term 'Soul' refers to the concept of an eternal nonphysical essence of who you are, which is related to but separable from your body'. Participants were then presented with two questions: 1) What are your thoughts on what will happen to you after your physical body dies? and 2) After the body dies, where will I go or do? Participants could check as many responses as they wished, and they could also enter free responses in a text field. The survey also included basic demographic information and the Noetic Experience and Belief Scale (Wahbeh, et al., 2020), evaluating paranormal beliefs and experiences.

2,389 participants completed the survey. Paranormal beliefs and experiences were predictive of what happens to 'me'. Being Atheist, Buddhist, Christian, and spiritual but not religious were significant predictors of what happens after death. Being Agnostic, Atheist, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Pagan increased the odds of specific beliefs about 'where I will go or do', while being spiritual but not religious decreased the odds of specific beliefs. In conclusion, most of our respondents believed that some aspect of the personal self survives bodily death and that paranormal beliefs more consistently predicted these afterlife beliefs rather than demographics or spiritual/religious affiliations.

ACADEMIC STUDIES ON CLAIMED PAST-LIFE MEMORIES: A SCOPING REVIEW

Objective: this study reviews observational studies regarding alleged past-life memories published as scientific articles, and points out their bibliometric and methodological characteristics. **Methods:** scientific databases were screened (Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed/Medline, PsycINFO, Scielo, and OpenGrey). The 78 included studies were classified by their methodological and bibliometric characteristics. **Results:** The peak of publications occurred from 1990 to 2010 (45%), and Asia was the most investigated territory (58 studies); most of in-

vestigations were related to children (84%) and case report was the predominant study design (60%). Interview was the predominant methodological approach (73%), followed by documental analysis (50%). Claimed past-life memories (100%), unusual behaviors (74%) and birthmarks/defects (37%) were the most investigated variables. **Conclusion:** investigations of past-life memories should be encouraged around all cultures, and future studies should consider previous methodological features and try to overcome their limitations.



Lucam J. Moraes is psychologist and has a MSc in psychology. He is a PhD student mentored by Prof. Alexander Moreira-Almeida MD, PhD in the Research Center in Spirituality and Health at Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora, Brazil. They are carrying out the research “National Survey of Cases of Reincarnation Type Among Brazilian Population”, funded by Bial Foundation, and in partnership with the Division of Perceptual Studies at University of Virginia, USA.

WILLIAM JAMES AND THE (NON) REPLICATION CRISIS IN PSYCHOLOGY: CONJECTURES AND CONTROVERSY IN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION

The question of whether psychology ought to be or is a science remains an open issue for both historical and philosophical reasons. Recent proposals for a theistic psychology clash most strongly with advocates of psychological science which are largely restricted to an epistemological naturalism. Theistic psychologies transcend epistemological naturalism and introduce non-material ontological considerations into psychology as a possible competing paradigm in which spiritual realities co-exist with the physical and are explicitly acknowledged. The history of these two competing paradigms characterizes the history of Division 36 of the APA and remain live options. Efforts to establish psychology as a natural science, di-

vorced from philosophy can be traced to William James who treated psychology as if it were a natural science in his *Principles of Psychology* while cognizant of serious philosophical conundrums that led him to abandon a strict epistemological naturalism in his study of religion. In James' *Variety of Religious Experience* advocates of theistic psychology have a model for an alternative to the preferred naturalist paradigm in the American study of religion and spirituality. James' suggestions for an alternative paradigm based upon empirical studies that evaluate secular and theistic psychologies within their cultural contexts can provide the realization of a conversation between advocates of what otherwise are largely philosophically incommensurate paradigms for psychology as a unique discipline.



Ralph W. Hood Jr. is professor of psychology at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. He is a former editor of the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, and former co-editor of the *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* and *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*. He is a past president of division 36 (psychology of religion) of the American Psychological Association and a recipient of its William James, Mentor, and Distinguished Service awards. He has published over 200 articles in the psychology of religion and has authored, co-authored, or edited numerous book chapters and eleven books, all dealing with the psychology of religion.

METHODOLOGICAL EXCLUSION OF THE TRANSCENDENT? IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

Early in founding of psychology of religion, a debated issue was the methodological exclusion of the transcendent (MET). While even cautiously endorsed by Theodore Flournoy, others, notable William James, Frederic Myers and Alister Hardy refused to be limited by this principle. This paper discusses: a) What is MET as proposed by Flournoy and the reasons he provided to adopt it, b) problems with MET, implications for research and theory, and why the transcendent should be included in academic research and theory on spiritual experiences (SE), and c) some methodological guidelines perform it in a fruitful way. These methodological guidelines will be based on in-depth analysis of Alister Hardy's writings, a major pioneer of the scientific study of SE. The main epistemological

guidelines are: transcendent as the core of spirituality and SE as a major source of R/S beliefs; non-dogmatic approach, acknowledging that Darwinian evolution does not imply materialism and mind is not reducible to matter; call for studies of psychic experiences and considering an expanded naturalism, including the "paraphysical" that could lead to a perennial philosophy and a natural theology. Methodological guidelines: a phenomenological classification and the development of a natural history of SE based on studies with proper ecological validity on the experimental and the experiential, mixing large surveys of general population and in-depth qualitative studies of the most prominent cases. In addition, it would be worth investigating developments of SE throughout a person's life.



