PSI Is Real.

Mitchel, whose wife died from COVID, stiffly stood up from the couch to head in to bed when he saw her standing across the room. He blinked and looked again. She was still there. He approached the vision and he clearly heard, “at he bottom of the sewing box. At the bottom of the sewing box.” While I begin with an anecdote, and they abound in the real world, I’ll examine the subject of psi from a scientific perspective.

There is a considerable body of research on the topic of psi. Much of this research is mathematically dense. Research that criticizes psi is often mathematically difficult too. My effort tries to avoid this. Still, once carefully examines the numbers a clear case can be made that psi exists and can be measured using accepted scientific methodology. The greatest difficulty for critics of psi is that psi findings threaten to undermine materialist tenets that science should have abandoned previously. I should make clear at the outset that this paper is not an effort to revive a rebarbative version of dualism. Yet, I will still contend that a materialist confusion is instrumental in many of the criticisms of psi experiments and the critic’s skepticism that these experiments could provide an honest view of reality.

Let’s take a brief tour through a body of evidence for the existence of psi from a variety of avenues. Unfortunately for me, there is mountain of research on the topic, but after analyzing the quality of the research as honestly as I can, I will rely in this paper on those treatments that are most prestigious and balanced in their efforts. For those who may claim selection bias, while the sources I carefully examined were outnumbered and surrounded by the critics of psi research, the quality of the selected research is superior to that of the critics.

One of the most respected current studies on psi came from Daryl Bem —a prestigious researcher in psychology. Published in 2011, it detailed the results of 9 experiments published in *the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* that purported a demonstration that “an individual’s cognitive and affective responses can be influenced by randomly selected stimulus events that do not occur until after his or her responses have already been made and recorded, a generalized variant of the phenomenon traditionally denoted by the term precognition”(Bem 2011). Everything necessary to replicate his experiments were made available for researchers. What followed become a collection of 90 experiments in 33 laboratories in 14 countries. Since the experiments used the protocols from his original work the findings were analyzed through a met-analysis of data using the Bayesian approach. The results were far beyond what science holds as a decisive standard. When they took out Bem’s original studies and calculated the numbers again it was still beyond decisive that psi exists (Bem 2016).

Let’s describe his experimental methodology in detail. In the experimental protocols each participant finished 36 trials in a laboratory setting. They were presented two curtains on the computer screen and were to guess which covered a gray screen and which covered a picture. The experimenters upped the ante by including 18 erotic pictures and 18 non-erotic visuals. Randomization of reward images were independent of each other. After each participant’s guess they received their look. They used a computer to randomly assign the image and gray picture again and they’d repeat the process. The reward for a correct guess was the image; poor choices were reward by gray.

Participants had to complete two short questionnaires that examined their belief in psi and to uncover their desire for pictures over gray screens. Participants were given relaxation and mind clearing techniques before the trial. They were then removed from the scientists into a separate room and fitted with headphones that played white noise as they made their predictions. Participants should have been rewarded with erotica at a rate of 25%---a number that many scientists and mathematicians would expect without psi, allowing them to claim a waste of time and effort for all involved. The numbers supporting psi though were clear, and compelling—not 25% for erotic hits, but about 33%. The 90 other research studies that tried to replicate his studies found results while varied, which one would expect, mathematically supported his original study. Since Bem and other researchers found that the numbers clearly supported the psi hypothesis the scientists who hated their results generally ignored them, and occasionally joined forces in aligning themselves against accepting them due to shortcomings in methodology that I am, even with their help, unable to discover.

