

Chapter 17

A Moon-Shot Research Program Proposal

I have been around America's military-industrial complex and research centers for fifty years, and when I want straight talk and reliable analysis without the influence of money, prejudice, or stupidity, I can rely on Dean Radin and Stephan Schwartz to give me a no-bullshit answer. That's a tough thing to find.

I asked Dean to tell me what kind of research we need to fund so that we can as a species protect ourselves from the coming threats outlined by Schwartz. Here is his answer.

Hi Bob,

Imagine if 2% of the world's annual military budgets was redirected from stockpiling more bombs and bullets to exploring the full potential of human consciousness. That would instantly provide billions of dollars to study the most age-old, important, and unresolved questions humans can ask: Who are we, what are we capable of, where do we come from, and what happens after we die?

These big questions are traditionally answered by religions, but orthodox religious concepts are based on medieval, prescientific worldviews. While some of those ancient ideas might have merit, especially ones based on esoteric and mystical insights, in the modern age the currency of truth is provided by science, not by untestable religious dogma.

Answers to the big questions are not just of academic interest. The answers to these questions shape civilization. They determine how we treat each other, whether societies are motivated mainly by profit or by wellness, and if the earth is viewed as a resource ripe for plundering or as a sacred garden demanding careful cultivation.

The academic discipline most commonly associated with studying these big questions is philosophy. But the *scientific* discipline that investigates the big questions is parapsychology. Incorrectly associated in the popular mind with all manner of so-called paranormal topics, parapsychology is actually the scientific study of human experiences suggestive of mind-to-mind connections, perception through space and time, mind-matter interactions, out-of-body and near-death experiences, communication with nonhuman entities, and other survival-oriented topics like reincarnation, poltergeist activity, and hauntings. All these topics ask testable questions.

Parapsychology as a systematic academic discipline began in 1882 with the formation of the Society for Psychical Research in London, England. Since then, there have always been a few hundred doctorate-level scientists and scholars around the world who have been seriously interested in this field. Of them, at any given time perhaps four dozen are engaged in full-time research; most are involved as an avocation. The reason for the small number of researchers is not a lack of interest but rather a lack of funding. It has been estimated that funding spent in a single year in conventional academic psychology is equivalent to the entire 150-year history of funding for parapsychology.

One might ask, why are the big questions, which are of such profound and perennial interest to everyone, not funded at the level of, say, medical research? That field has millions of working scientists funded worldwide at hundreds of billions of dollars a year. There are two main reasons. First, orthodox religions strictly prohibit questioning dogma, so there is strong societal pressure to not use science to look at what some believe—incorrectly—are “supernatural” phenomena. There are even scientists who wrongly assert that these questions are beyond the capability of being scientifically investigated. Second, those who become addicted to political or financial power are specialists in exploiting human frailties—greed, envy, and fear. Anything that threatens that power is forcefully suppressed, and it is likely that if 7.5 billion people began to learn that we're all capable of far more than we've been told

(by religion or by authority, which are often mixed in politics), that would almost certainly constitute a threat.

Returning to the opening vision, rather than the current shoe-string funding available to study the big questions, let's say a miracle occurs and we now have \$1 billion a year. How would we spend that wisely? I propose four areas: education, empirical studies, theory development, and applied research.

Education

Progress in parapsychology has been slow and is intentionally excluded from the academic world (with a few rare exceptions, as noted below) because there are concerted efforts by small groups of activists—most of whom are not scientists—determined to marginalize the field. For decades, such efforts were primarily associated in the United States with an organization called the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, or CSICOP. Today (2019) they've adopted a shorter name [CSI](#), for Committee for Skeptical Inquiry. The irony about CSICOP/CSI, which has strongly influenced scientific and public opinion about parapsychology, is that for many years they trumpeted the term “scientific investigation” in their organization's name, but they hardly ever investigated anything. One of the very few times they *did* launch an investigation, they successfully confirmed a claim about astrology. The committee was so shocked with that outcome that they intentionally suppressed their findings. The only reason we know this is because one of the members of their executive committee [blew the whistle](#) on them.