Alexander Moreira-Almeida, MD, PhD is Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Director of the Research Center in Spirituality and Health (NUPES), School of Medicine, Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora (UFJF), Brazil. Chair of the Section on Spirituality of the Latin American Psychiatric Association (APAL). Former chair of the Sections on Religion, Spirituality and Psychiatry of the World Psychiatric Association (WPA 2014-20) and the Brazilian Psychiatric Association (ABP 2014-21).

CROSS-CULTURAL APPROACHES TO DISSOCIATIVE IDENTITY DISORDER: THERAPEUTIC PRACTICES IN BRAZILIAN MEDIUMISTIC RELIGIONS

This presentation will discuss religious practices among the Candomble, Kardescismo, and Umbanda of Brazil as these practices relate to therapy for dissociative disorders. The Spiritist theory of the 3 groups is based on belief that (1) humans

have both physical and spiritual bodies; (2) discarnate spirits are in constant contact with the physical world; and (3) humans can learn to incorporate spirit guides for the purpose of healing. Spiritist theory, methods of therapy, and therapeutic effectiveness are considered.



Stanley Krippner is an Associated Distinguished Professor at the California Institute of Integral Studies. He has received Lifetime Career Awards for his research in dream studies, humanistic psychology, and parapsychology. He has authored or co-authored over 1,000 books, monographs, and articles on such topics as anomalous dreams, post-traumatic stress disorder, shamanism, hypnosis, creativity, and psychedelics. He is the recipient of the American Psychological Association's Award for Distinguished Contributions to the International Advancement of Psychology. He is the co-author of the award-winning book *Personal Mythology* and the co-editor of another award-winning book, *Varieties of Anomalous Experience: Examining the Scientific Evidence*.

WORKING WITH ANGELS: ENERGY HEALING AND SPIRITUAL PATHWAYS

Purpose: Angels hold a particular fascination for many religious people within Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as within New Age spiritualities. A quick web search or look at the program of somewhere like the College of Psychic Studies reveals that giving and receiving healing and wisdom from the angelic realms is big business. Spiritual technologies, like other forms of physical and technical learning, require an apprenticeship in order to become a skilled practitioner. While the skills of a surgeon, ballet dancer or seamstress may be apparent to all, working with energies that are felt in the body and seen only through their effects can seem more ephemeral.

Whereas the claims of practitioners do not accord with Western academic understandings of the world, they are often rationalized and explained in psychological, cultural and neurological/biological terms. These tools can be useful and offer comparative insights and

understandings of healing phenomena, but also leave an epistemological deficit that embodied experience can partially compensate for. In this presentation I argue that a first-hand subjective encounter with angels and with angelic energy healing can suggest areas for parapsychology to investigate, but also that such encounters do not necessarily demand or provide the kind of proof that parapsychology seeks. The spiritual path has its own agenda and may run parallel to parapsychology without necessarily crossing its path.

Methods: I use participative ethnographic methods to explore a form of energy healing and a spiritual pathway that is relatively new, starting in England in 2007, known as Metatronic Healing. The story of its founder, Philippa Merivale, certainly contains elements of supernatural encounters of the sort collected by Louisa Rhine and Alister Hardy, and her supernatural experiences remain central to the teaching and praxis of Metatronic Life and



Fiona Bowie is Research Affiliate at the Oxford University School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography. She taught anthropology in the University of Wales and Bristol University, as well as in Sweden and the USA. Her interests include religion and spirituality, afterlife studies, ethnicity and identity, kinship and adoption, with regional interests in Cameroon, the Cameroonian diaspora, and Wales. In 2010 Fiona Bowie started the Afterlife Research Centre for the ethnographic study of the Afterlife and related phenomena such as spirit possession, mediumship and healing. She is the author of a best-selling textbook on the *Anthropology of Religion* (Blackwell).

Healing. I have been taking courses and following this Pathway since 2017 and make use of my own embodied experience, conversations with fellow students, teachers and healers, as well as literature and recordings produced by Philippa Merivale and others.

Results: The Metatronic Pathway draws on many well-established elements of spiritual healing and teaching, from Gnosticism and Essenes to chakras, crystals to astrology, reincarnation and karma to mediation and visualisation, taking in many other healing modalities along the way. What can appear a rather random assortment of New Age phenomena are linked through the personal story of Metatronic Life's founder. It is clear that while there is a set of ideas common to many participants, it is the praxis, the personal encounter with the energies channeled by Metatron and the divine angelic realm that attracts and holds people. This is not a cult with members, but a loose association of self-selected individuals who are drawn to the particular energies that are 'downloaded' into their system. The path is both spiritual (to discover one's divine nature) and practical (to free oneself from negative conditioning stored in the physical and energetic body through 'lifting of the story'). The enhanced abilities of experienced practitioners correspond to some of those described in parapsychological experiments conducted or described by Joyce Hawks, Gary Schwartz, Dean Radin and others, but are not an end in themselves for those following the Metatronic Pathway or training as Metatronic Healers.