Rather than stopping here, some further evidence for psi from a variety of other sources might be helpful. There exists a well-written collection of a met-analysis of psi research that preexists the work by Bem by Radin in The Conscious Universe. Those who are interested in being mocked by materialist scientists can also find a rich and spooky trove of work by the CIA gleaned through FOIA (readingroom 2004), and numerous studies from Stanford University. Unfortunately for X-Files fans, all those who claimed special abilities that were investigated in The Conscious Universe (Radin 2009) were either fraudulent or deluded. Still, a smidgen is found throughout the universe through the scientific application of met-analyses of sound, scholarly research. I’m making a case that psi does not appear to be uniform throughout the society at large, but it is closer to artistic talent in the sense that some people seem to have more than others. No individual seems to have cornered the market. (I have little aptitude for art or psi.) One can also study with considerably more difficulty the more secret work by the Soviets, eastern Europeans, Chinese, and other world intelligence agencies, and their research into psi. It's especially comical when scientists bound by dialectical materialism try to make sense of what they discover, or maybe this says something about my sense of humor. Evidence from disciplines as far removed from academic settings as casino research demonstrate surprising correlations. In fact, the correlation between payouts and lunar cycles is undeniable, and downright spooky. This is true and well researched, even though the bulk of the numbers come from casinos that are far more concerned with getting their 7% than occasional psi, which they cannot effectively control (Radin 2009). Evidence for psi in Yoga and Buddhist practices that can be measured may also be included (Meditation 2015). While the previously documented site focuses on health benefits, there are numerous sites make a case for more unusual psi advantages that can be likewise measured empirically. (I did discover in my research that the treatment of psi by the academic community is extremely varied across cultures.) This is not intended to be an exhaustive collection as much as suggestive. I exclude in this analysis idiosyncratic events like Mitchel’s in our opening.

Let us briefly list and examine the main methodological complaints leveled against the two most well-respected published psi researchers Bem and Radin, in particular. These complaints are numerous, as you’ll discover below:

1. Selective Reporting or File Drawer Effect (Researchers who discover no psi do not publish). This claim strains credibility. In English language journals there have been counted 62 published researchers, 309 experiments, more than 50,000 participants. You’d need 46 unreported studies, all showing null results, for each one of those mentioned above, to reduce the overall significance of original findings to chance (replication 2018). This source also held a Bayesian approach of a sort I find difficult to employ in the manner they suggest, which I criticize in the following section.
2. Using inappropriate mathematics by Bem and Radin. These critics claim that you cannot add up the percentages of correct answers in appropriately controlled studies and then use a met-analyses to see evidence of psi. They desire a Bayesian approach instead where the critics’ own belief about the unlikelihood of psi is the starting point, and then they try to outdo each other in their adamant rejections to what the actual numbers make clear. While the Bayesian approach is unquestionably valid. You cannot honestly use it in the manner suggested. Therefore, this is not compelling criticism of psi either.
3. Psychological studies need a major change in practices by now treating stimuli statistically as a random factor as they already treat participants. These psi findings fly in the face of materialist ontology; therefore, the accepted experimental methodology must be undependable. I do not agree that we need to change experimental protocols. Most researchers not engaged in this particular battle on psi are not persuaded either.
4. The numbers of Bem and Radin are too compelling. They must be cheating somehow. Therefore, the 62 researcher scholars that contributed more than 300 experiments on the topic of psi must be and large in on the conspiracy too. I’ll also pass on this one.
5. Luck explains the findings. For Bem, for example, to have been right by luck is one chance in 53,612,565,445 (Bem 2016)—a poor wager.
6. Generous rounding of numbers by Bem is suggested by some, but even his fierce critics find this wanting.
7. Multiple dependent variables, failure to report conditions, harking, exclusion of data, snooping at incoming data, and stopping data collection early, and choosing the wrong participants (only picking people with wizard hats?), may be a problem for some studies but are not a serious deficiency in Bem’s work. I lump these together simply to save time and effort.
8. Another questionable practice that was examined involved only reporting successful studies that produced a significant result. This is like complaining that studies that demonstrate well know effects should be published just as often as those where the unexpected or curious outcomes are discovered. Publishing compelling discoveries is common practice. This is how it is expected to work, but critics complain about psi studies in particular. I (and most serious researchers) find no reason to challenge the accepted norms of scientific publication standards simply because they applied to the efforts of Bem and Radin.
9. It is also suggested that psi researchers must be frauds and liars. This is a far flung and grand conspiracy for little gain. Therefore, this seems like a low order of probability.

