

# **The science of magic: A parapsychological model of psychic ability in the context of magical will**

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Crowley defined magic as the art and science of causing change in conformity with will. There has been much written about the art of magic, but very little of the abstract science of that art has taken on truly empirical edicts. The following paper describes a parapsychological model of psychic ability in terms of its intrinsically magical undercurrent, thereby providing a bridge between science and magic that has seldom been remarked upon, save for occasional discussion (e.g. Roney-Dougal 1991). The model, termed 'psi-mediated instrumental response' (PMIR), seeks to explain the unconscious everyday use of 'psi' (precognition, telepathy, clairvoyance, or psychokinesis) as a means of serving the needs and desires of the organism. While the model is based on the principles and research of cognitive, behavioural, and para-psychology, it is intended that by extending the inferences of this model and by subtly re-orientating it to a magical perspective it can serve as a useful

psychology of magical operation, or an aspect of it at least, in a truly scientific sense.

## **Solve...**

Coming from a purely psycho-biological perspective Rex Stanford initially put forward his PMIR model of psychic functioning in 1974, and then gently tweaked it and supported it over a period of successive publications spanning sixteen years, but fundamentally altered it little (Stanford 1974a, 1974b, 1977, 1982, 1990). Synchronously, with the publication of SSOTBME by Ramsey Dukes 1974 also heralded the formation of the bare principles of chaos magic (Dukes 2000; Illuminates of Thanteros 2002), to which Stanford's propositions have an uncanny resemblance, as will be demonstrated, although, PMIR corresponds most closely with the works of Austin Osman Spare, which preceded them both. Nevertheless, from the lack of corresponding literature it is apparent that Stanford was not even covertly familiar with such work (a matter confirmed by personal communication – Stanford 2005), nor occultists with his, despite the similarities. His model, while even now remaining somewhat obscure, straddled the theoretical any-man's land of the period by relying largely on the then newly flourishing foundations of cognitive science while simultaneously representing vestiges of the aged and declining school of behaviourism. The behaviourist aspect is apparent from the model's name, which offers the concept of there being an 'instrumental response' to a given stimulus, albeit in this case the stimulus, desire, is internal. Furthermore, the corresponding behavioural response to the stimulus need not be physical either but, according to Stanford's model, can be psychic too, as in psychokinesis – the ability to affect matter directly with the mind.

The model also assumes a particularly evolutionary flavour by considering psychic ability as an adaptive function, which is made available to serve the needs of the individual. Taking this needs-serving function of psi as a basic assumption allows the model to offer a useful account of *why* psi works, and this acts as a forerunner to explaining *how* it works. By making the theoretical assumption that psi is need-serving Stanford was able to break down the concept of need into some testable psychological mechanics. For example, according to PMIR, the primary motivating factor for psi to occur depends on both 'need strength' and 'need relevance'. Such that the greater need there is for psi to serve the organism then the more likely it is to occur. So, for instance, though somewhat banally, your need to stay alive is probably strong enough to warrant your using psi to find a restaurant when you get hungry, but the relevance of the food incentive may prevent you from detecting a greasy fast-food outlet when a tastier option also lies within equal reach.

For Stanford (1974a), the needs-driven supposition also incorporated desires under the rubric of needs, although he later altered the terminology of this proposition to additionally include mere 'dispositions' (Stanford 1977), thereby covering a far looser range of motivating factors, semantically at least. Yet, for all its inclusivity of expression, by 1977 Stanford had constricted his earlier generosity and redefined his 'dispositions' so that they only actually amounted to biological tissue needs, learned needs, and conditioned responses, thereby distilling human desires down to a rather reactive robotic brew of behavioural drives. However, this quite Skinnerian view rather chokes the spirit out of being, and it need not be fundamental to the PMIR model. If we instead focus on Stanford's original central concept of

desire, rather than the purely behaviourist images of need that came later, the model can be seen as a useful psychological framework for the magical function of the will. By considering PMIR's needs and desires in equivalence to the will of the magician, Stanford's following psychological portrait of the psychic organism takes on a wholly thelemic hue. Thelemic, that is, primarily in the sense that it relates to magical will, and less in the sense of the Crowley-ian magical current, because here I have chosen to parallel the model mostly to the magical doctrines of Austin Osman Spare.

