

**A PARAPSYCHOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF THE THEORY OF
PSYCHOPRAXIA:
EXPERIMENTAL AND THEORETICAL RESEARCHES INTO AN ALTERNATIVE
THEORY EXPLAINING NORMAL AND PARANORMAL PHENOMENA**

BY

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**THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
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STATEMENT

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any other university or tertiary institute, and, to the best of my knowledge, contains no material published or written by another person, except where due references have been given on the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the Barr Smith Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Signed,

..... /December, 2001

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With astonishing rapidity those principles which only yesterday expressed the highest radicalism in the region of thought have become the basis of opportunism in the region of ideas and serve as blind alleys, stopping the progress of thought. . . . But thought which is free, cannot be bound by any limits. . . . The true and real progress of thought is only in the broadest striving toward knowledge that does not recognize the possibility of arrestment in any found forms of knowledge at all.

P. D. Ouspensky (1920/1964, pp. 305-306)

It is interesting to note how the world, especially the scientific world, likes to believe in things stripped of all meaning, while other more meaningful and logical explanations are rejected as fantasies or hallucinations. . . . The many discoveries continually being made . . . are no proof of the value of our age's science but—since generally speaking these discoveries are the result of factors other than those given by science—a proof that it divigates and digresses upon a constantly moving and changing wave.

R. A. Schwaller de Lubicz (1913/1986, pp. 9-10)

ABSTRACT

A series of four experiments were conducted to test Thalbourne's theory of *psychopraxia* (Thalbourne, 2000a). The thesis begins with an introduction to the field of parapsychology in the form of an argument against extreme skepticism (Chapter 1). It argues that skeptics have failed to produce cogent arguments to undermine the hypothesis that so-called paranormal phenomena exist. A review of the parapsychological meta-analyses (Chapters 2 and 3) provides supporting evidence of the hypothesis that paranormal effects do exist. By argument and by experimentation, the study of anomalous phenomena is deemed justifiable, thus, establishing a rationale for investigation of paranormal phenomena, with particular focus on the theory of *psychopraxia*.

Chapter 4 introduces the theory of psychopraxia—the term ‘psychopraxia’ is derived from two Greek words: *psyche*, which means ‘soul’ or ‘mind’ or ‘self’, and *praxia*, from which we get our word ‘practice’ (derived from *prattein*, meaning ‘to accomplish’ or ‘bring about’). The theory of psychopraxia is an attempt to unify both normal and paranormal psychology, and motor action and cognition, so that the conceptual distinction between (i) ESP and PK, and (ii) normal information-acquisition and normal motor control might be “eliminated” (Thalbourne, 1982, pp. 62-63) since both sides of the dichotomy are instances of action. The present thesis is an investigation of the theory from the perspective of paranormal phenomena only.

In Chapters 5 and 6, an experiment is described that uses an ancient Chinese form of divination known as the *I Ching*. The *I Ching* experiment was conducted to test the psychopractic hypothesis that the ESP-PK dichotomy can be unworkable in practice because either (a) an anomalous mental process (suggesting ESP), or (b) an anomalous physical process (suggesting PK), or both (a) and (b) might be involved in the *I Ching* process. Evidence was found that the *I Ching* may involve a paranormal component, but this process could not be explained exclusively as either ESP or PK. According to the theory of psychopraxia, the ostensibly paranormal anomaly identified in the *I Ching* process is described as exosomatic psychopraxia (i.e., the psychopractic function working outside the mind/body complex).

In Chapter 7 a forced-choice card-identifying experiment was conducted to test a basic proposition of the theory of psychopraxia known as the ‘pro attitude’, which is an orientation of the self towards a specific and preferred outcome or goal. Participants had to

locate 5 aces of spades in 5 'hands' of cards, while avoiding the aces of clubs. A significant negative relationship was found between spade hitting and club hitting, suggesting that 'compliant' pro attitudes and 'noncompliant' pro attitudes are incompatible. Post hoc evidence was also found that participants do not necessarily comply with the experimental protocol due to attitudes and dispositions that conflict with the protocol.

In Chapter 8, another forced-choice experiment was run on computer to test the concept of the pro attitude from a different perspective. Post hoc evidence was found that the pro attitude of 'converted' skeptics (i.e., skeptics who became believers) changed when an experimental treatment conducive to a change of pro attitude was introduced. There was also evidence that the pro attitude of 'entrenched' skeptics (i.e., skeptics who remained skeptics) did *not* change even when an experimental treatment ostensibly conducive to a change of pro attitude was introduced. The latter result suggests that the pro attitude may remain fixed over time.

In Chapter 9 a free-response study was conducted to test vision-impaired participants against sighted participants. The theory of psychopraxia argues that compensation for an adverse condition (such as blindness) may take the form of paranormal functioning. Evidence of paranormal effects was found, but no evidence was found that the vision-impaired had an advantage over sighted participants. In support of the compensation hypothesis, however, there was *suggestive* evidence that the totally blind performed better than all other participants combined.

The so-called 'necessary condition' is another basic proposition of the theory of psychopraxia. In all the above four experiments, evidence was found, in the relevant experiments, that certain conditions were necessary and sufficient in bringing about paranormal effects in the respective experimental situations: (1) High scoring on four personality factors as measured on Cattell's 16PF: Factor F (Liveliness), Factor H (Social Boldness), Factor EX (Extraversion), Factor IN (Independence); (2) Low scoring on Factor Q₄ (Tension); (3) Extreme scores on the Transliminality Scale (a measure of the tendency to experience psychological material coming into, and going out of consciousness); (4) Belief in paranormal processes; (5) Low scores on attitude towards horseracing; and (6) Relaxation.

Two other conditions were introduced in Chapter 10: (i) perceived simplicity of the apparatus and experimental procedure, and (ii) ease of the paranormal task. These two conditions and six 'states of mind' (i.e., 'freshness', 'sobriety', 'attentiveness', 'confidence', 'fitness,' and 'energy level') were hypothesized as being conditions

conducive to paranormal effects. In Chapter 11, suggestive evidence was found that simplicity of the experimental apparatus and procedure had a positive effect on paranormal performance. Two 'states of mind' ('freshness' and 'confidence') were found to correlate significantly with paranormal outcomes, but only in the *I Ching* experiment. These conditions were also found to be necessary and sufficient in bringing about hexagram hitting.

In Chapter 12, the theory of psychopraxia was argued as being important to the field of parapsychology because it offered (a) a philosophical critique on taken-for-granted assumptions about the nature of the paranormal, (b) relatively unambiguous terminology, and (c) a process-oriented approach to investigations of the paranormal by concentrating on conditions deemed necessary in bringing about paranormal effects. In its current form, the psychopraxia model needs clarification of its most crucial concepts ('self', 'pro attitude', and 'necessary conditions') before it can be regarded as a workable theory.