

study at first hand, and to whom he gives credit for much of the inspiration for this book. Among the most interesting of her cases was one in which she was able to give an accurate description of an object in a sealed box the contents of which nobody involved had ever seen, and another in which she was led blindfolded to a modern building and asked to describe what had previously occupied the site, giving the right answer: a circus (pp. 130–131).

Her comment on how she obtains information—“as if she were remembering it” (p. 157) leads to an exploration of a huge amount of evidence for the clairvoyance–memory analogy, from ancient Greek mythology to the US military remote viewers, cases of apparent reincarnation (in the sense of recollection of somebody else’s memories), and of course Proust’s famously evocative mouthful of *madeleine* teacake. “The facts are there”, Méheust writes (p. 241), “it is the implications that rapidly escape us”.

He sets off in pursuit of those implications as only a well-informed philosopher can, concluding that memory “overflows the spatial-temporal limits considered insuperable by Western common sense” (p. 242). So, of course, does clairvoyance, and it is good to be reminded of the implications of the abundance of evidence for it, such as the fact that consciousness is something infinitely more extensive than we have thought, and that a gifted clairvoyant can tap into the past, present and future consciousnesses of others.

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THE SCIENCE DELUSION: FREEING THE SPIRIT OF ENQUIRY by Rupert Sheldrake. Coronet (Hodder & Stoughton), London, 2012. 392 pp. £15.00. ISBN 978 1 444 72792 0, eBook 978 1 444 72795 1

While reviewing his life in science, Sheldrake remarks in the Preface to his new book that “I have become increasingly convinced that the sciences have lost much of their vigour, vitality and curiosity. Dogmatic ideology, fear-based conformity and institutional inertia are inhibiting scientific creativity.” He declares having written his book “because I believe that the sciences will be more exciting and engaging when they move beyond the dogmas that restrict free enquiry and imprison imagination”.

This view might seem odd to a public that sees science as the exciting hunt for the Higgs boson, space exploration, or the discovery of extraordinary life forms in ocean depths. Members of the SPR are likely to belong to a smaller public that is ready to take Sheldrake’s point: when it comes to ideas of the independence of mind—even its very existence—then restriction of free enquiry and imprisoned imagination become crushingly evident. Psychical research has suffered from inhibiting ideology throughout its history, notably “the claim

that all reality is material or physical. There is no reality but material reality. Consciousness is a by-product of the physical activity of the brain." In such an ideology, psi cannot be said to be more than illusion.

Sheldrake sagely remarks that "these beliefs are powerful, not because most scientists think about them critically but because they don't". Is science a belief system, or is it a method of enquiry? he asks, and his answer regarding actual practice favours the former. He identifies "ten core beliefs" taken for granted by most scientists. These beliefs are then turned inside out by converting them into critical questions which require a measured answer. Most of the book is taken up with this questioning. The core beliefs most directly relevant to psychical research are: minds are inside heads, and are nothing but the activities of brains (turned around as, are minds confined to brains?), and unexplained phenomena like telepathy are illusory (turned around as, are psychic phenomena illusory?).

On the mind/brain issue, Sheldrake cites the observation of Max Velmans that when asked to point to an object, we point to that object in space, not to a supposed image somewhere in our brain. He suggests that "the outward projection of visual images is both psychological *and* physical. It occurs through perceptual fields." The concept of fields is central to Sheldrake's work: "vision takes place through extended perceptual fields, which are both within the brain and stretch out beyond it . . . When I look at a person or an animal, my perceptual field interacts with the field of the person or animal I am looking at, enabling my gaze to be detected." The last comment is empirically supported by the demonstration that people react significantly to the gaze of someone else, and so prepares the way for the chapter on psychic phenomena. "Our experience certainly suggests that our minds are extended beyond our brains," he writes, and extension is also held to occur in time: "Minds are extended beyond brains not only in space but also in time, and connect us to our own pasts through memory and to virtual futures, among which we choose."

This leads to the next chapter, on psychic phenomena. He notes that:-

Psychic phenomena are normal in the sense that they are common: for example, most people have made other people turn round by staring at them, or had seemingly telepathic experience with telephone calls. . . . But because these experiences do not fit in with the materialist mind-in-brain theory, they are classified as paranormal, literally meaning 'beyond the normal'. In this sense, 'normal' is defined not by what actually happens, but by the assumptions of materialists . . . If psi phenomena exist, which I think they do, they are normal, not paranormal; natural, not supernatural. They are part of human nature and animal nature, and they can be investigated scientifically.

Therefore on the sceptics' slogan that 'extraordinary claims demand extraordinary evidence' he maintains, "the *sceptics'* claim is extraordinary and demands extraordinary evidence". Yet "Where is the extraordinary evidence that most people are deluded about their own experience? Sceptics can only fall back on generic arguments about the fallibility of human judgement—or, rather, other people's judgement." The chapter has a valuable summary of evidence for animal as well as human telepathy, and human and animal premonitions. It closes with his encounters with sceptics: "In almost every case, they were not only ignorant of the evidence, but uninterested in it." Richard

Dawkins comes off particularly badly as holding a grossly unscientific attitude regarding the importance of evidence, especially appalling as he is a spokesman for the 'public understanding of science'.

