

# InPresence 0049: Is Parapsychology a Science?

with Jeffrey Mishlove

Video Transcript - *New Thinking Allowed* with Jeffrey Mishlove

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Recorded on March 30, 2018

Published to YouTube on April 19, 2018

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(00:24) Hello, I'm Jeffrey Mishlove and today I'd like to discuss the question of whether or not parapsychology is a science, a legitimate science. Now, I should state at the outset that I'm not much of an experimentalist myself. I haven't had great success in the realm of experimental science, although I did do experiments. Now also, I want to point out that there are different approaches to science. Not every science is an experimental science. There are observational sciences and there are other approaches to knowledge and truth besides science. There's the criminology approach, there's the approach of the courtroom, there's an approach based on education, on practice, on lore, on, for example, even poetry. Some would say that the deepest truths are discovered through poetry. They can't be expressed logically.

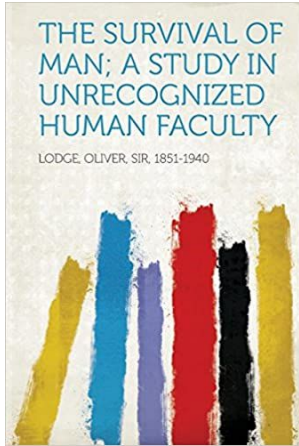
(01:30) Nevertheless, I think it's fair enough to say that in our day and age, science is one of the most important approaches to truth and there are people today, people who have been posting comments on some of my videos, suggesting that there is no real science associated with parapsychology, and naturally I beg to differ.

(01:56) For starters, let me say this: I have conducted some 14 interviews dealing with - in the *New Thinking Allowed* series, not even counting the old *Thinking Allowed* series - dealing with experimental work in parapsychology. I have created a special page on the [newthinkingallowed.com](http://newthinkingallowed.com) website where you can access these particular interviews. You'll see in the upper right hand corner of your screen right now, a link to that page with those interviews with experimental parapsychologists. I would urge anybody who really wants to dig into the experimental science behind this field, they should look into that.

(02:45) As I stated in the introductory video to the entire *New Thinking Allowed* series, my approach to parapsychology is unique. I don't think it's only an experimental field. I think it is a very holistic discipline with a history that can be traced back thousands of years. I think one needs to know a great deal about spiritual practice, about psychotherapy, about related cultural and philosophical issues as well as about the practical aspects of being a psychic practitioner, and about training psychic abilities. These are the non-experimental aspects that make parapsychology a complete field.

(03:33) But let's look at the history for a moment. The original British Society for Psychical Research was founded in 1882. The participants at that time included a number of the most prominent scientists of the era: Charles Richet, a Nobel Laureate in neurophysiology being one, Sir William Crookes, also was the president of the Royal Scientific Society in England, Sir Oliver Lodge, co-inventor with Marconi of the radio, a president of the British Scientific Society, were all amongst the founding members and early members of the Society for Psychical Research. Not to mention William

James, America's first great psychologist, very important philosopher, who was the president of the Society for Psychical Research, and as I recall, also the American Society for Psychical Research.



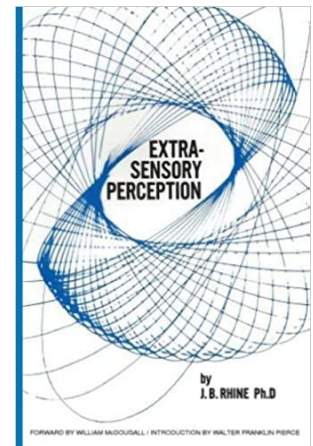
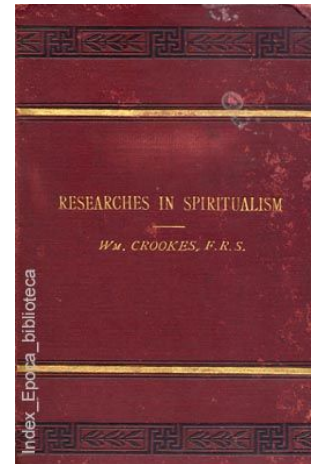
(04:37) Now, that work was largely based on the case study methodology. They approached the study of psychic phenomena the way a detective would approach solving a crime. It was a perfectly valid method and very rigorous. That continued for many many years up until about the 1930s, when Dr. J.B. Rhine at Duke University began developing the experimental approach in parapsychology using the most advanced statistics of his era and publishing experimental reports which

received worldwide attention. Dr. Rhine in his day was one of the most famous scientists on the planet, frankly.