Conclusion: Direct embodied experience of Metatronic healing helps bridge epistemological divides between esoteric practices and rational enquiry. Seen from the outside many of the ideas and practices of Metatronic healing seem non-sensical from a scientific perspective. Its founder and many of the teachers and students will, however, point to quantum mechanics and advances cosmology, and even in parapsychology, to confirm the reality of unseen, divine realms, and the view of life as intelligent energy, that are central to the Metatronic Pathway and angelic healing. Whereas providing scientific proof of concepts is at the heart of parapsychology, for those working with angels it is direct personal experience that really counts. Epistemological embodiment of healing energies moves the recipient from a state of 'believing' to one of 'knowing' that by-passes the need for proof, however satisfying the latter might be.

NEO-SHAMANISM AS AN ALTERNATIVE CONTEMPORARY WORLDVIEW AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Neo-shamanism (the practice of some traditional shamanic techniques by contemporary individuals whose cultural matrix does not support the traditional shamanic worldview) can be a spiritual practice that encourages an expanded worldview and way of being in the world. This qualitative case study research used questionnaires, interviews, and recordings of narrations made by 6 Neo-shamanic practitioners while in the journey state. Based on the gathered material and testimonies of the participants their Neo-shamanic practices resulted in enhanced iden-

tity and Dasein, elevated well-being, close connection with nature and spirit, and improved authenticity and self-acceptance. Participants also reported communication between rational and irrational functions, increased ability to perceive anomalous phenomena, expanded worldview and integration of body, mind and spirit. They reported awareness of interdimensionality and simultaneous integration of the material and spiritual realms when in a normal waking state. Discussion of these findings constitutes a chapter in my *book Neo-shamanism and Mental Health* (2019. Palgrave Macmillan).



Karel James Bouse is the author of *Neo-shamanism and Mental Health* (2019), *Transgenerational Colonialism* (2021), and the forthcoming *Finding the Phoenix* (2021). She has doctorates in Psychology and History, has edited a special issue on anomalous lifeworlds for the *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* and has been an educator and Neo-shamanic practitioner for 25 years. She has presented her work at academic conferences throughout the US and in the UK. She is the Founder and Director of the Institute of Esoteric Psychology, a resource and educational organization promoting alternative therapies and expanded consciousness studies.

A GROUP PK EXPERIMENT: TESTING PSYCHICAL RESEARCH AND SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION HYPOTHESES

Purpose: This study was designed to test hypotheses derived from Batchelder's artefact induction theory and the ritual healing theory, a sociology of religion orientation. The study argues that Paleolithic shamanism involved group psychokinesis.

Methods: A PK research group began on-line weekly Zoom meetings in August 2019. The group sought to induce collective PK experiences.

Results: The group experienced a wide variety of individual psi experiences (with religious implications), electronic voice phenomena, and successful results with an online PK experiment, remote viewing experiments, and pinwheel experiments. The presentation will include video evidence.

Conclusion: Group Zoom meetings are a useful strategy for inducing PK experiences. Studies conducted in a variety of cultures would further our understanding of factors conducive to success.



James McClenon, Ph.D., is a retired sociology professor and licensed clinical social worker (LCSW). He has investigated psychic phenomena in the USA, Korea, Philippines, Thailand, China, Japan, Okinawa, Sri Lanka, and India. His books include *The Entity Letters: A Sociologist on the Trail of a Supernatural Mystery* and *Wondrous Healing: Shamanism, Human Evolution, and the Origin of Religion*.

THE PROBLEMS RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISTS HAVE WITH PARAPSYCHOLOGY

Parapsychology, since its inception in Victorian England, has been plagued by a struggle for recognition on two fronts. First, there are the scientific debunkers who reject that psychic phenomena exist or that paranormal occurrences are ever anything more than perceptual error or fraud. It is this arena where parapsychologists are most well-equipped to change worldviews over the long-term and have already made substantial progress in winning acknowledgement of their credibility. However, there is another area where they are often met with hostility, which are the ardent beliefs of religious fundamentalists of all kinds. These critics embrace that such phenomena are genuine – as in not fraudulent or explainable by misperception – but claim that those not produced by their co-religionists are diabolic in nature and that theirs is divine evidence meant to reinforce their own rigid worldview.

In this presentation, I will explore the philosophical origins of the monotheistic logic that underscores the latter, pious rejection of parapsychology. Unfortunately, only focusing on stricter controls and hard data might not help assuage these nonrational objections, but I will offer a few thoughts that might aid in debates with those who believe that we are studying the work of demons.

According to historian of religions Jan Assmann, the origins of what is now often referred to as ‘monotheistic logic’ lay in what was once called ‘the Mosaic distinction.’ This exclusivist position has been the dominant view of most forms of Judeo-Christian theology and probably arose as a reaction against polytheism in the ancient world. This is because polytheist cultures are probably much older and most commonly made sense of other pantheons through simple assertions of equivalency between deities that had equal functions. How-



Christopher Senn is a Ph.D. Candidate concentrating in the History of Religions in America and the History of Gnosticism, Esotericism, and Mysticism. His current research focuses on using comparative methodology to examine the historical precedents of parapsychology research.

ever, monotheist forms of religion largely rejected this religious inclusivism in favor of a religious exclusivism that asserted the existence of only one God. Put another way, in the mind of a strict monotheist: if I am right, you must be wrong.

