

BOOK REVIEW

Ojos Invisibles: La Cruzada por la Conquista del Espíritu: Una Neurociencia de las Experiencias Paranormales [Invisible Eyes: The Crusade for the Conquest of the Spirit: A Neuroscience of Paranormal Experiences] edited by Alejandro Parra. Buenos Aires, Argentina: Antigua, 2015. 316 pp. ISBN 978-987-3707-19-3.

Alejandro Parra has compiled in this book, published in Spanish, several good-quality essays about various aspects of parapsychology. Most of the essays are new, although some are expanded from previous publications. To explain the title, *Ojos Invisibles* (Invisible Eyes), Parra mentions a statement from Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince*, saying that one must use the heart to see things invisible to the eyes. Parra speculates that

it is possible that our eyes are incapable of capturing the richness, subtlety, and perhaps beauty, of an anomalous experience simply because such 'capture' and observation probably represents its own destruction. (p. 7; this and other translations are mine)

The book is divided in four parts. The first one, "Beyond the Limits of the Flesh," opens with a chapter by José Miguel Pérez Navarro about ESP in the ganzfeld, in which the author focuses on methodological considerations necessary in these studies. The author states that some may consider many of the controls used somewhat exaggerated, but he reminds the reader of the necessity of being more than thorough due to the critiques addressed to ESP research over the years.

This is followed by discussions of synesthesia and auras by Oscar Iborra. He wrote about a study he and others conducted on the topic:

Our research with persons who say they see auras . . . leads us to suggest some psi experiences could be explained, or least could be mediated, by some types of synesthesia . . . It is not my intention to explain psi experiences completely, and seeing the aura in particular, as synesthesia, but to present a possible proposal or recommendation both to be able to discard what psi is not and to see whether it is only synesthesia, as well as to point out the differences. This takes on special importance in the case of synesthetes who are not aware that they are so. (p. 50)

The first part has chapters also about the presentiment effect by Fabio E. da Silva. Da Silva presents in his article a summary of his own research, which, among other results, found that skin conductance activity was significantly higher when emotional photographs were used as targets, as compared with non-emotional photographs.

The last chapter in this section is my own, about veridical aspects of out-of-body experiences. As argued in the conclusion, “the study of these veridical aspects . . . presents the possibility of expanding our understanding of human experience and the OBE in particular” (p. 88).

Part Two, “The Mind/Body Frontier and Belief Systems,” opens with Daniel E. Gómez Montanelli’s summary of spontaneous previous lives’ studies by Ian Stevenson, Jim Tucker, Erlendur Haraldsson, and others. In Gómez Montanelli’s view,

the hypothesis that past life memories are based on ESP . . . does not imply that memory continues after death, because the information reported could have been obtained from family or persons close to the deceased. But this explanation does not account for the question of why a child would receive information from people related to a particular deceased individual but does not show other telepathic abilities. (p. 109)

This is followed by an essay about methodological and epistemological considerations about the issue of survival of death, authored by Everton de Oliveira Maraldi, Wellington Zangari, and Fátima Regina Machado. The authors are skeptical about the evidence to support survival. Commenting on laboratory studies of mediums, they state that they believe that even the results of the best of those studies are far from presenting “scientific confirmation of the hypothesis of survival” (p. 117). They also point out that we still know too little about the nature of psi to be able to differentiate living and discarnate sources of information. In their view, to address this problem we need first to “unveil the mystery of psi” (p. 127). I agree that living agency has to be considered in the evaluation of survival evidence, and that decisions can never be clear-cut, depending on the antecedent probability each person assigns to possible explanations. In this process it is also important to be critical of the evidence for such living agency separate from speculations.

The section closes with an article by Stanley Krippner about psi and shamanism that raises, as other writings by this author do, fascinating issues. He argues at the end that the systematic exploration of the topic has been neglected, but he holds hope for the future.

In the last section, “Challenging the Limits of Matter and Energy,” Juan Gimeno opens with a discussion of his table-turning work, showing that this

topic has a future if he and others can continue their work. The concept of a non-local mind is discussed by Patrizio E. Tressoldi, who presents much relevant experimental evidence. Tressoldi is aware of the resistance of many scientists to the idea of a non-local mind, but is confident that the work will bring up this “conceptual revolution,” and adds, “I am convinced that we are going to witness this change soon” (p. 187). While I agree there is much to make us think, and perhaps change, traditional scientific views about the potentials of the mind, I cannot but be skeptical of the immediacy of such change. There is still much resistance that will diminish in a significant way only with fundamental changes in the assumptions of the current paradigm.

Finally, Alfonso Martínez Taboas presents a discussion of poltergeists. As in his previous writings, he is skeptical about the validity of the psychological work of William Roll and others. The author also says much about evidential problems, but he affirms that he believes that the evidence strongly suggests that the poltergeist is a paranormal phenomenon and one that presents a challenge to established knowledge.

The fourth and last section is entitled “Exceptional Human Experiences: Approaches from Neuroscience, Consciousness Studies, and Psychopathology.” David Luke starts with an article about “parapsychopharmacology” in which he summarizes research and argues for various approaches for future studies, such as the consideration of more naturalistic contexts. This is followed by a paper authored by Alejandro Parra and Juan Carlos Argibay reviewing the topic of psychic sensibility which includes work on psychometry, medical diagnosis, and psychic readings. Regarding the latter, the authors argue for the importance of studying the performance of psychics while considering the context in which they usually work. A “strict and maybe obsessive control of the experimental session may neutralize the possible emergence of genuine psi . . . To control for this, experimental sessions should be friendly and cordial” (p. 249) in conditions similar to those the psychic is used to working under, but including some controls.

Other work in this area includes Christine Simmonds-Moore’s discussion of boundaries, as seen in the concepts of transliminality and boundary thinness. Thin boundaries may be related to the occurrence of psi experiences, but there is more we need to learn about such boundaries in general in order to understand their relationship to psychic phenomena. I also wonder what the effect is of specific content experiences. For example, while there may be a general relationship between thin boundaries and ESP experiences, it may be speculated that highly emotional ESP experiences, such as those involving death, show a different pattern. I am not saying that boundary thinness is not important, but that emotion connected to the ESP

message may also open the person, or facilitate the emergence of an ESP message to mind, and sometimes in spite of thick boundaries.

The final chapter in this section, by Renaud Evrard, is about clinical aspects of exceptional experiences. He focuses on differential diagnosis between exceptional and pathological ones. The chapter is a good summary of the topic and it is clear from the author's review that this is a neglected area, particularly in terms of empirical work.

From the editorial point of view, some criticisms could be made about the book. Chapters 2, 3, 6, and 13 have different titles in the table of contents from the ones in the text. Furthermore, I question the subtitle, "A Neuroscience of Paranormal Experiences," because I believe there is not enough neuroscience in the book to put this emphasis in the subtitle.

These issues aside, this collection of essays presents useful, up-to-date overviews about various aspects of modern parapsychology in a serious and responsible way. Most readers of this review are probably not aware of the uniqueness of this volume, since there are very few books in Spanish that are up-to-date and that present high-quality discussions of the topic. *Ojos Invisibles* is a unique contribution to the Spanish-language literature about parapsychology.

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