

# The Paranormal - Extract from Wikipedia

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paranormal>

Paranormal is an umbrella term used to describe a wide variety of reported anomalous phenomena.

According to the Journal of Parapsychology, the term paranormal describes "any phenomenon that in one or more respects exceeds the limits of what is deemed physically possible according to current scientific assumptions."

Paranormal describes subjects studied under parapsychology, which deals with psychical phenomena like telepathy, extra-sensory perception, psychokinesis, and survival studies like reincarnation, ghosts, and hauntings. However, as a broader category, the paranormal sometimes describes subjects outside the scope of parapsychology, including anomalous aspects of UFOs, some creatures that fall under the scope of cryptozoology, purported phenomena surrounding the Bermuda Triangle, and many other non-psychical subjects.

The word paranormal consists of two parts: para and normal. In most definitions of the word paranormal, it is described as anything that is beyond or contrary to what is deemed scientifically possible. The definition implies that the scientific explanation of the world around us is the 'normal' part of the word and 'para' makes up the beyond, contrary, or against part of the meaning.

Approaching paranormal phenomena from a research perspective is often difficult because even when the phenomena are seen as real they may be difficult to explain using existing rules or theory. By definition, paranormal phenomena exist outside of conventional norms, if they exist at all. Skeptics contend that they don't. Despite this challenge, studies on the paranormal are periodically conducted by researchers from various disciplines. Some researchers study just the beliefs in paranormal phenomena regardless of whether the phenomena actually exist.

## Research Approaches

### ***(1) Anecdotal approach***

An anecdotal approach to the paranormal involves the collection of anecdotal evidence, which is an informal account of something that presumably happened. Anecdotes are often in contrast to empirical evidence, which are types of formal accounts that can be investigated using the scientific method. The anecdotal approach is not a scientific approach to the paranormal because it leaves verification dependent on the credibility of the party presenting the evidence. It is also subject to such logical fallacies as cognitive bias, inductive reasoning, lack of falsifiability, and other fallacies that may prevent the anecdote from having meaningful information to impart. Nevertheless, it is a common approach to paranormal phenomena.

### ***(2) Experimental approach***

Experimental investigation of the paranormal is largely conducted in the multidisciplinary field of parapsychology. Although parapsychology has its roots in earlier research, it began using the experimental approach in the 1930s under the direction of J. B. Rhine (1895 – 1980). Rhine popularized the now famous methodology of using card-guessing and dice-

rolling experiments in a laboratory to find a statistical validation of extra-sensory perception.

In 1957, the Parapsychological Association was formed as the preeminent society for parapsychologists. In 1969, they became affiliated with the American Association for the Advancement of Science. That affiliation, along with a general openness to psychic and occult phenomena in the 1970s, led to a decade of increased parapsychological research.[3] During this time, other notable organizations were also formed, including the Academy of Parapsychology and Medicine (1970), the Institute of Parascience (1971), the Academy of Religion and Psychical Research, the Institute for Noetic Sciences (1973), and the International Kirlian Research Association (1975). Each of these groups performed experiments on paranormal subjects to varying degrees. Parapsychological work was also conducted at the Stanford Research Institute during this time.

With the increase in parapsychological investigation, there came an increase in opposition to both the findings of parapsychologists and the granting of any formal recognition of the field. Criticisms of the field were focused in the founding of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (1976), now called the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry, and its periodical, *Skeptical Inquirer*.

As astronomer Carl Sagan put it, 'extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence', and experimental research into the paranormal continues today. One such experiment is called the Ganzfeld Experiment. The purpose of the Ganzfeld Experiment, like other parapsychological experiments, is to test for statistical anomalies that might suggest the existence of psi, a process indicating psychic phenomena.

In the Ganzfeld Experiment, a subject (receiver) is asked to access through psychic means some target. The target is typically a picture or video clip selected randomly from a large pool, which is then viewed in a remote location by another subject (sender). Ganzfeld experiments use audio and visual sensory deprivation to remove any kind of external stimulus that may interfere with the testing or corrupt the test by providing cues to correct targets. A 'hit' refers to a correctly identified target. The expected hit ratio of such a trial is 1 in 4, or 25%. Deviations from this expected ratio might be seen as evidence for psi, although such conclusions are often disputed.