As the influence of CSI has somewhat declined with the rise of the internet, we find the same mind-set still active, this time in the form of self-styled [Guerrilla Skeptics on Wikipedia](#). They state their mission as the following: “To improve skeptical content on Wikipedia. We do this by improving pages of our skeptic spokespeople, providing noteworthy citations, and removing the unsourced claims from paranormal and pseudoscientific pages. Why? Because evidence is cool.”

The irony here is that these so-called skeptics are really not interested in evidence at all, because if they were, Wikipedia would provide articles on parapsychological topics that survey all sides of the topic. As it currently stands (2019), all those articles have been edited by guerrillas to be exclusively negative. Wikipedia proudly advertises that it can be edited by anyone, but in practice that is not quite true. Wikipedia has an endless set of byzantine rules that editors have to follow; otherwise proposed edits are not accepted. Taking advantage of this, the guerrillas have rewritten parapsychological-oriented articles as well as the personal biographies of scientists involved in parapsychology in such a way that a naïve reader going to Wikipedia for information will come away with a thoroughly negative opinion.

Thus, a well-funded educational effort would do the following:

- (a) Commission high-quality online written and video information that presents a more accurate picture of the state of the science, including how parapsychology explores the “big questions.” One initiative to do this is already [under way](#), but to make that site more popular would require a dedicated public relations effort.
- (b) Hire experienced Wikipedia editors to refine the existing biased articles to make them more accurate and balanced.
- (c) Develop new or revise existing *Introduction to Psychology* college textbooks, most of which today simply regurgitate old prejudices about parapsychology that were heavily promoted by CSICOP.
- (d) Commission more accurate portrayals of what parapsychology is, and what it has learned, in TV shows and movies aimed at popular audiences.
- (e) Commission a series of academic and popular books by knowledgeable authors that describe the history, methods, and results of the various categories of study in parapsychology.
- (f) Commission web-based or mobile-based experiments accessible to anyone.

(g) Establish endowed chairs of parapsychology within fully funded Centers for Consciousness Studies at major universities around the world, and provide funding for undergraduate and graduate scholarships, teaching, and research assistants.

The last point is the most important because as long as this topic remains marginalized, there will always be a struggle to find students to keep the field alive and thriving. We know, for example, from an endowed Chair of Parapsychology established in the mid-1980s at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, that a single well-run graduate program at an established university can significantly revitalize the field. Three decades after that professorship was established, over seventy-five graduate students have gone on to gain doctorates associated with parapsychological topics. That one chair established the United Kingdom as world's current academic center for parapsychology.

The chair at Edinburgh was not the first time an endowed professorship for parapsychology was established. There were similar endowments at Harvard, Clark, and Stanford Universities in the late 1800s and early 1900s. But after the initial holders of those positions retired, subsequent professors were hired who were either not interested in parapsychology, or the funds that supported those chairs were usurped by the universities for other purposes. Thus, any new endowments that are established must be specified in such a way that the purpose of the chair cannot be altered, and the individuals selected for those positions must be vetted as having appropriate interests.

It is predictable that universities approached with the opportunity to gain endowed chairs of parapsychology will encounter vigorous opposition from existing faculty because nearly everything they think they know about parapsychology probably originated from highly distorted sources. Thus, the endowment initiative will require a companion educational and public relations effort to inform faculties and university administrations about what the topic actually entails.

This initial educational effort might cost perhaps \$50 million, with most of those funds supporting the endowed professorships, student scholarships, and associated costs. On an ongoing basis, the costs would drop to perhaps \$10 million a year. Before the last and arguably most important proposed step is taken (the endowed chairs), it would be advisable to first launch a one- or two-year discovery project by a team of higher education experts. The mission would be to identify universities that are devoted to honoring the endowments and to ensure that the plan is both practical and achievable.

