

Comment on “The Quest for Proof of Out-of-Body Experiences and Allied Phenomena,” by Michael Ross [JofC, Vol. 7, No 28, April 2005]¹

In a recent article, Michael Ross invite us to consider the following question (Ross, Michael, 2005): “*Why are OBE’s (and psychic/spiritual events and talents in all their manifestations) so difficult to empirically prove under scientifically valid conditions?*”. In his article, the author presents possible answers to his interrogative, asking the readers to respond and share their opinions.

Let me start by analysing the question itself, as formulated by Ross. Kant argued that when all answers available lead you into absurdity, it is time to examine the presupposition of your question. For a question may itself have something wrong with it, and thus make all its own answers impossible. It is my opinion that the question proposed by Michael Ross falls into the category of unanswerable questions mentioned by Kant.

The false, tacitly assumed, presupposition, is that in science proofs of whatever kind are possible. Unfortunately (or maybe fortunately) this is not the case. According to Karl Popper, every genuine test of a theory is an attempt to falsify it, or to refute it, cause testability is falsifiability. In other terms, strictly speaking, there is no answer to Ross’ question, seeing that it is not true that OBE and parapsychic phenomena are more difficult to prove than anything else in science, cause nothing in science is provable at all.

Let me recall here that science is about problem solving and explanation. A problem exists when it seems that some of our theories, especially the explanations they contain, are inadequate and worth trying to improve. In other terms, the purpose of science is to understand reality through explanations. For doing this, there are essentially two characteristic methods of criticism which are used: *rational criticism* and *experimental testing*. Rational criticism compares rival theories with the aim of finding

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which of them offer the best explanations, according to the criteria inherent in the problem, whereas experimental testing consists in performing experiments whose outcome may falsify one or more of a set of rival theories.

Now, considering the experimental test described in Ross' article (obtaining a target number placed in a controlled laboratory via a psychosomatic projection), the following question arises: What is this experiment really testing? Or, being testability nothing but falsifiability: What is this experiment trying to falsify? The answer is straightforward: the materialistic paradigm.

Roughly speaking, we can say that we have today two main theoretical frameworks for our understanding of reality: the materialistic paradigm and the consciencial paradigm. If the above mentioned OBE-test fails (the projector does not succeed obtaining the right number or obtaining a number at all), there are no consequences for the hypothesised validity of the consciencial paradigm. But, on the other hand, if the test is successful, even a single event is sufficient, in principle, to falsify the entire edifice of the materialistic paradigm (of course, after having duly singled out possible factors of chance).

According to the above, I am now in a position to rephrase Ross' question in what I think are more pertinent terms: "*Why is it so difficult to empirically falsify the materialistic paradigm, by means of experimental tests based on OBE's (and psychic/spiritual events and talents in all their manifestations), under scientifically valid conditions?*"

I hope the reader will agree that this new version of Ross' question is now much less puzzling. Indeed, it already points us in the direction where an answer can be found: the difficulty is not so much in the shifty character of parapsychic phenomena, but, rather, in the difficulty of getting rid of the granitic prejudgment incarnated by the materialistic paradigm.

Concerning materialism, it is important to distinguish *classical materialism* from *modern materialism*. By classical materialism, I mean here the view which considers the entire world as a sort of huge mechanic clockwork, evolving deterministically according to the classical equations of Newton. By modern materialism, on the other hand, I mean the world view that emerged when classical materialism has been challenged by the two fundamental physical theories of modern times: quantum mechanics and relativity theory.

Modern materialism is radically different from classical materialism. For instance, according to quantum theory, quantum

physical entities, in most of their states, are no more local entities, having a specific place in space, but instead *nonlocal* entities, not permanently present in space. And when a quantum physical entity is detected in such a nonspatial state, it is somehow “sucked up” into space by the measuring apparatus. This is certainly a dramatic change of view with respect to the classical assumption that each material entity has, at every instant, its own specific place in space. But, more importantly, nonlocality imposes us to abandon the hypothesis that our physical reality is contained within space: “Reality is not contained within space. Space is a momentaneous crystallization of a theatre for reality where the motions and interactions of the macroscopic material and energetic entities take place. But other entities – like quantum entities for example – “take place” outside space, or – and this would be another way of saying the same thing – within a space that is not the three dimensional Euclidean space” (Aerts, Diederik, 1999, page 178). In other terms, modern materialism is already a multidimensional theory of reality.