Of course, dissenters have always existed in monotheist religions, usually arguing for some form of pantheism or panentheism, whereby the universe itself is said to be divine and there is no stark distinction between Creator and Creation – a philosophical view that is resurgent among many parapsychologists who see consciousness as being a fundamental aspect of reality. Historically speaking, though there are exceptions, this view, known in religious scholarship as cosmotheism, is most often regarded as a heresy and rarely embraced by religious officials.

In her recent book *How God Becomes Real*, the anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann argues that religious practices perform a psychological role in entrenching a person within their personal belief system, and particularly important in this view are direct encounters that people believe they have with their personal God or agent of God, such as an angel. These encounters provide evidence for the accuracy of a person's belief system. It boils down to a sort of formulaic logic: believe the right things, pray the right way, attend the right services where the right acts are performed, and God will reveal himself in some manner to verify that a person is on the right path. Similarly, the fundamentalist religious person who interprets paranormal events that occur outside of their own religious system as diabolic does so to reinforce their own belief system as well. Since paranormal occurrences occurring within their belief system are taken as evidence in favor of it, paranormal events that happen in other belief systems cannot be evidence for the veracity of those beliefs, prayers, and acts of worship because only one system can be right. Thus, those paranormal events that occur outside of their belief system must be seen as evidence against it, and, in the absence of human fraud, only a diabolic entity would attempt to provide evidence against the one true belief system.

The concept that other gods are actually demons masquerading as divinities, intent on actively attempting to deceive people in order to pull them away from a single God, can be traced to St. Augustine's famous work *The City of God: Against the Pagans*, written in 410 C.E., and it has been a fairly common view ever since. Also, worthy of note might be Freudian projection, where a person dislikes something that they are doing themselves – in this case doubting their faith, which drives them to seek out evidence of it. This drives the religious adherent to project that unconsciously disliked aspect of

themselves onto an external that they can vilify, which is an opposing belief system in this case.

Counteracting a religious belief is difficult, sometimes even more difficult than scientific debunking, which simply ignores or obfuscates data, and I must confess that I do not believe that simply pointing to well-controlled experiments and statistically significant results is going to always work here. These are also often interpreted as demons attempting to deceive. The search for demonstrable theories and natural correlates might be a way forward, though, as it provides evidence that such phenomena are parts of the natural world and closes the door on wholly religious explanations.

When an experience can be switched on and off with an epigenetic switch that activates or deactivates a corresponding brain structure, it is difficult to say that it is an experience of God. When geomagnetic fluctuations cause greater or lesser accuracy in descriptions of remote viewing targets, it is more difficult for a fundamentalist to argue that the work of demons is hindered by electromagnetic frequencies. A major problem with this, however, is the symbolic nature of psi. As we all know, people who report paranormal phenomena often have encounters with angels, saints, gods, etc., and there is quite a bit of literature that demonstrates how such religious imagery does seem to facilitate psi effects.

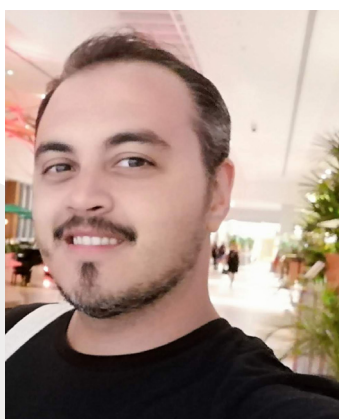
However, again, we have a theoretical explanation that works in terms of natural correlates in the bi-hemispheric model of the human brain. Here, I cite the work of my own advisor Jeffrey J. Kripal, who writes of "mythical thinking or enchanted imagining as expressive of dimensions of mind that are correlated with the right hemisphere of the brain and so are confusing or simply nonsensical to more left-brain ways of knowing.... these presences show us pictures and tell us stories in dream and vision. They possess us. They claim to be gods, or God." This latter position, of the bi-hemispheric model of the brain, shifts the focus away from supernatural entities entirely and centers the discussion of paranormal occurrences on the human. This also has historical precedent and hearkens back to the arguments for natural magic made by Renaissance magi such as Marsilio Ficino, who argued that their practices utilized aspects of the natural world that were not well understood. While this position has been regarded with suspicion by many religious authorities in Abrahamic traditions – as it negates that such happenings are evidence of God, demons, or any corresponding status – it does offer a way to reframe the discussion within a scientific context, which is where parapsychologists can thrive.

SOCIAL SCIENCES AND SPIRITUALITY AFTER COVID-19

This paper aims to present theoretical considerations on what we recognize as a necessary shift for the social sciences, at a global level, concerning the studies of different phenomena related to spirituality, on its multiple forms, since the advent of the Coronavirus pandemic. At the moment this study is being offered, the pandemic, which is still being comprehended and fought around the world, has already infected almost 185 million people and took almost 4 million lives (among official numbers only) within just a year or so. New variants continue to be discovered and spread. Due to its unprecedented gravity, this has been the main theme worldwide since at least February 2020. It is compared, in recent years, only to the devastating Spanish Flu Pandemic which, between 1918-1919, caused at least 50 million deaths around the world. Therefore, according to different historians, philosophers and social scientists, Covid-19 Pandemic

will probably be the main emblem, so far, for the development of the generations born after 1990; and might be considered, according to some, even the “historical landmark for the actual beginning of the 21st century”. And it already does so, bringing important inflexions for social life across the globe.