“What is desired of the Self is given – eventually. The desire is sufficient.” (Spare 1921, p 3)

In essence, what Stanford's model suggests is that desire is the sole requisite for ensuring that the organism tacitly and psychically attracts its desire towards itself, and itself towards its desire. Be it through the psychic reception of information relevant to the desire, or through the psychic exertion of one's will upon the environment. By this means we see that 'need strength' and 'need relevance' are psychological correlates of psychic attraction. Somewhat like magnetic metrics for magical manifestation of the will, if you will. The greater the desire, and the more relevant the object or event is to that desire, then the more likely it is that there will be a psychic response to ensure the two unite. In an evolutionary sense this is born out of the needs basic to the survival of the organism, such as sensing immanent danger, or preventing an impending accident from occurring. On a fundamental level though, this equates to the satisfaction of the needs and desires of the individual, and here we see that this 'goal-orientated' concept of psi is literally

‘thelemic’ in nature because it defines a psychic reality contingent upon the will alone.

“...That which is indeliberate is the more vital and is will.”

(Spare 1921, p 7)

The twin functions of the magician’s perception and will, which Carroll (1987) used to define Spare’s *Kia*, could here equate to psi. Yet, the real harmony in equating PMIR to magical divination and manifestation comes through the model’s following assumptions. The first of which stipulates that no conscious awareness of the psychic act, or awareness even of the desire, is required for the PMIR to occur. Stanford also proposed that psi works through the most economical means available, because it serves a purpose by attending to the needs of the individual. That is, the psychic agent may well be an unwitting wizard, but furthermore, the PMIR actually works better where the individual is unwise to its action. To this end, Stanford offered that humans tend to react more successfully to their unconscious primary drives rather than their conscious cognitions, an idea which is supported by the notion established in cognitive psychology of ‘implicit knowledge’ commonly driving behaviour. For Stanford, the individual reacts to psi information in the same way as they would react to subliminal or other ‘implicit’ information. So conscious awareness of psi-accessed information, for example, is redundant if the function of that information can be better utilised unconsciously, and therefore directly, through a ‘psi-mediated instrumental response’. Or quite simply put, you don’t have to know psi is working for it to work, and it actually works better if you don’t, because there’s less interference that way. The same might be said of magic.

## **Receptive magic – perceiving the web outside of time and space**

Focusing here on the case of ‘receptive psi’ serving the organism (telepathy, clairvoyance, or precognition, terms that have, perhaps misleadingly, been called extra sensory perception, ESP), psi is proposed to function better unconsciously because the conscious cognition of the psi information may easily get confabulated and distorted by ongoing cognitions, and this is obviously counterproductive. Expressing this in data language, the information is more likely to become degraded by data noise if it becomes conscious and, according to Stanford, it would most often be better responded to instead by unconscious alterations to behaviour, memory, thinking, emotions, or even desires. This sits comfortably with the techniques used by the practitioners of the divinatory arts, who may endeavour to clear their mind of conscious thoughts before they scry, or at least settle them, yet most will also use tools flexible enough to channel through the subtleties of the signal before they even attempt to cognise it. Elsewhere, in parapsychological research, free association of one’s stream of consciousness in an altered state seems to be the favoured method of eliciting divine information (as in the Ganzfeld method), although this also gives a lot of superfluous verbal flotsam. Yet, bypassing the conscious mind completely by tapping directly into the unconscious psi information has been superbly demonstrated by research recently demonstrating the apparent psychic anticipation of arousing images. This psychic anticipation was indicated solely by psychophysiological markers, such as galvanic skin conductance, a general measure of physiological arousal (e.g. Beirman 2000; Radin 1997). This research has shown a small but quite distinct

*bodily* presentiment to arousing stimuli several seconds before their delivery, strongly supporting Stanford's unconscious psi hypothesis.

Going a little beyond Stanford's vision, others have noted that the conscious awareness of psi information has the added hazard of having to contend with that most ingrained rationalist abhorrence common to modern wo/man, the fear of psi (e.g. Braude 1993; Tart 1984). Given all the terrifying psychotic implications of psychic transparency that are loaded within the idea of our being latently omniscient, and then mixed with the quite blasphemous possibility that we may also be latently omnipotent too, the fear of psi would seem a well buried yet determined phobia of our own psychic abilities, no doubt common to many, even magicians. Given this fear of psi, any conscious psi cognitions, assuming they can be recognised as such, would cause a 'cognitive dissonance' between subconscious belief and experience in all but the most mentally liberated individuals, rendering the information useless. The logic in this cognitive dissonance concept combined with Stanford's cognitive distortion of conscious psychic information seem jointly more than capable in accounting for why only the most extreme incidences of psi-information make themselves known spontaneously to the individual, such as in crisis apparitions (e.g. visions of absent relatives as they die).

"Magic, like Science is reluctant to shatter our basic beliefs."

(Dukes, 2000 p 24)

However, in the usual case, Stanford proposed that everyday psi-information attempts to satisfy its desire-driven goal by expressing itself through unconscious behaviour, thought, desires, memories, emotions, and even psychokinesis, in such a way as to be maximally economical.