Now, to what kind of materialism am I referring to in my rephrased version of Ross’ question? It would be natural to think that, since classical mechanics has been superseded by quantum theory and relativity, then I should refer to modern materialism. In fact, this is not the case, cause, unfortunately, the today dominant scientific world-view is still the one of classical materialism (see for instance Capra, Fritjof, 1982). Even more surprising, the Newtonian mechanical view appears to remain the dominant picture also in physics! Indeed, an overview of recent literature is indicative of how the vast majority of physicists still cling, conceptually, to the idea of a non existing void full of little particles in the spirit of Leibnitz or Descartes (see for instance Piron, Costantin, 1999, page 107).

Therefore, to Ross’ question one can add the following interrogation: *Why is it so difficult for quanta and relativity revolutions to wash out the classical materialistic paradigm?* To my opinion, this gives an entirely new perspective to the issue raised by Ross. How can we pretend that experimental tests based on OBE’s and other parapsychic phenomena should succeed doing what a century of quantum and relativity scientific revolutions weren’t able doing?

Said this, I would like now to go one step forward into the analysis of Ross’ question. What is the meaning of his statement “*under scientifically valid conditions*”? Of course, there are many possible answers here, but let us focus on the sensible

issue: *repeatability* and *reproducibility*. The question is: “*Why is it so difficult to produce repeatable and reproducible parapsychic phenomena in controlled laboratory conditions?*”

In laboratory experiments dealing with OBE and other parapsychic phenomena, the system under study is a human being. This is an extremely complex entity, constantly processing a huge amount of information (both physical and extraphysical). As all researchers know, almost any experiment is subject to the vagaries of environmental perturbations. Ideally, in an experiment one would like to vary a parameter of interest while holding all the others stable. How to do this is in general a problem of control theory. However, for human systems we don't have any workable control theory. For instance, in an OBE experiment, one would need to control not only the internal factors (the inner consciential laboratory of the projector) but also the external ones. External factors must be controlled not only intraphysically, but also extraphysically. In a well equipped laboratory the control of the intraphysical environment is in general not a big issue, but what about the extraphysical, energetic dimension of the laboratory? Controlling the extraphysical dimension is usually not a cause of concern for experimenters working in conventional laboratories, not belonging to coscientiocentric institutions. But, as every coscientiologist knows by experience, the control of the energetic environment is of the utmost importance for the success of parapsychic experiments of whatever nature.

On that respect, one can be sure that the energetic dimension of a laboratory in which critical tests of the materialistic paradigm are performed (via for instance OBE), will have the tendency of being systematically interfered by a number of extraphysical consciousnesses (intruders), not willing to see their power dangerously diminished by a cracking of the secular materialistic prejudice².

On the other hand, concerning the issue of achieving a good control of the internal factors (the inner laboratory), this only depends on the experience, maturity, and specific training of the subject, as well as on the quality of the assistance he or she can receive from his or her team of extraphysical helpers.

² To obtain a better theoretical and practical understanding of intrusive dynamics, one can attend for instance the very interesting one-year multi-module course “Goal: Permanent, Total Intrusionlessness”, delivered by Wagner Alegretti and Nanci Trivellato at the IAC.

Following the above discussion, we can say that the assumption made by Rudolf Steiner, as mentioned in Ross' article – that repeatable and reproducible parapsychic phenomena remain unavailable because this is not the will of the spiritual world – is nevertheless true, but certainly not in the original sense given by Steiner: cause the spiritual world in question is not the one composed of highly evolved beings, but, instead, of intrusive consciousnesses living in the terrestrial troposphere. It should also be added that the example given by Steiner in support of his hypothesis – that different aura readings usually don't match – is certainly not a pertinent one. Indeed, our parapsychic greatly differs from our physical sight. When we use our parapsychic we can tune our vision on different energetic frequencies and dimensions, whereas our more limited physical eyes can only observe what belongs to a single dimension: the physical one. Therefore, if different aura readings do not match, this is simply because the various observers are not tuning their parapsychic on the same morphosphere or holosphere. Furthermore, each individual has its own very personal way to process and decode extraphysical information, which also explain the differences mentioned by Steiner, without the necessity to invoke a spiritual world depriving the humans of the evidences of a “beyond the body” reality, and willing to have them believing only by faith. If this would be the case, then why, as emphasised by Ross in the beginning of his article, parapsychic experiences, although difficult to control, are so ubiquitous in nature?

