

Parapsychology

<http://www.randi.org/encyclopedia/parapsychology.html>

Among all the sciences, there is one known as parapsychology. It studies certain reported but unsubstantiated events (such as ESP, psychokinesis, dowsing, prophecy) that have no presently known explanation. Like all other sciences, it develops theories to explain these claimed events and attempts to test those theories by experimentation.

However, unlike in other sciences, none of the parapsychologists' experiments have both shown positive results and have been replicated by independent researchers. Even the Guinness Book of Records, listing the single most astonishing performance in ESP, apologizes and reports that the episode fails to meet even their standards. Data in some important basic parapsychological experiments that yielded apparently positive results have been shown to be falsified — though parapsychology is not alone in this respect.

Some students of paranormal matters say that such claims cannot be examined rationally. If that is the case, then their studies do not belong with science, but in the same category as flat-Earth theories and perpetual-motion machines, none of which can have the slightest importance to anyone except, perhaps, students of abnormal psychology or editors of the sensational press.

Psychologist Dr. David Marks, who has done extensive investigation of the parapsychologists' work, has said:

Parascience has so far failed to produce a single repeatable finding and, until it does, will continue to be viewed as an incoherent collection of belief systems steeped in fantasy, illusion and error.

The U.S. National Research Council in 1988 concluded a well-funded two-year study by a special committee and published a report, 'Enhancing Human Performance', which concluded:

The committee finds no scientific justification from research conducted over a period of 130 years, for the existence of parapsychological phenomena. In the committee's view, the best scientific evidence does not justify the conclusion that ESP — that is, gathering information about objects or thoughts without the intervention of known sensory mechanisms—exists. Nor does scientific evidence offer support for the existence of psychokinesis — that is, the influence of thoughts upon objects without the intervention of known physical processes.

Nonetheless, courses in parapsychology are offered in more than two hundred colleges and universities in the United States alone, and degrees in parapsychology are offered at several schools, in particular at John F. Kennedy University in Orinda, California. Their Graduate School of Consciousness Studies offers a parapsychology master of science degree.