To do so, the PMIR manifests itself through ‘ready responses’, i.e. processes which are very likely to happen, so that no major deviations in conscious action are necessary, merely the subtle alteration of a normal impending action. This occurs through various mechanisms such as unconscious timing changes, so, for example, that you may unconsciously speed yourself up to ‘serendipitously’ bump into someone you hoped to see. Alternatively, the response may be expressed through one’s memory, by forgetting to do something, or remembering something else, or it may happen through an unconsciously psi-mediated mistake. Additionally, the PMIR may exert itself through association, either made emotionally or through a train of thought. Psi-information may even be best expressed through unconscious psychokinesis. But only in the extreme case, as explained already, does psi-information naturally manifest itself to the conscious mind. Through these means ‘magic’ occurs very much more frequently than is ever actually noticed by the casual observer, and this resembles Dukes’ (2000, p 78) point that, “we might not see magic only because we are taught not to believe in it”. Here perhaps, knowledge of PMIR would help the aspiring mage to spot when such subtle magic is happening.

“Instead of defying causality, modern Magic tends to stretch it slowly, within the operator’s subjectively conceived world”  
(Dukes 2000, p 23)

For Stanford, what mattered most was that the PMIR occurs economically, and for that, it is best expressed unconsciously and in accordance with the individual’s current action. This concept may have more accord with the tacit practicalities of reality than with established occult doctrine concerning the economics of magic, but it has pragmatic

appeal for the demands of both the will, and the imagination, if magic expresses itself often through mundane and invisible means, save for the end results. This is akin to the Robert Anton Wilson adage that 'reality is what you can get away with', and lets face it, it should be a damn sight easier to get away with profound, but little, tweaks in the normal construction of reality than straining to summon an enormous visible Cthulhu-type entity to eat your foe in the living room. Not that I'm being pessimistic about the bounds of possibility I just recognise that magical manifestation in general, and any ordinary unwitting magic particularly, is seemingly limited by a Reality Violation Principle. This, I propose, is nothing more than the sense that whatever one wills or desires to happen can only occur within the limitations of one's will and imagination. Given that these are suitably focused and capable of completely convincing the mind of the magician, gaining their absolute belief, and possibly those of others involved, then theoretically anything is possible. But it's a far tougher job cutting across the grain of perceived consensus reality than it is working with it. This idea is self-evident in the peculiar and often unexpected way that desire tends to manifest itself magically. As noted by Dukes (2000, p 23) "Nowadays the Magician...is unlikely to find his spells will defy causality – e.g. instead of materialising gold coins, he might have 'luck' on a state lottery". It is probably easier to change consensus reality enough for the magic to occur than it is to transgress its integrity, and this is the basis of creating temporary yet complete magical belief during group ritual.

## **Expressive magic – the manifestation of desire**

"The desire determines, and no later belief will alter it one whit." (Spare 1921, p 6)

Applying his model to so called ‘active psi’, Stanford (1974b) looked to research of spontaneous cases of psychokinesis (PK) primarily, and found these reflected the same unwitting expression of desire specified by his model for receptive psi. In one-off cases, such as the stopping of a clock at the time of someone’s death, the PK appears to be unconsciously concocted, yet always expressive of something relevant or important to the person involved. In cases of recurrent spontaneous psychokinesis (known as RSPK), such as so called poltergeist activity, there is always a central person around which the activity occurs, and also ceases in their absence. In such instances, the poltergeist activity is seen as the expression of suppressed hostility towards others, which, because it rarely hurts anyone physically, is a safe form of harassment. This is because the agent has no conscious control, and therefore no ownership or responsibility for the events. A prime example of such a case involved torrents of water gushing inexplicably from the ceiling, whilst all the vessels in the house containing liquids spilled themselves on the floor (Auerbach 1996). These events occurred to a family whose son was forced by his father to stay in the swimming team against his will, thereby demonstrating RSPK as a poetic manifestation of anger. Despite the scarcity of spontaneous PK cases, laboratory PK has proven even more rare and difficult to manifest on a visible (macro) scale, although there is very good laboratory evidence to suggest the influence of PK on randomly controlled micro systems, such as the outcome of dice rolls or other random event generators (e.g. Radin & Nelson 1989). In such research, the results seem to suggest that the greatest effects, usually measured statistically, occur in the moment when the agent stops trying to cause the PK to happen, and this is called the ‘release of effort’ effect.