We highlight here not only the new role of governments, companies, and civil society organizations, but especially universities and different spaces of scientific contribution. But, more specifically here, we highlight the different approaches of spiritual experiences and, in particular, their relations to different dimensions of health. We bring attention to this fact because not only, of course, the theme of health gained centrality in almost all spheres of social life during this period. Preliminary data also show an increase in the search for different manifestations of spirituality during the pandemic. Google data shows that searches for the term “spiritual-



Antonio Joao holds a bachelor's degree and a licentiate degree in Social Sciences at the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), Brazil. With a major in Anthropology and a sandwich research scholarship at Fisk University and Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, US. he has a Masters in Sociology at UFRGS, as well as a Post-graduate Diploma at the Southern Institute of Technology, New Zealand.

ity” have broken records since last year. In March 2020, the number of Google searches for prayer emerged to the highest level ever recorded. In other words, since 2004, when the company started registering, never so many people have searched for the topic on its platform.

Jeanet Sinding Bentzen, associate professor of economics at the University of Copenhagen, who led research on this topic, found that the level of prayer searches in March 2020 was more than 50% higher than the average during February 2020. Based on daily data on Google searches for prayer across 95 countries, Professor Bentzen found that the increase in the number of inquiries for ‘coronavirus prayer’ was a global phenomenon. According to Google, in the last 12 months, there has been a record increase in searches for terms such as “guided meditation to sleep, heal and relax”. The expression “meditation to calm the mind” had increased 200%, “how to do meditation for anxiety” by 170% and “guided meditation to relax” by 150%. On YouTube, guided meditation videos also gained a lot of attention. They had a 50% increase in average views between March 15, 2020, and March 15, 2021, compared to the previous 12 months, according to the platform. The company itself claims that interest in terms related to mental health reached its highest level in May 2021 since the beginning of the historical series, in 2008. Searches for “how to relax your mind” grew 60% in the last year. During the same period, searches for “meditation to sleep soundly” and “meditation to calm the mind” increased by 130%. These numbers are followed by “anxiety meditation” (120%), “anxiety guided meditation” (60%) and “sleep meditation” (40%).

“When WHO declared the Covid-19 a pandemic, search-shares for prayer rose around mid-March for most regions, even for most secular regions of Northern Europe,” according to Professor Bentzen’s study. At the same time, the three countries most affected by the pandemic, so far (US, India and Brazil) are (or were, like the US) led by authorities who claimed to be linked to religion. Consequently, if health-related subjects gained, and tends to maintain, unprecedented importance in the globalized world scenario of the 21st centu-

ry; and preliminary data and studies point to increasing the interest for themes related to spirituality, as well as the influence of religion in the scope of national lives, not just individual or like-minded-community ones; a new approach is urgently needed in the social sciences for the study of such phenomena related to spirituality, in its different manifestations. Especially concerning its relationships with health in general and, in particular, on how these connections between spirituality and health will be addressed by the generations of new leaders (who are and will be rising under the advent of this new global context). Moreover, to foster new approaches and research in the field of social sciences, we add here two other questions that seem to be significant in these new circumstances: how should we, scientists, approach religion, spirituality and health from here? And what could those interested in religion and/or spirituality do to help to build a sustainable future for us all?

THE PSI DATA AND THE MEANING OF IT ALL

The growing of evidence on psi recently summarized by Cardeña (2018) arguably leads us to consider what this anomalous data might mean for our experience in the world. If we accept the psi data, how does our view and understanding of reality change? To get a handle on this question, I will begin by claiming that the laboratory psi evidence points toward our having access to considerably more information than our conventional theories allow. Perhaps the metaphor of a radio is useful, and we might imagine that we can tune to receive a channel of nonlocal information. Further, the psychokinesis data suggests that our intentions may influence our world. This suggests that we are not only receivers but senders with respect to whatever channel of information this might be. How should we characterize the nature of this “channel” of information, as well as our relationship with it (the sending and receiving)? Recently I have proposed a framework that arguably fits very well with the laboratory psi data (Williams 2021). Borrowing from literature in both the philosophy of mind and physics, I argued that what philosophers have termed the inscrutable or intrinsic aspect of the physical world is likely

to be the quantum ground, which is also likely characterized as an inherently nonlocal field of potentialities, which in turn provides the basis for the particles that constitute our world and their behavior. Further, using arguments associated with Bertrand Russell that are currently topical in philosophy of mind, I’ve argued that this nonlocal quantum ground of potentialities likely provides the foundation for conscious experience. This leads to a version of cosmopsychism, the view that all conscious beings are aspects of the more fundamental cosmic mind. Within this framework, we might understand that our consciousness has roots in a deeper level of reality, which we might characterize as nonlocal and unified potential. Subconscious cognitive processes might access information within this ground and manifest what we might call telepathy and clairvoyance. Precognition and presentiment conceivably result from an ability to similarly intuit the probabilities of future events. And psychokinesis may represent our ability to influence through intention the probabilities or tendencies of events to manifest. In short, we arguably possess the ability to both send and receive some degree of information from this nonlocal field of potentialia.