(05:27) Naturally, it attracted a lot of criticism. But, I should say, stepping back as I recall, it was in 1903, when the Smithsonian Institute Magazine published an article about the progress in psychical research up to that point. They concluded, as I recall from having read the article, that well they weren't quite able to prove whether life after death had occurred or not, but surely they had established unquestionably the existence of what was then called thought

transference. Well, Rhine did the experimental work, card guessing studies, dice-throwing studies, to test for psychokinesis. There was a great deal of criticism.

(06:13) In 1949, Rhine published with his co-workers, including Gaither Pratt who I believe was the first author of this book, *Extrasensory Perception After Sixty Years*. In that book - it's a very important book historically - he listed every single criticism that had been published in the scientific literature about that research, and he addressed them and answered each one and pointed out that there were a number of studies that satisfied every single criticism, as of that point.



(06:51) In 1957, the Parapsychological Association was officially founded for people doing research, as it was spreading and the Rhinian paradigm was being followed up by scientists of different universities and colleges and research centers around the world. In 1969, the Parapsychology Association applied for membership as an affiliate organization of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

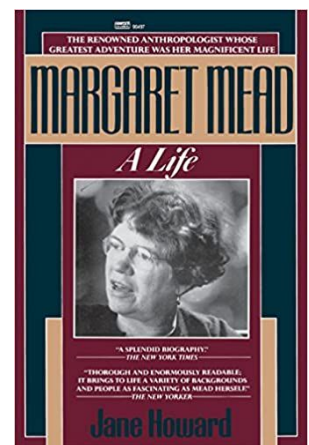
(07:28) This was a big deal, to be affiliated with the major scientific organization in the United States. There were some 300 science and engineering organizations that, at the time, were affiliates, but in order to achieve that status, any association had to go through a very elaborate application procedure. They collected dozens of scientific papers, they talked about symposia that were held in major universities and other scientific centers, they pointed out that nine members of the Parapsychological Association at that time were actually fellows of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Furthermore, the application had to be reviewed and approved by the council of the AAAS. That Council met at the Statler Hilton Ballroom in Boston in 1969 and took a vote. There was some controversy as there still is. Somebody stood up and said, "It's not a science, because we all know extrasensory perception doesn't exist."

(08:45) And then the great anthropologist Margaret Mead stood up and she said, "You know, the history of science is full of findings that people at one time said didn't exist. The Parapsychological Association has shown that they are using legitimate scientific methods that are accepted in all fields. They use double-blinds, they are rigorous. Therefore, I suggest we admit them." They took a vote at the time and it was overwhelmingly approved. That was in 1969, almost half a century ago.

(09:27) I would say since then, the question of whether parapsychology is or is not a science has been settled. That's no longer an issue. There are still people today who claim so. There are many people who, as I've pointed out in previous segments of the "In Presence" series, are militant about it. You often hear the skeptics say, "There isn't a shred of evidence." That's a phrase that is very common among skeptics, as if thousands of papers, at this point, and books and testimonials never existed, or simply don't count.

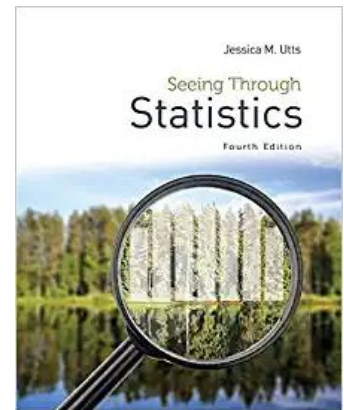
(10:07) Now, of course, there are controversies in science. There are people who are calling into question, many of the findings of the behavioral sciences in general - psychology, sociology, economics, are in turmoil about problems with replicability. These issues about questionable research practices in science, of course, affect parapsychology. But, let me put it quite simply: parapsychology is as valid a science and as strong a science as any other behavioral science.

(10:43) I'll give you an example that the statistician Jessica Utts likes to bring up. Jessica was recently president of the American Statistical Association and she noted most people take for granted that, for example, aspirin is useful to take to avoid heart attacks. Many, many thousands of people, maybe



millions take aspirin on a daily basis, a baby aspirin. I do in fact, recommended by my doctor. But, statistically speaking as Jessica points out, the evidence for extrasensory perception is much stronger than the evidence that aspirin will help you avoid heart attacks.

(11:30) So, I hope that those people who question the validity of parapsychology as a science will take the time and trouble to go through the research literature and consider thoughtfully. Maybe it's time to let go of rigid skepticism, that kind of insistence that there isn't a shred of evidence, is simply the mirror image of a similar segment in the population who take the Bible literally to be the word of God. I'll leave you with that thought. Thank you for being with me. (12:10)



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