“Conscious desire is the negation of possession: the procrastination of reality. Make thy desire subconscious; the organic is creative impulse to will.” (Spare 1921, p 3)

That visible psychokinesis occurs so rarely and is never owned by the individual is, for Stanford, a fundamental feature of the necessity for unconscious active psi. The fact that efforts to manifest PK in the laboratory are much less dramatic than those occurring spontaneously reflects the hindrance of consciously aware and owned attempts at PK. This quirk has been aptly demonstrated by the likes of Batcheldor (1966), who was able to demonstrate remarkable table tipping phenomena during experimental pseudo-séances. Batcheldor accounted for these pronounced PK effects with the explanation that ownership inhibited PK, but could be bypassed by abdicating responsibility to the group. Furthermore, by invoking the mercurial trickster and utilising a ‘deliberate deception technique’ to get things started, Batcheldor was able to overcome what he called ‘witness inhibition’ to PK by deceiving his group into thinking that the table tipping was caused by unseen, normal forces, which it was - initially at least. Once witness inhibition had been overcome, amid much humour, by the spectacle of observing oneself performing pseudo-PK in a group, the deliberate deception was unknowingly (i.e. deceptively) ceased and real PK began; unwittingly. Thereby demonstrating that you may need to ‘fake it till you make it’ to surmount the barriers of belief.

That such barriers of belief exist makes unconscious, un-owned, unknowing, and released desire near essential to the spontaneous manifestation of will as psi, or perhaps even magic? This has been expressed nowhere more succinctly than by Spare (1913/1975, p 2)

when he wrote that “Unless desire is subconscious, it is not fulfilled, no not in this life. Then verily sleep is better than prayer.” Indeed, to support this notion of unconscious nonattachment Stanford cited research by McConnell (1955) that demonstrated a successful attempt to affect dice rolls during sleep. Furthermore, despite his clearly non-occult academic-psychology stance, Stanford (1974b) also drew upon parallels from prayer, spiritual healing, and religious or magical rites to further inform his model. Stripping down these rituals into constituent parts Stanford begins to seem like an early chaos magician searching for the bare principle components of spell casting when he identified that, for the desire to manifest, an appeal must be made to a supernatural agency through the use of ritual. However, more importantly he informed us that the ritual is necessary but not sufficient to produce the effect, but through this action the responsibility becomes mediated to a supernatural agency. For the magician, this supernatural agency can be the angel, demon, god, spirit, element, or even just ‘sympathy’ that is evoked or invoked.

Dukes (2000, p 53) has noted that magicians have long since identified demons and angels as being part of their own mind but regrets “the implicit Scientific deduction that being part of our own minds means that they ‘don’t exist’”. Yet for Stanford, whether the supernatural agency exists or not was largely irrelevant, perhaps because it went beyond the realms of his field. What was important is that the agency serves to displace any inhibitory ownership, a matter which is convenient in preventing the magical or religious belief system from collapsing should the ritual fail. Yet astute as this observation is, here Stanford failed to also recognise that the displacement of ownership insures against the

surfacing of those submerged fears of omnipotence that provoke the inhibitive fear of success, and furthermore, should the ritual actually be successful, it also prevents against inducing megalomania.

“The soul, proud and blighted... is a civil war of desire”

(Spare, 1921, p 8)

It was further offered by Stanford that intentional psychokinetic research anecdotes teach us that a seemingly paradoxical sense of hope, yet complete abandonment, creates a psi-conducive balance of beliefs. Recent research has shown that the most psi-conducive volitional strategy in tests of intentional psychokinesis is best described as an ‘effortless effort’ (Houtkooper, 2004). Stanford offered that such a contradictory condition is necessary because otherwise ego-involvement leads to a fear of failure, which only induces desperation and scattered efforts. This is a point aptly delivered by Spare (1913/1975, p 51) with his art of sigilisation. “The sigil, being a vehicle, serves the function of protecting consciousness from the direct manifestation of the (consciously unacknowledged) obsession, conflict is avoided with any incompatible ideas and neither gains separate personality”. Here conflict applies to the contrary urges reflective of the original desire competing against its corresponding distortions that may emanate as the fear of success, the fear of failure, or any other such competing desires.

“Complex desire is the further creation of different desire, not the realization of (particular) desire.” (Spare 1921, p 3)

In generalising about the function of ritual in manifesting desire, Stanford offered that the act of manifestation should be ‘ego-alien’,

because this prevents the ego misdirecting the will, abnegates personal responsibility, and provides a sense that the outcome will be meaningful and comprehensible. Despite offering no further explanation on this latter point it is presumed that the miraculous outcome is meaningful because it occurs within the context of the magical or religious belief system, although even a parapsychological belief system such as the one implied by this model should do. Here Stanford also pointed out that the dominant belief system conditions the specific nature of the phenomena produced, and gave the example of the cold war Russian psychokinetic star, Nina Kulagina, who couched the cause of her rare skill in terms of 'bioplasma' (Pratt & Keil 1973).