Concerning the question of faith, Ross asks: “Often enough we are told to “believe by faith” – why? Is this some sort of “cosmic imperative”? If so – why?”. I think it is important here to emphasise that faith alone is meaningless. In fact, faith is just the first element of a *faith–hope–knowledge* trinomial. The meaning of such a trinomial is the following. Faith, in its correct understanding, is *hypothesis*, the initial step of a research process through which I can decide to open myself to new possibilities. Hope is *evolutionary reproducibility*: if I observe that something is possible for someone else (for instance being a total, permanent intrusionless consciousness), then, by an argument of homogeneity, I can reasonably hope it can be possible also for me, provided of course I will act consequently. Finally, knowledge, and more precisely *self-knowledge*, is what I get at the end of my self-research and self-development process.

Coming back to our previous point, a question is now worth asking: *are repeatability and reproducibility unavoidable ingredients of a scientific experimentation?* The answer is certainly negative, otherwise the field of investigation of science would be limited to only that small part of reality that can be repetitively reproduced in a laboratory. But then, what are the alternatives in situations where it is impossible (or very difficult) to control the experimental conditions? A valid alternative is to have recourse to that characteristic method of criticism – more prone to errors but also more powerful and daring – employed by police officers and investigating magistrates, based on circumstantial evidences. More precisely, such a method is not founded on the control of the experimental conditions, but on the careful observations and subsequent cross-checking of the different accounts (consensus).

This was the method employed by a great number of highly reputed European scientist at the beginning of the twentieth century, while investigating a number of parapsychic phenomena, like telekinesis, exteriorisation of ectoplasm, transmutations, etc. These parapsychic phenomena were produced by a number of talented mediums, like for instance the Italian woman Eusapia Paladino (see Bensaude-Vincent, 2002) who exposed herself to a worldwide campaign of collective experimentations for a period of more than twenty years. All the individuals, scientists or not, who participated to Paladino's countless demonstrations, couldn't doubt any more about what they saw. As an emblematic example, we can cite the French Nobel price for physics Pierre Curie, who after having witnessed a number of these sessions wrote on his notebook in 1906: "Le résultat, c'est que ces phénomènes existent réellement et il ne m'est plus possible d'en douter³."

Eusapia Paladino is just an example of the many talented individuals having provided strong evidences to the scientific community of the existence of parapsychic phenomena. And, in that respect, I cannot fully agree with Ross when he claims the difficulty in collecting evidences. The problem, I believe, is not so much in obtaining unambiguous parapsychic facts, but, rather, in the highly sceptical and prejudicial attitude of the majority of conventional scientists, too strongly attached to a purely materialistic vision of the world. The case of the ex-psychical researcher Dr. Susan Blackmore, mentioned by Ross in his

³ The result, is that these phenomena really exist and it is not anymore possible for me to doubt.

article, is certainly typical of this conventional and conformist attitude, which can go as far as denying personal experimental evidence.

However, there is another aspect we need to consider, cause acknowledging the existence of parapsychic phenomena (being them repeatable and reproducible or not) is not the end of the story. Being science about explanation, the first question a conventional scientist convinced of the existence of parapsychic facts is going to ask is the following: *Can I explain these phenomena in the ambit of the materialistic paradigm?* Or, in a weaker version of this question: *Are parapsychic phenomena incompatible with the materialistic paradigm?* The answer is that although they are certainly not compatible with the classical materialism, they could be explained, at least in principle, in the ambit of modern materialism.

Let us take the example of OBE. The following excerpt from the physicist Goswami will perfectly illustrate my point (Goswami, Amit 1995, pages 133-136): “Quite frankly, when I first looked at OBE in the early eighties, I was impressed with this and other research and started looking for some alternative way of viewing the phenomenon that would enable me to explain it within a scientific framework – without resorting to either hallucination or the transmigration of the mind. Somehow, disembodied minds, or astral bodies as they are called in some circles, watching their physical bodies undergo surgery was to me a noncompelling and simplistic explanation of what I could accept only as a subjective perception of an optical illusion... Meanwhile, I was also surveying the literature on distant viewing. It suddenly occurred to me that OBE must be an illusory construction of distant viewing, which is nonlocal viewing outside one’s physical field of view... Here at last was an explanation of OBE that could satisfy the scepticism of a scientist... Thus it is logical to conclude that psychic phenomena, such as distant viewing and out-of-body experiences, are examples of the nonlocal operation of the consciousness... Any attempt to dismiss a phenomenon that is not understood merely by explaining it as hallucination becomes irrelevant when a coherent scientific theory can be applied. Quantum mechanics undergrids such a theory by providing crucial support for the case of the nonlocality of consciousness; it provides an empirical challenge to the dogma of locality as a universal limiting principle.”