Still, we might ask what does this really mean of sig-



George R. Williams is an economist specializing in media at the Federal Communications Commission. However, his interests are interdisciplinary, and he has recently expanded his research into the philosophy of mind and parapsychology. Recent publications have included the *Journal of Mind and Behavior*, *Mind and Matter*, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*.

nificance to our lives? Rather than settling the matter, I hope to sketch some possibilities. Often extrapolating applications from what the psi data represents leads to questions such as predicting stock prices or how to manifest psi on demand. However, I think the inherently nonlocal nature of my framework suggests a different direction. That is, I believe this nonlocal field of aware potential provides insight into such topics as meaning, altruism, and religious practices. I will proceed to briefly discuss how my proposed ground of aware potentiality (again a version of cosmopsychism) may provide insight on various aspects of spirituality and religion.

Meaning. Within the proposed framework, we might characterize accessing of information as interaction with an inherently holistic and nonlocal field, which completely underlies our world. To the degree that we are guided by impulses or motivations from this deeper field, we are likely to feel more intimately connected to the world around us. That is, perhaps we need not feel disconnected, alienated, and disenchanting from our world. If this framework is correct, we might put more weight on what Jung termed synchronicity, where we experience a sort of meaning from apparently disconnected events. Through receiving or intuiting information intimately connected with the whole community (or world), we experience greater meaning.

Compassion and altruism. The theory outlined here suggests we are part of an inherently nonlocal and holistic reality. As aspects of cosmic intelligence, we are not truly separate from one another. It follows that experiences of sincere compassion may be giving us moments of greater connection with others. Through feeling information via a nonlocal channel, we might intuit the needs of others and be of greater service. To the degree that our actions are guided or informed by this field of unified potentialities, our actions arguably have stronger or wider benefit toward others.

Creativity. Artists, musicians, or writers who are inspired or guided by this deeper, more comprehensive field will likely create art that is more relevant or resonant to their viewers, listeners, or readers. Of course, creativity manifests in many other fields, including technology and business enterprise. Within our framework, we might imagine the artist having an intention to create something useful or inspiring, and this intention may fall like a seed in the ground of nonlocal, unified potentiality. Such intentions then interact with the resources of our proposed quantum ground, which in turn leads to ideas or sparks of creativity that are based in a comprehensive field of information.

Prayer and Rituals. Notions of prayer with a greater intelligence perhaps invite scorn or ridicule from many

(if not most) mainstream scientists. But prayer may be genuinely efficacious within this version of cosmopsychism, where our conscious experiences are aspects of a cosmic mind. It seems reasonable that communication with our deeper source of consciousness, the cosmic mind, is genuinely possible and appropriate. Additionally, we might recognize one of the puzzling questions regarding psychokinesis is what practical application there might be, given the relatively small effect sizes. However, consider the situation of a community focused on a ritual, perhaps for healing or prosperity. Unlike repetitive laboratory experiments, such a ritual, involving real stakes and real symbols or practices that have meaning for the participants, likely has a considerably stronger effect. Of course, rigorously testing the effects of such practices outside of controlled experimental conditions is problematic. I'm not suggesting that religious rituals have a reliable effect; only that such rituals, on average, may have surprisingly efficacious results.

Religion. I am not suggesting that this proposal points toward a particular notion of God or religion that is "correct." Instead, I submit that various religious institutions or religious practices may have evolved across large time periods that facilitate ways of interacting with this deeper field, the basis for both mind and matter. Factors such as history and regional characteristics (sources of food and climate) likely played important roles in shaping different religions. Given knowledge limitations on people living in prior times, beliefs found in many religions are often inconsistent with our modern understanding. Nevertheless, the impulse to seek greater connection with an ultimate reality, greater meaning in life, and teach altruistic values, is arguably consistent with being guided or interacting with the fundamental ground of the universe along the lines we've discussed.

These arguments regarding various aspects of spirituality or religion perhaps cannot be rigorously scientifically tested. However, they are consistent with a framework that fits the psi data very well. Perhaps the best test of whether we are on the right track is whether this understanding of a deeper field, as well as relevant practices such as meditation that might lead to greater contact with this field, facilitates people living more compassionate, meaningful, creative, and happier lives.

SPIRITUALITY, RELIGION AND PSI

This discussion seeks to show that spirituality is a biological reality in ‘sentient beings’ (i.e., those with senses, both humans and animals), and that it is nothing mythical. Defined as a ‘genetic potential for psychological homeostasis’, it is explained in terms of six characteristics – two foundational, four supportive. Religion, distinct from spirituality, is defined as a ‘sociospiritual manifestation of spirituality’. Replacing ‘ESP’, a ‘Reality-turned-myth’, with Mind-Sensory Ultra Perception (MSUP), it is also shown that psi speaks to a quality of mind and has nothing to do with a set of beliefs, although any given religion may have features facilitative of it.

Introduction

The purpose of this symposium is to bring together researchers from different disciplines to reflect on “the many relations between parapsychology, religion, and spirituality”. This humble presentation seeks to explore it, but in a reverse order: spirituality, religion and psi. While the topic is approached from a creative interdisciplinary perspective, it is however inspired by Buddhahamma, meaning ‘Teachings of the Buddha’, as distinct from Buddhism as a religion.