“To will well, to will long, to will always, but never to lust after anything, such is the secret of power”

(Levi 1856/1968, p 245)

Before influencing the external object, Kulagina would build up great physical stress, and Stanford used this as an example of how intense ritual focus also serves to absorb the attention of the agent so that the ego becomes detached from the operation. However, Stanford speculated that in most other situations focused attention on PK targets inhibits its manifestation, which he called ‘attention wishing inhibition’, and hence the release of effort effect. This release of effort is the psychological equivalent to Spare’s quiescence, the art of letting go of the desire and releasing the will. It is also the act of banishing, which seeks to detach the mind of the magician from the act.

“Why is belief always incarnating? Though oft times not even a sincere wish?” (Spare 1921, p 10)

Conversely to the ‘attention wishing inhibition’, Stanford also proposed that even focused attention on desired events that are about to unfold naturally can cause a counterproductive PK inhibition or retardation of the event. As an anecdotal example you need only think about urging-on a sluggish piece of technology whilst desperately requiring its slick performance in a moment of need, such as the observed malfunction of one’s printer while dancing on the edge of a deadline. Essentially, direct attention on one’s desire, although initially necessary, is inhibitive of its manifestation, so truly a watched pot never boils.

“The will, the desire, the belief, lived as inseparable, become realization.” (Spare 1921 p 3)

In essence of PMIR, for the desire to manifest itself outside of the body, the desire, or need, should be suitably strong and the will should be appropriately focused. To best achieve this, Stanford suggested that other avenues of action must seem unavailable and a supernatural agency must be invoked and appealed to properly, thereby abnegating responsibility to the agency and reducing concern, and focusing the attention prior to releasing it. In magical terms, “The sorcerer should be able to deliberately forget, or at least become consciously detached from, the outcome of the rite” (Humphries & Vayne 2004, p 13).

“What is there to believe that is free of belief? What is there to wish that is safe from reaction?” (Spare 1921, p 10)

Whatever the formula, conscious manifestation requires a belief system upon which to hang it and the manipulation of the delicate intricacies inherent within its technique, so the PMIR model indicates that

unconscious focus itself works best, freeing the agent from some of the paradoxical pitfalls that arise when desire encounters belief. For example, as Lee (2003 p 108) notes, the path of belief, intrinsic in attempts of conscious manifestation, can be a sceptical *cul-de-sac*, because “the whole game of questioning reality, if taken as a game of doubting, puts the issue of belief in the foreground.” Indeed, Spare (1913/1975) rather suggested that belief is merely counterproductive and that even to have need of belief diminishes the purpose.

“Every man is a God, in whatsoever he will his belief.”

(Spare 1921, pp 13-14)

Regardless of belief factors, Stanford has offered a set of principles for the realisation of the magical will, dressed as it is in the cloak of psychic expression, and spoken in the language of academic psychology rather than an occult dialect. In its inception PMIR is a means of explaining psi and delineating its contours, and in doing so it paints an image of psi as an everyday ability that most often secretly serves the unattended-to desires of the individual, and in quite subtle and sublime ways. As Dukes (2000 p 84) notes “...the modern Magician can hope for runs of luck or some ‘amazing coincidences’, but he should not expect too many gold coins to materialise from thin air.” It is rather a hidden angel than a rowdy demon doing one’s bidding. Yet it is clear that there are also a number of limiting factors to the true expression of the will, preventing this conceptual guardian angel from always creating a perfect environment for the unknowingly blessed. Yet, in PMIR most of these limitations are actually eliminated when the will acts without the observer, making the somnambulist potentially omnipotent and

omniscient, so Stanford has been judicious in noting other factors that obstruct the free expression of unconscious psi.

Given that PMIR most often functions through the ready responses of the individual, particularly with receptive psi, then these responses must be suitably flexible to allow for the subtle, implicit redirection of the agent towards its goal. The principle is, again, simply one of expressive economy. If the behavioural repertoire of the individual is overly restricted or determined, then the expression of unconscious goal-directed mistakes, mistimings, associations, and memory omissions or triggers become much less fluid or available. Examples of this restrictive behaviour include the use of rigid schedules and plans; rational, determined, and un-impulsive actions; and repetitive responses, which Stanford respectively termed behavioural- rigidity, inhibition, and stereotyping. Response chaining, the tendency to follow familiar events with habitual actions, was also noted as being restrictive, as were strong preoccupations, which suppress the expression of the sublime will. Taken together these factors form the model's supposition numbered by Stanford (1974a) as the eighth PMIR component, which, appropriately, relates it to the mercurial nature of Hod in kabalistic terms.