### ***(3) Participant-observer approach***

While parapsychologists look for quantitative evidence of the paranormal in laboratories, a great number of people immerse themselves in qualitative research through participant-observer approaches to the paranormal. Participant-observer methodologies have overlaps with other essentially qualitative approaches as well, including phenomenological research that seeks largely to describe subjects as they are experienced, rather than to explain them.

Participant-observation is a straightforward technique. It suggests that by immersing oneself in the subject being studied, a researcher is presumed to gain understanding of the subject. In paranormal research, a participant-observer study might consist of a researcher visiting a place where alleged paranormal activity is said to occur and recording observations while there. Participation levels may vary. In studying a supposedly haunted location, for example, the researcher may conduct a séance or participate in other activities said to cause paranormal activity.

Criticisms of participant-observation as a data-gathering technique are similar to criticisms of other approaches to the paranormal, but also include an increased threat to the objectivity of the researcher, unsystematic gathering of data, reliance on subjective measurement, and possible observer effects (observation may distort the observed behavior). Specific data gathering methods, such as recording EMF readings at haunted locations have their own criticisms beyond those attributed to the participant-observation approach itself.

The participant-observer approach to the paranormal has gained increased visibility and popularity through reality-based television shows like Ghost Hunters, and the formation of independent ghost hunting groups which advocate immersive research at alleged paranormal locations. One popular website for ghost hunting enthusiasts lists over 300 of these organizations throughout the United States and the United Kingdom.

#### ***(4) Survey approach***

While the validity of the existence of paranormal phenomena is controversial and debated passionately by both proponents of the paranormal and by skeptics, surveys are useful in determining the beliefs of people in regards to paranormal phenomena.

One such survey of the beliefs of the general United States population regarding paranormal topics was conducted by the Gallup Organization in 2005. The survey found that 73 PERCENT of those polled believed in at least one of the ten paranormal items presented in the survey.

Items included in the survey were as follows (the percentage of respondents who indicated that they believed in the phenomenon is in parenthesis):

- Extrasensory perception (41%),
- haunted houses (37%),
- ghosts (32%),
- telepathy (31%),
- clairvoyance (26%),
- astrology (25%),
- communication with the dead (21%),
- witches (21%),
- reincarnation (20%), and
- channeling spiritual entities (9%).

Only one percent of those surveyed believed in all ten items.

The items selected for the survey were chosen because they "require the belief that humans have more than the 'normal' five senses."

Another survey conducted in 2006 by researchers from Australia's Monash University sought to determine what types of phenomena people claim to have experienced and the effects these experiences have had on their lives. The study was conducted as an online survey with over 2,000 respondents from around the world participating. Interim results revealed that around 70% of the respondents believe to have had an unexplained paranormal event that changed their life, mostly in a positive way. About 70% also claimed to have seen, heard, or been touched by an animal or person that they knew was not

there; 80% have reported having a premonition, and almost 50% stated they recalled a previous life.

### **Paranormal and Perinormal**

Paranormal phenomena, by definition, lacks a complete scientific explanation. If at some point the phenomena is explainable by science, it becomes perinormal. Perinormal phenomena is a term that has been suggested to describe previously unknown forces which at first appeared to be paranormal and were later verified scientifically. The name is derived from the Greek "peri", meaning "in the vicinity of". While paranormal phenomena remains scientifically questionable ("beyond the range of normal experience or scientific explanation"), perinormal phenomena can eventually be shown to be "skeptic-approved".

One significant modern example of a perinormal phenomenon is electromagnetic fields (EMF). At one time EMF was debatable from a scientific perspective but later was proven to be real and is currently accepted by scientific and medical communities.

Smaller examples of perinormal phenomena include medical oddities which at first may baffle medical professionals, and later turn out to have a mundane cause. An excellent example of a perinormal medical oddity would be the "Pregnant Man" from Nagpur, India. When doctors went to remove what they thought was a tumor causing the man to look pregnant, they instead found a human being inside the man's abdominal region. What could have been misconstrued as the paranormal case of a pregnant man, was actually the perinormal case of fetus in fetu — the man's twin brother had been growing inside his abdomen for 36 years.