

John Palmer, PhD

Abstract

Confronting the Source-of-Psi Problem

The source-of-psi problem is perhaps the greatest challenge facing modern parapsychology. For ESP, the question is, who is the source of the information obtained by the receiver? For PK, it's who creates the change in the target system? The problem is relevant in two contexts. The first is laboratory research on ESP and PK, where the possibility exists that experimenters unintentionally and unconsciously influence, totally or in part, the results of their experiments. Although a few experiments have demonstrated this "experimenter psi" directly, the main reason for taking it seriously is that the best predictor of success in a psi experiment appears to be the identity of the experimenter or principal investigator, and many psi-conducive investigators have shown independent evidence of psi ability. The second context is survival research, especially research with mediums, where the crucial question is whether the source of the information is a discarnate entity or some living person or document. Solving the source-of-psi problem will be difficult and perhaps impossible to accomplish conclusively. My fear is that the hypothesis is unfalsifiable. But just because a hypothesis is unfalsifiable doesn't mean it's false, just that we can't prove it's true, a sad state of affairs for anyone with a scientific value system. The key to solving the problem as best we can may be to discover how to block psi, a valuable exercise in its own right. This may be a better way to proceed at this stage than trying to solve the source-of-psi problem directly.



John Palmer received his PhD in psychology from the University of Texas in 1969. With the exception of a three-year period from 2004 to 2007, he has been on the staff of the Rhine Research Center (formerly Foundation of Research on the Nature of Man) since 1984, serving as Director of Research from 2000 to 2004 and from 2009 to the present. He was Director of Education from 1988 to 2004, in which capacity he was in charge of the 8-week Summer Study Program. He has been Editor of the *Journal of Parapsychology* since 1994. He was President of the Parapsychological Association in 1979 and 1992. He has published numerous research articles in professional journals and is co-author of the book *Foundations of Parapsychology*. His research has focused primarily on psychological factors associated with ESP performance in the laboratory, and in 1979 he published a random survey of psi experiences in an American city.

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