“Chaos magic is results magic, designed to get you what you need” (Ellwood, 2004)

Collectively these psi-inhibitive behaviours and compulsions are antithetical to what Braud (1980) termed psi-conducive ‘lability’, which may be seen as the desired personality substrate of chaos that lurks within the magical current of that name. To the discordian, this translates into the Church of the Subgenius’ power of slack, or more eruditely,

this relates to what Weibel (2003) refers to as the disorder intentionally created within situations to make them compatible with the use of magic. It is those ambiguous states of in-between, the undecided conjunction at the crossroads where, in the language of physics, consciousness has not yet collapsed the state vector. And it relates to what Vayne (2001) reminds us is the 'liminal' state. It also vindicates the Spare-ian reasoning behind transmuting the identity into a metamorphic ensemble of effluvial 'selves'. How better to conduct the chaotic current of Kia? No doubt unwittingly, Stanford (1978) further offered himself as a chaos-magic theorist when he suggested that the body-brain system functions as a random event generator necessary for the reception of psi. He also later supposed that chaotic EEG traces would be psi-conducive, thereby implicating chaos as the primary medium through which magic manifests and announced 'readiness for change' as a central tenet of PMIR (Stanford 1990).

“One thing is desired, another is thought; and a different becomes. Everything loved obtains an obscene disease.”

(Spare 1921, p 8)

While the PMIR model outlined so far is encompassing enough to accommodate the conditions both favourable and anathema to psi, the model also comes equipped with a breakdown feature to account for instances where psi manifests desire counter to the needs of the individual using it. Here Stanford (1990) proposed that when individuals are disposed towards negative self-esteem (or self-concept, or self-image respectively in Stanford, 1974a, 1982), neuroticism, or conflicting needs or desires, then psi may manifest itself in ways counterproductive to the needs of the organism.

“What man can prevent his belief from incarnating? Who is free of filth and disease? All men are servile to the great unconsciousness of their purpose in desire” (Spare 1921, p 11)

In some instances this counterproductive expression of psi is something like psychic masochism and can occur in combination with guilt and the unconscious desire to be punished. Indeed, as Spare (1921, p 9) intoned “What man prohibits and then commits will certainly cause suffering, because he has willed double. Born of complex desire, results of actions are dual, multitudinous virtue and vice.” Such conflicting desires, as when they are prohibited, were clearly unhealthy for William Blake (1994, p 181) when he wrote “He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence”. Similarly, although he speculated upon the precise wording, Stanford was certain of the centrality of negative aspects of ‘self’ in manifesting maladaptive consequences through psi, just as they would through non-psi behaviour. Extending this notion to desire’s opposite pole would then include the metaphor that “Fear attracts bullets” (Levi 1856, p 34), which may be taken quite literally. For as Spare (1921, p 2) asks, “Is fear of desire?”

### **...et Coagula**

“Will to pleasure is the basic function underlying all activity whether conscious or not, -and whatsoever the means.”

(Spare 1921, p 7)

Evaluating the PMIR model, Stanford (1990) was able to report a reasonable body of evidence to support most of his suppositions, although he urged for further research to shore-up these claims. Central to his ideas is the notion that psi is driven by the needs, desires, or

dispositions of the individual, and in achieving these aims psi is solely goal-orientated. That is, only the desire and the goal – the object of desire – are in themselves sufficient to cause psi. In terms of receptive psi this means that the need-serving psi-information is automatically sought out and that there is no need to scan the entirety of the information available, and this makes it far simpler than the alternative because, empirically, psi appears to have no outer limits in space or time so the available information is essentially infinite. As such, any ‘informational’ system of psi would seemingly have problems processing that much data without any known boundaries, so a goal-orientated model is also advantageous. So rather than an informational, or cybernetic model of psi, PMIR is fundamentally teleological, because it is concerned with the direct consequence of purpose. Yet, Stanford also recognised that, once the psi information had actually been received, it was then processed cybernetically, so that it then became subject to all the usual processing trends known to cognitive psychology. Nevertheless, the fundamental process for the occurrence of psi was contingent solely upon teleological factors. In terms of magic, this makes PMIR primarily thelemic, in the true sense of the word as being ‘of the will’, rather than techgnostic, in the way that Davis (1999) visualises information, or McKenna (1991) visualises language, rather than will, as the official substrate of magical reality.

