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Parapsychology Update

At least one member of Congress, Senator Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.), has publicly expressed an interest in parapsychology, but apparently there are quite a few others sufficiently curious to ask the Congressional Research Service (CRS) to report on the status of such research.* (CRS does not reveal names of requesters.)

* "Research into 'psi' Phenomena: Current Status and Trends of Congressional Concern.'

The report, completed last summer, carries on at some length about the potential educational, military, anticrime, and health applications if psychic phenomena are ever understood well enough to be replicable.

Currently, says the report, a paltry \$ 500,000 a year is going into psi research in the United States, almost all from private sources. In contrast, research is more or less thriving in the Soviet Union where speculation puts the funding at tens of millions of dollars. However, the only recognized application is dowsing, which is taught to mineralogists and geologists at the Omsk Polytechnical Institute. The People's Republic of China is said to have developed a fairly recent interest in parapsychology, including psychic healing.

In the United States, the field has been chiefly explored by psychologists, but physicists have become increasingly involved and are employing the latest technologies in an effort to detect the slightest effects of mind on matter. Most research is devoted either to extrasensory perception (ESP) or telekinesis--the ability to move objects. Currently, extensive efforts are being made to correlate psychic ability with personality variables or with particular altered states of consciousness, according to the report. The prime location for this, says the report's author Christopher Dodge, is the Maimonides Medical Center in New York.

Another major thrust has been the use of random number generators to seek statistically significant psi-induced deviations. Robert Jahn, dean of Engineering at Princeton University, has been doing this for some years, and claims weak but persistent positive results. Jahn and several other engineers are increasingly interested in possible psi interactions with computers, examining, for example, the possible disturbance of the memory functions of single microelectronic chips.

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So far, the most striking results appear to be coming from remote viewing experiments. At Stanford Research Institute physicist Harold Puthoff is conducting double-blind experiments where a person is sent out to engage in an activity and the subject is asked to visualize where the person is. The investigators are claiming a 70 percent success rate.

The report notes that there is "no conclusive physical theory of psi' phenomena, but that is not for lack of trying. Theoreticians have found explanations based on electromagnetic or sound waves inadequate and are looking for more 'holistic' paradigms. An extension of quantum mechanics to cover the laws of consciousness is one idea; another extends the concept of hyperspace to postulate an added dimension in human experience.

The report concludes with a glowing catalog of all the fields of human endeavor that could be enhanced by the harnessing of psi abilities. It makes no mention of the appalling social disruption such powers could also bring.

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