Empiricism

The second area where an infusion of funding would be important is experimental research. While the number of researchers engaged in empirical parapsychology has always been rather small, as a group they have been remarkably persistent, competent, and productive. A half dozen classes of psi experiments have reached a stage of maturity that methods to replicate effects can be described in straightforward terms, and replications should be encouraged as teaching tools.

Part of the funding then would create teaching systems to help students replicate experiments known to be successful. This would include, as examples, hardware and software for a digital ganzfeld telepathy system, setups to allow for psychophysiological experiments such as presentiment (unconscious precognition), the "feeling of being stared at" from a distance, and brain-to-brain correlations. These teaching systems would be made available at low or no-cost to educational institutions and online for no cost. The rest of the funding would fall into two categories. First, directed multi-year programs. These would be experimental programs requiring a minimum of three- to five-year efforts, with the research team identified and invited by a steering committee of experienced researchers. Longer term programs, up to ten years, would also be considered, depending on the nature of the proposed programs, the track records of the proposers, and the judgment of the steering committee. Second, an international grants program will solicit requests for proposals. These will be offered annually, with a maximum of \$100,000 per grant.

There is no lack of interest among researchers interested in studying psi phenomena, but the range of experiments that have been conducted to date has just scratched the surface. With an infusion of

funds, the scope of phenomena studied will creatively explode. Besides experimental tests of elementary psychic phenomena, including telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, psychokinesis, this effort would significantly expand research on survival-oriented phenomena, including mediumship, channeling, near-death and out-of-body experiences, reincarnation, and mediumship. In addition, a worldview survey can be undertaken to find exceptional talents (children and adults) to study, and in future efforts the experimental program can be integrated with these talented individuals. This effort is estimated to cost about \$100 million, with most of the funds going to the long-term and solicited grants program, and support of positions required to administer and track those grants.

Theory Development

Experimental work in parapsychology has always run far ahead of theoretical explanations. This initiative would provide funding for theorists to develop testable physical, biological, neurological, or psychological models of psi. The long-term directed-grants programs would be encouraged to include theorists to develop explanatory frameworks and suggest ways of testing those ideas. This effort will include historians, anthropologists, and other scholars working on testable theories. For example, a historian or anthropologist may develop a theory about the use or methods underlying an ancient magical practice, and the testing of that theory would entail analysis of the historical or contemporary record to see if that theory is supported. This effort would cost perhaps \$5 million as most of these efforts will not require special instrumentation. It will be initially incorporated into part of the solicited grants program.

Applied Research

This area would focus on aspects of psi that are sufficiently understood to be applied in rudimentary ways. This would include projects investigating psychic healing, uses in archeological exploration, law enforcement, counterterrorism, and development of new types of communication systems that span spatial and temporal distances. In all cases, these would be directed, multi-year programs. The goal in each program would be to demonstrate proof of principle for an application within three to five years of initial funding and to provide an assessment if that application could be successfully launched, and if so, when. This effort would cost perhaps \$100 million, mainly because developing the requisite instrumentation is likely to be expensive and because of the overhead and salary costs of longer-term programs.

Summary

An estimated total cost for the proposed program is about \$400 million for the first year, dropping to perhaps \$100 million each successive year. This is nowhere near \$1 billion a year, and for good reason. At this stage of our knowledge, it is very unlikely that a billion could be spent wisely. A program audit and reassessment would be planned on a five-year basis to judge if funds spent so far were used well and would recommend adjustments up or down. A question not yet addressed in this moonshot proposal is whether a single overarching organization would be in charge of the whole program or whether it would be distributed among several organizations. In either case, the overhead in running and tracking a \$100- to \$400-million-dollar program is nontrivial. It would require a staff of perhaps twenty people, which would cost perhaps \$5 million a year. Still, compared to an annual billion-dollar allocation, that would be in the noise.

Dean and I agree that the field of consciousness science needs funding. I would posit that how you go about getting the money is a measure of how much money you set out to get. Remember, the purpose of this book, as stated in the foreword, is to obtain funding to advance our understanding of consciousness. What is happening presently is not what Dean outlines. So what do we do? How do we create the plan to fund Dean's vision?