The critics of psi finally claim that there is no way to make sense of psi, so it must be wrong. I contend that science has uncritically accepted a materialistic metaphysic which has been taught as unassailable truth. While it could be used as a successful ontology previously, recent empirical advancements, especially in the domain of particle physics have so seriously undermined this metaphysical foundation that it is dire need of replacement in contemporary applications. This is addressed in my essay “Why Philosophical Materialism is Mistaken”.

Where does this leave us? The studies into psi prove that something curious is happening. The effect is real and significant. This is based on clear evidence. Anecdotal examples abound as well, and they are often personally compelling. But, as stated above, my position here is based on replicated studies that are hard to dismiss.

Let me share some insights that occur to me as I conclude. I personally suspect that any random numbers that are generated by a computer in these studies are not random in the true sense, as computers are indeed physical systems, after all. This is true in the sense that a coin flip is bound by the laws of physics, but while this statement is true, coin flips and computers can be honestly used to generate fair outcomes. Computer generated numbers are undeniably trustworthy for the psi experiments as well as other respected scientific endeavors.

Since methodologies like Bem’s are sound, they make a mess of scientific materialism. Since scientific materialism at the large-scale level has worked so well for so long, scientists have assumed it as a foundation for science, and this assumption may prove their undoing.

Backward causation is implied by some psi experiments, and this undermines the second law of thermodynamics, which scientists were especially fond of. (Unfortunately, quantum physics has undermined this law, as well.) Bem’s experiment detailed previously does not have as clear a result as is often assumed either. Once psi is demonstrated all sorts of bizarre possibilities are unleashed upon empirical foundations. Perhaps the precognition of the participants may not be the singular cause. Perhaps the computers are conspiring to alter the outcome for reasons that are presently unclear. Perhaps the experimenter or the participants are using their psi to influence the computer. Maybe the researchers are unintentionally employing their psi to influence the participants. Perhaps the line between experimenter and participants is so undermined by psi that it cannot be easily disentangled. The belief in psi makes a mess of materialistic science (Frontiers 2020).

Historically, findings that threaten the foundations of the established order in science go through a process that precedes their acceptance. The first stage contends that the findings are impossible. The believers of the new evidence are liars, crazy, or simply misled. Stage two admits there’s something there, but it is not especially noteworthy. The third stage holds that contradictory evidence is stronger than the new notion. Stage four is where the new belief is finally accepted as true. This typically occurs when the established critics of the new notion retire. Stage five happens when new scientists claim to have known the new notion was true the whole time. The final stage is usually something like this, “It was my idea at the beginning.” I expect the same pattern to repeat here. Science is a human endeavor and people do not like to consider evidence that contravenes their beliefs. Since the notion of psi is challenging, the acceptance of psi is barely beginning in its movement through these steps. Science provides answers that are demonstrably true about the world. Many people have well deserved confidence in its findings. Inconvenient conclusions, like evidence for psi, make scientists’ lives more difficult; it challenges their foundations, and is likely to lead to concomitant difficulties throughout the scientific enterprise. The best researchers in science are already trying to grapple with making sense of a real effect measured in the best psi studies.

Recall Mitchel. Perhaps after hearing his wife’s words he looked at the bedroom mirror, and her reflection was nowhere to be seen, a bit like the vampires of legend. He looked back to find her gone altogether. Although his hip was giving him a bad time, he nervously dug around, eventually finding her sewing box where he found a cache of money under a bunch of other stuff. She must have secretly squirreled extra cash away for decades. He pondered half the night as to whether to tell his friends and family. Although he was not especially religious, he figured that they’d find solace in the story. He eventually decided. “Nope. The kids might suspect I’ve lost touch, and they might decide I’d be safer in a rest home. There’s no need to fess up. I guess I maybe somehow unconsciously knew about the stash the whole time. Better safe than sorry.” He had no idea that this type of event is extremely common (Journal of Death and Dying 2023). So he kept quiet, but he somehow felt a little guilty.

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