Spirituality

We define spirituality as ‘the genetic potential for psychological homeostasis’. It is “genetic” since it is inherent to every sentient being, meaning “one with senses”. We critically understand the number of senses not as five as in Westernscience, but six, the sixth being the mind sense. However, “mind is the forerunner” (Dhammapada 1), the horse that pulls the cart. In other words, it is the mind that is behind, not only the five physical senses - eye, ear, nose, tongue and body, but the mind itself. So, spirituality is a biological reality in the psychological domain, paralleling physiological homeostasis. Spirituality is a ‘potential’ in the sense of something inherent awaiting manifestation. It is ingrained within, as captured in the Buddhian term ‘internality’ (ajjhattika). The term homeostasis may be understood as a balance and a harmony. It is part of an autonomic process – which I label as Autonomic Spiritual Systems (ASPS) that serves to maintain a stable internal environment suitable for sustaining life. The word homeostasis is derived from Greek, *homeo* meaning “similar” and *stasis* “stability”. So, what qualities of mind can be said to maintain psychostasis? Drawn upon the Abhidhamm, we show it in a chart:



Ven. Bhikkhu Mihita (US Fulbright scholar (U Penn; U of Michigan); BA (London); MA (Pennsylvania); MA MEd, PhD (Toronto)); Founding Editor, *Canadian Journal of Buddhist Studies*. Formerly on Faculty of Divinity, Trinity College, University of Toronto, Canada; Author of books and publications.

BASIS	QUALITIES	PALI TERM
1 Foundational	Neutrality	tatramajjhataṭṭā
2	Tranquility	passaddhi
3 Supportive	Lightness	lahutā
4	Malleability	mudutā
5	Readiness	kammaññatā
6	Proficiency	pāguññatā

So, spirituality is part of the genome of a given sentient being, genome meaning “the complete set of genes in a cell or living thing”.

Religion

In general, the terms spirituality and religion come to be seen as being the same. But as we shall try to show, this is not the case. Is there no relationship between spirituality and religion? There indeed is. We may say, “religion is the social manifestation of spirituality”. In other words, religion is a sociospirituality. It can be said to be system facilitating a group of people in a given region towards psychostasis, in a shared wisdom. While more can be said of the relationship between spirituality and religion, suffice it to say that they are not the same. While every sentient being is a spiritual being, not everyone is a religious being!

Psi. Religion and Spirituality

By “psi” is understood phenomena such as telepathy, clairvoyance, clairaudience, psychokinesis and the like. Understood for nearly a century as extra-sensory perception, pointing out that this is a ‘reality turned myth’ in Western science, I define it as MSUP – Mind-Sensory Ultra Perception. If there is no consciousness in a given sense when a stimulus impacts upon it, there would be no perception. Helen Keller had no perception of her mom’s hand waving in front of her eyes, since the mind part of the physical eye was dysfunctional, gone blind. So MSUP is a potential awaiting manifestation in a sentient being. However, unlike intelligence, or language, it does not necessarily get manifested in every sentient being. That is to say that some MSUP may come to be manifested in some easily, it may be rare in others. But also, not all forms of psi may be manifested easily. While telepathy may be the commonest, psychokinesis, like going through walls, may be extremely rare.

While religion has been associated with psi phenomena, we posit that there is no such necessary connection. Religion is of relatively recent origin. So, if psi is based in the mind, then the potential for it would have been present, as in the context of humans, from the earliest times, when there was no formal religion. Now animals

are also sentient beings, given that they have the six senses, too, just as humans do, both qualifying under the Buddhist term *sattā*. They have also been scientifically found to have psi potential – from pet dogs and horses to homing pigeons and bees, and even blind termites. So, if animals are included as sentient beings, then psi phenomena can be seen to date back to the beginning of the evolution of the species – both human and animal. Again, there was assuredly no religion then! Hence, it is that there is no necessary connection between religion and psi. So, what accounts for psi? At the lower level, such as telepathy, it may part of a survival tool kit. – horse neighing from the time the master leaves and calming down upon his return, or human being getting a phone call from a long-lost friend just as she was thinking may relate to the yearning for precious company. But at a higher level, levitation could be explained as evidence of an advanced quality of mind, namely concentration. So, whether at a lower or a higher level, psi is clearly based in the mind, hence the characterization MSUP. And the quality of mind may also be explained in terms of past lives, either due to the fruition of kamma, or by way of a carryover of a mind cultivation. Now a person with psi skills may end up being a member of a particular religious community, but it is not a particular set of teachings or beliefs of the religion that accounts for it. However, while there is no theoretical basis that argues for a necessary connection between religion and psi, there can be said to be a functional connection. A religion may provide a context to strengthen the psi capacity in a given individual, such as meditation, silent prayer, compassionate action, etc. Such practices can be said to give the right brain hemisphere a powerful workout. It is hoped that this perspective, Buddhadhamma inspired, though not exclusively canonical, sheds some light on the relationship between parapsychology, religion, and spirituality towards future of research. The writer appreciates the opening up of an interdisciplinary space for dialogue between and among different research fields.