Yet despite the intuitive appeal of a teleological model Stanford had become slightly suspicious of it by 1990 and, thinking that the definition of ‘goal’ was a bit vague, he hoped to distance himself from its ‘magical’ connotations. Added to this, there was some evidence appearing from Vassy (1986) (and more recently from May & Spottiswoode 1998)

suggesting that psi was subject to a degradation of the ‘signal’ in proportion to the informational complexity of the psi transmission. Evidence such as this, indicating that psi exhibited ‘Shannon entropy’, would imply a cybernetic basis for the transmission of psi. This argument itself becomes quite complex when considering expressive psi (i.e. psychokinesis), but there is a good theoretical argument that all laboratory psychokinesis so far, which is largely demonstrated on a micro rather than a macro level, can be explained conceptually in terms of precognition (e.g. see May, Spottiswoode, & Utts 1995). Precognition, unlike psychokinesis, can easily be conceptualised cybernetically.

“According to Magical theory, the outcome of an act will be influenced by the intent of the actor, so any Scientific experiment or measurement carried out with a desire to prove something will be affected by that desire...”

(Dukes 2000, p 39)

To make the whole theoretical complication a bit saltier, Stanford’s PMIR, like any concept of unconscious psi, implicates the actual experimenter as a cause of the results of psi experiments just as much as the participants, if not more so. As Stanford (1990) noted, in criticism of others’ work, it is often the experimenter who has the strongest desire to get positive results. This has rather distasteful implications for any scientist because it means that the desires of the experimenter may be responsible for any results that occur. Mainstream psychology has long been aware of the potential, non-psi, ‘experimenter effect’ and has often responded to its threat with seemingly adequate blind controls. But its psychic equivalent, experimenter psi, rather upsets any hope of obtaining objective scientific results because blind controls become quite

meaningless. This is probably the main reason why parapsychology has long been so unpopular amongst its bigger scientific peers - psychology in particular. The philosopher of science Karl Popper was also unpopular for suggesting that objectivity was a subjective illusion. Returning to the issue of Shannon entropy, because of experimenter psi it may well be that this apparent cybernetic behaviour of psi is, quite literally, just wishful thinking on the behalf of the experimenter.

“...Scientists, understandably, would question this assertion”.

(Dukes 2000, p 39)

Devoting an entire paper to the topic of experimenter psi, entitled ‘Are we shamans or are we scientists?’, Stanford (1981) had already become quite concerned not just with the tacit science of magic, but with the growing implication of science *as* magic. Like most parapsychologists Stanford (1990) has, however, been quite dismissive of experimenter psi. Reviewing the evidence, he invoked the god of Occam’s razor and suggested that it was more plausible that experimental psi was due to the participant rather than the experimenter, because of the complexity of psi involved otherwise. While the law of parsimony elsewhere has its elegance, Stanford’s (1990 p 98) attempts here to “...put down the myth of almost omnipotent experimenter psi” are reminiscent of Doctor Frankenstein trying to kill his own monstrous creation. It also seems to backfire because issues of psi complexity and parsimony become obsolete when it is remembered that, in PMIR, psi is goal-orientated – the desire manifests *directly* without heed of the process.

“In the Science sector an open, skeptical mind is a virtue that one aspires to, in the Magic sector it is an inner emptiness one seeks to fill with meaning”. (Dukes 2000, p 46)

In the end, Stanford (1990, p 113) finally back-peddled over his reservations about goal-orientated psi but still remained somewhat equivocal of his concept, accepting it for the time being – “It is probably too soon to dismiss entirely the earlier formulation of PMIR that assumes the goal-oriented character of psi...but I confess to uneasiness about the magical quality of such a formulation...”. It is here ironic to hear a scientist, in attempting to deny his own model, eventually discuss it less logically and rather more in terms of his ‘feeling’, a mode of operation which Dukes (2000) has pointed out is definitively magical, not scientific (see also Snell, 2004).

“In fact a scientific investigation which came to any conclusion in favour of Magic would be as disturbing to me as to other Scientists”. (Dukes 2000, p 56)

It is perhaps not surprising that as a scientist Stanford had some difficulty accepting his own model, despite its empirical cohesion, given the intrinsically magical nature of it, as has been shown throughout this essay. Magicians too can be reluctant to accept scientific explanations of magic. Nevertheless, PMIR is based upon the findings of a great wealth of psychological and parapsychological research and has itself been tested empirically to some extent, largely fulfilling all its hypotheses – experimenter psi aside. It is by dint of being empirically testable in this way that makes Stanford’s model a genuinely scientific model of psi, and, by extension, of magical reception and expression too. Being

empirically testable in this way is what distinguishes a scientific model from a pseudo-scientific theory, which I suspect, is partly what Phil Hine objects to.