The main section of the book reviewing the 'core beliefs' is preceded by a well-referenced chapter that reviews the institutionalisation of science and the formation of central dogmas and a church of scientism, with the establishment of a deeply nihilistic ultimate worldview. "Mechanistic science in itself gives no reason to suppose that there is any point in life, or purpose in humanity, or that progress is inevitable. Instead it asserts that the universe is ultimately purposeless, and so is human life." Secular humanism has attempted to introduce a positive element, but Sheldrake points out that it is a faith, one that arose within a Judaeo-Christian culture, and "is in many ways a Christian heresy, in which man has replaced God". For a level look at the state of world thinking under the impact of institutionalised science this chapter can hardly be bettered.

Two chapters follow the treatment of the core beliefs (namely: everything is essentially mechanical; all matter is unconscious; the total amount of matter and energy is always the same; the laws of nature are fixed; nature is purposeless; all biological inheritance is material; minds are inside heads; memories are stored as material traces; phenomena like telepathy are illusory; mechanistic medicine is the only kind that really works). The penultimate chapter focuses on the situation that "Through studying scientists in action, sociologists of science have revealed that scientists are indeed like other people . . . Scientists are often dogmatic and prejudiced when confronted with evidence or ideas that go against their beliefs. They usually ignore what they do not want to deal with." Experimenter effects and expectations of individual researchers are reviewed, and cases cited of experimenters unwilling to test these effects because of the fear of mind-generated contamination of experimental results. A counter-measure of double-blind experimentation is shown to be much more widely practised in parapsychology than in any other branch of science. Scepticism is seen as "a healthy part of normal science but is often used as a weapon in defence of politically or ideologically motivated points of view," something that Sheldrake can speak on with much personal authority. This brand of sceptic is not seeking the truth because "they believe they already know the truth".

The final chapter is headed "Scientific Futures". Use of the plural indicates Sheldrake's view of 'science' becoming multifarious, no longer the monolithic face of mechanistic science that "appeared to provide a simple unified view of nature" rooted in nineteenth-century physics. This does not lessen the authority of science, a situation which becomes the main concern of this chapter. He notes, "The authoritarian mentality is most obvious in relation to psychic phenomena and alternative medicine. These are treated as heresies, rather than valid areas for rational enquiry." This is thought to be "a relic of the ethos of absolute religious and political power when mechanistic science was born". This stifles debate: "debates are very rare. Debates are not yet part of the culture of science." Yet "As the sciences free themselves from the constrictions of materialism, many new possibilities arise. And many of them raise new possibilities for dialogues with religious traditions." An example of fruitful

exploration is the improved health of people with religious affiliations. “New discoveries are more likely to happen if we venture off the well-trodden paths of conventional research, and if we open up questions that have been suppressed by dogmas and taboos.”

This leads to the matter that is the title of the book, *The Science Delusion*. Sheldrake writes, “The delusion that science has already answered the fundamental questions chokes off the spirit of enquiry. . . . The materialist agenda was once liberating but is now depressing. Those who believe in it are alienated from their own experience; they are cut off from all religious traditions; and they are prone to suffer from a sense of disconnection and isolation.” It might seem unlikely that an individual submerged in the materialist agenda would feel this dysphoria; it takes a stepping off the established path to take a broader view. Hopefully this book will prove to be helpful in giving a shove off this path. The rather polemical tone of the book’s title might lead the reader to expect a more compact set of reasons in the closing chapter as to why the word ‘delusion’ is attached to ‘science’. According to an interview with Sheldrake published in *The Observer*, 5 February 2012, the title was actually the publisher’s idea—another case where a publisher has attached an inappropriate title to a book. The title in America is *Science Set Free*, which Sheldrake thought was better.

This is a user-friendly book, clearly written and with a useful summary at the end of every chapter, together with some “questions for materialists”. These questions might help to focus the mind on the situation in the sciences, a situation that Sheldrake is at pains to show is in need of a new period of enlightenment.

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PARANORMAL CASE FILES OF GREAT BRITAIN. VOLUME 1: MALCOLM ROBINSON  
INVESTIGATES by Malcolm Robinson. Mayfair Books, 2010. 342 pp.  
£14.99. ISBN 978 1 907126 06 2

Malcolm Robinson is a life-long investigator of the paranormal and was the founder of Strange Phenomena Investigations (SPI) in 1979. His first paranormal experiences were as a child of 7 or so in the 1960s when he saw a pair of levitating shoes. This event was one of many that convinced Robinson of the existence of the paranormal and ghosts, but he wanted to know more: Were the things he was experiencing real? What did they mean? These and other questions prompted him to found SPI, which, as its title suggests, is an investigative group, often relying heavily on the input of mediums, an approach some may disagree with.

This current work largely draws on cases investigated by Robinson and colleagues. After an initial background introduction to Robinson’s experiences there is a small potted history of the group and then the real meat of the book starts. We are straight into 180 pages of investigations from the files of SPI. Some of the reports are given a single page and others are gone into in greater