A MODEL OF THE SPIRIT THAT COULD EXPLAIN MANY ANOMALOUS PHENOMENA OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Many ancient practices, religious traditions, and contemplative approaches conceived of the spirit as the immaterial, ineffable essence of the human being, source of the mind, that survives bodily death and keeps its individuality. Even if the current scientific paradigm is dominated by materialistic thought, the following anomalous phenomena of consciousness could only be justified through the possibility of consciousness survival after death:

Mediumship: how come some texts have accurate, verifiable information in controlled and blind studies that exclude fraud or coincidence?

Memories of Past Lives: how could some reports have precise verifiable matches, sometimes even with birthmarks from the previous persona?

Near Death Experiences: how could a few people remember actual events that occurred in the resuscitation period, when brain activity was absent?

End of Life Experiences: how come people with dementia due to irreversible brain damage can experience paradoxical lucidity phenomenon?

Today, scientific demonstration of the spirit is very unlikely, for its nature is not compatible with current research tools and designs. Besides, spiritual phenomena are unpredictable and irregular, preventing any study under controlled conditions. However, indirect evidence of the spirit and its characteristics emerged from scientific research with adequate methodology. So, by putting together the few pieces available for this puzzle, we could forecast what would look like the missing



Marcelo Saad, MD, Ph.D. (Brazil). Current director member of the Spiritist-Medical Association of São Paulo. Co-founder member of the Interfaith Coalition on Health and Spirituality (a movement with health professionals and religious leaders for spiritual support in hospitals). Besides private acupuncture practice, he is also engaged in scientific publication, editorial collaborations with journals and books, medical lectures, and participation in scholar tasks.

pieces. Then, one could dare to idealize how they would fit together to raise an incomplete but educated model of the spirit and its nature.

There are many principles of Spiritism that would cover the gaps in the current knowledge. Spiritism was initiated in France in the 1860s by the empirical work of the teacher and pedagogue Hippolyte L. D. Rivail (1804–1869). He started a rational investigation of communication with spirits through formulating, testing, and reformulating methods to obtain reliable information by eliminating any inconsistency. Although he had no mediumship ability, he compiled the answers provided by several mediums, forming a collection of principles. Using the pen name Allan Kardec, he published an organized set of principles that he named Spiritism. Using this bias-free discipline as a starting point could outline a description of possible spiritual characteristics.

There are at least three reasons for this choice:

1. Spiritism, being a well-structured investigative discipline, called the attention of dozens of scholars over the past 150 years. Over the decades after its foundation, Spiritism's ideas spread worldwide. This discipline found much acceptance among educated people because of its pragmatic origin and objective presentation. A few examples include personalities such as Charles Richet (Nobel awarded French physician), William James (the "father of North-American psychology"), and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (British writer of the character Sherlock Holmes).

2. Spiritism overcame barriers that separate science, philosophy, and religion; thus, it can transit among them. This is the main difference between Kardec's work and those of other serious researchers. According to him, Spiritism is an observational science (on the spirits' nature and their relationship with us) and a philosophical doctrine (about the consequences resulting from such findings). The religious component relies on some universal values of morality, altruism, and peace, but without theological assumptions.

3. Spiritism inspired Brazilian sectors of society to create associations to study applications of this discipline in their fields. In 1968, a group of physicians created the Spiritist Medical Association, which inspired the creation of other similar entities over the years. Some examples are the Brazilian Association of Spiritist Magistrates, the Brazilian Association of Spiritist Psychologists, the Juridical-Spiritist Association of Brazil, and the Spiritist Military Crusade.

Based on some assumptions of Spiritism, the spirit has these characteristics:

A. The spirit is the immaterial essence that makes a human being what it is; each one is an eternal individuality, and its nature is beyond our knowledge capacity.

B. An incarnated spirit is called a soul, as many of its characteristics and potentialities are blocked by matter; still, the soul has some degree of liberty.

C. The soul is the source of all mind properties manifested through the brain activity by awareness, thoughts, and emotions; the brain is the car and the soul, the driver.

D. Spirits exert an incessant action upon all of us, sometimes promoting an insight; however, some people can ostensibly transmit a complete message (mediums).

E. After death, the soul gets free from the physical body; the now unrestricted spirit keeps its personality and the knowledge from the mundane experience.

F. All spirits must pass through many incarnations for their learning and perfecting process; the new incarnation temporarily blocks access to past lives data.

This model offers explanations to the phenomena mentioned above:

Mediumship: Although we all have some sensitivity for spiritual influence, certain people can interact deeply with spirits to convey a complete message.

Memories of Past Lives: Incarnation blocks memories of previous lives, as it should be; in particular cases, the mind can access them.

Near-Death Experiences: In critical situations, the body-soul linkage is weakened, and the mind can experience the spiritual reality.

End of Life Experiences: The soul in a devitalized person may experience a greater degree of freedom, beyond the constraints of matter. In short, this work proposed a spirit model that could explain certain enigmatic anomalous phenomena of consciousness. The explanation presented here is a tentative model of how the spirit would be like, using the sparse and indirect evidence of its existence. Eventually, these provisional ideas could receive more contribution to evolve to a more acceptable academic model.