Why does Goswami say that the explanation of OBE in terms of an astral (objective) body is a noncompelling and

simplistic one? And why does he prefer to explain the OBE phenomenon (as well as remote viewing) maintaining the materialistic view that we are just physical beings exhibiting some quantum nonlocal properties? In other terms (and this is another way to rephrase Ross' question): *“Why is it so difficult for the consciential paradigm to compete, in terms of explanatory power, with the modern materialistic paradigm?”*

By consciential paradigm, I mean here the leading-edge theory of Conscientiology, considering that the consciousness is an intelligent principle manifesting through an energetic multi-vehicle, constituted by at least three intelligent bodies (soma, psychosoma and mentalsoma) and evolving in a multi-dimensional environment and multi-existential cycle.

The answer to the above question is rather simple. Parapsychic phenomena, as they are usually studied in conventional parapsychological research, are just intraphysical events, like for instance the following one: “an intraphysical subject communicates to an intraphysical scientist a physical target number”. Although the projection through which the subject obtains the number is perceived by him or her as a real extraphysical process, the final outcome of it (the number) is just intraphysical. Therefore, it is natural for a conventional scientist to apply the well-known guiding principle of Occam's razor, suggesting not to multiply entities beyond necessity or, in other terms, not to complicate explanations beyond necessity.

Therefore, Goswami is just doing good science when he assumes that the psychosoma doesn't exist: not only he doesn't need to assume the existence of such a vehicle for explaining the phenomena of a subject obtaining a target number, but also he doesn't have any reasonable criterion for its reality.

My point here is that most probably we will never succeed in developing a reality criterion for the existence of more subtle vehicles of manifestation, if such a criterion is to be based only on the acknowledgment of intraphysical facts (although of a nonlocal nature).

To “push” a conventional scientist to reject modern materialism and adopt the more advanced consciential paradigm, one needs to have him or her fully involved at a personal level, becoming both the subject and the object of his experimentation. Indeed, “The facts of projectiology definitively convince *only* the lucid projector through self-thosenization. Thus far, projectiology does not have a foundation capable of persuading non-practitioner or non-participant researchers.”(Vieira, Waldo, 2002, page 28).

The superiority of the consciencial paradigm becomes manifest only when one uses it to explain and understand the functioning of the whole multidimensional reality, as experienced by a lucid projector. It is only in that context that the consciencial paradigm unfold its full explanatory power, with respect to which modern materialism can certainly not compete.

Let me now mention another source of difficulty, which is certainly also responsible for the great deal of distortion with which the consciencial paradigm is usually perceived by conventional scientists. Unfortunately, the front of parapsychic research is not a homogeneous one. Considering OBE, there is a huge literature on the subject, which ranges from the most occult and esoteric sources to those related to religious and superstitious beliefs. And, in the middle of that confusion, there are just a few authors really trying to make the difference, studying the phenomena with objectivity, method, and willing to share an information of quality. But, apparently, even the more experienced authors are not immune from the contagious of an incoherent and superstitious thinking. Let me mention here the example of Robert Bruce, author of a well known and interesting treatise about astral projection⁴ (Bruce, Robert, 1999). In a more recent work of his, this experienced projector deals with the specific theme of psychic self-defence (Bruce, Robert, 2002), suggesting to overcome intrusive phenomena by using salt, holy water, garlic, Feng Shui fountains, religious icons, crystals, drawing pentagrams and other symbols on the body, church exorcisms and occult practices, just to cite a few of the superstitious rituals he proposes as remedies. When reading materials of this sort, written by a reputed researcher, I can, to some extent, understand the derisive terms and hostile responses from the adherents of the materialistic paradigm mentioned by Ross in his article, as well as the suspicion and difficulty that many conventional scientists feel when approaching the parapsychic domain of investigation.

In that respect, I think we really have to praise the seriousness and professionalism so far demonstrated by all the consciencial institutions around the world: they are certainly establishing a high quality research standard which, certainly, will become a reference for the future 'consciousness' researchers.

⁴ For interesting reviews of Bruce's book in this Journal see the correspondences of Michael Ross in Vol. 2, No. 6, 1999 and Vol. 5, No. 18, 2002, as well as the letter of Luis Minero in Vol. 5, No. 17, 2002.

Finally, I would like to conclude this letter by thanking Michael Ross for his stimulating article, giving me the opportunity to present the above discussion, which, I hope, will contribute to a better understanding of the issue he raised.

Massimiliano Sassoli de' Bianchi
Carona, Switzerland

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