“...magick has become obfuscated under a weight of words, a welter of technical terms which exclude the uninitiated and serve those who are eager for a ‘scientific’ jargon with which to legitimise their enterprise into something self-important and pompous.” (Hine 1995, p 11)

Yet, for all its obfuscation to the scientifically uninitiated, PMIR, as a model rather than a theory, does not attempt to explain *what* psi *is*, merely *why* psi works, and, more importantly, *how* it works psychologically. The *why* – that it is evolutionarily needs-serving – might be wrong, but regardless of this the *how* can only be useful, because, for the magician’s purposes, it need not be right if it works. As Dukes (2000, p 34) has pointed out, for the magician “...the theory is being accepted only because it is ‘working’, not because it is ‘true’...”

Nevertheless, it would help to further our understanding and help inspire confidence in those who would choose to use this model magically if scientific ‘evidence’ can support it. Furthermore, Dukes (1992, p 128) has offered that “...occultists...are still asking permission of science to belief in magic”. Apparently, magicians are still experiencing a hangover from the enormous influence of science and its obsession with causality and, particularly, falsification (Dukes 2000). Ideally, magicians are concerned with association not causality, and should only be interested in verifying rather than falsifying their temporary magical beliefs. However, such subjective magical conviction about reality is

apparently proving problematic to new-millennium magicians because “Magic...inherits unconscious scepticism from Science. Just as the ‘open minded’ Scientist is deep down a total believer in material reality, so also the ‘gullible’ Magician deep down does not really believe in anything.” (Dukes 2000, p 45)

“What so many un-evolved Magical thinkers are trying to do is convince themselves of the reality of Magic which, deep down, they do not believe can really exist” (Dukes 2000, p 46)

If Dukes is right, perhaps PMIR can help the struggling un-evolved magicians, seeking to shed their sceptical skin, to realise that magic can exist and to help them know where to spot it. Having the conviction of empirical reason behind it, perhaps a model such as PMIR can offer aspiring mages a solid scientific basis for belief in magic, as an intermediary part of the process of weaning them onto much more flamboyant modes of thought. As Dukes (2000 p 84) noted “...it is interesting to wonder whether it is the strength of Scientific beliefs which gives them their power to unify our experience”. Yet whilst flirting with the power of scientific belief, Dukes also warned that, whilst magical thought is complete, scientific theories all too often become outdated and those ‘chaoist’ mages who are dressed in a lab coats are left feeling somewhat ridiculous when the science moves on. Nevertheless, new millennium magicians are reminded that ‘nothing is true, everything is possible’ and that beliefs are there to be borrowed temporarily as befits the purpose. Whether or not science is built upon shifting sands, those with winged feet may find that “...in order to be an effective and practising magician in contemporary times one must

utilize the most practical and cutting edge technology and theories of the era” (Porridge 2003, pp 113-114).

“...the irrational feeling which haunts some of us – the feeling that Science is shrinking the world and making it more boring and empty – is possibly a betrayal of a suppressed inclination towards the magical way of thought” (Dukes 2000, p. 29)

Regardless of his fears, Dukes suggested that the dominant scientific way of thinking is nevertheless experiencing a fundamental shift towards magical thinking, for reasons too numerous to include in this essay. That this may well be the case has begun to be shown here because, whilst scratching rather covertly at the surface of a science of magic, parapsychology has already unearthed some unpopular signs of science as magic, with methodological paradoxes like experimenter psi, for example. Indeed, Roney-Dougal (1991) supposed that the scientific experiment is little different from a magical ritual, with the experimenter as the high priest/ess. This concept is now being taken seriously, as Mario Varvoglisis (2003) in his presidential address to the Parapsychological Association suggested that researchers should refine and amplify their experimenter effects, like shamans. So rightly Dukes (2000 p 40), in looking to the future, has predicted that “...it will still be called ‘Science’ but it will amount to a choice of belief systems, which is pure Magic”. However, in the meantime, PMIR can serve as a useful scientific model of the psychology of magical manifestation and divination, offering a usable scientific belief system to those magicians inclined towards science, and a testable model of magic for those scientists inclined towards magic. It is possible that both disciplines may also learn from the other.

“...early anthropologists tended to overlook the positive aspect of what gets lost in the transition from magic to science... (and that is) the resonating worldview that organically bound the perceptions and procedures of the magician to the holistic web-work of cosmic, animal, and ancestral forces.” (Davis 1999, p 173)

Finally, although PMIR might be limited in its conception of conditions favourable to psi, because, for instance, it omits to consider the role of altered states, it is a particularly useful model of the factors *necessary* for psi. Similarly, although psi in no way equates entirely to what may be considered magic, and is actually only considered by some magicians to be an unimportant side effect (e.g. Nema 1995), it relates directly to some of the most basic functions of magic. Psi, in essence, is the anonymous numen of a scientific magic, denied of spirit or personality but still recognised by some by its secret names, such as mana (Winkelman 1983) or Kia, it is the expression of the scientific current of magical thought.

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