

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editors:

Allow me to make a few comments concerning the recent book by Martin Gardner, *How Not to Test a Psychic* (Prometheus Books, Buffalo, NY, 1989), where the author reviews experiments which I performed years ago with the subject, Mr. P. S. (Pavel Stepanek).

With all due respect to the author's opinions (which he tries to defend at any price), and even though I commend the fact that he evidently perused much of the relevant literature thoroughly, his reading of this literature was biased by his a priori negative point of view (even though he disclaims it on p. 8). Similarly biased was the treatment (or, rather, the distortion) of some facts as described in his book. This alone, in my opinion, disqualifies his book as a serious work of scholarship. (The book still remains a comprehensive and readable job of investigative reporting—unfortunately marred by the author's tendency to twist facts to suit his purposes, to use innuendoes, and to rely on unconfirmed hearsay when it supports his position.)

Because of the extent of material discussed in the book, a comprehensive review is not practicable. Yet there are at least a few points which should be put on record.

I tried to cooperate with Mr. Gardner as honestly and efficiently as I could. I even welcomed the opportunity to correspond with a person known as a critic of ESP research, because I presumed that his interest was motivated primarily by the desire to search objectively for truth. I answered all his questions, put at his disposal relevant photographs as well as samples of materials used in the experiments, as did P. S. (who still resides in Prague, Czechoslovakia)—at least to the extent that his recollection allowed him to comment on details of procedures in experiments performed more than two decades ago.

The hypothesis by which Gardner tried to explain the positive ESP performance of the subject is absurd, and his description of it shows how easily malevolent critics can distort the truth. The fact is that in no experiment was P. S. allowed to handle the target mat-

Correspondence

283

rials in the way suggested by Gardner (that by opening the flaps of outer covers with his fingers he could peek and see their contents). Besides, even if he could, he could see only inner envelopes and could not get sensory knowledge of the cards inside. (In some experiments, the inner envelopes were unsealed only after the conclusion of the experimental series; in others the cards were randomly reversed and moved from one envelope to the other.) When I said above that P. S. was not "allowed," this expression does not tell the whole story. In fact, P. S., always faithfully and with care to the least detail, followed procedures imposed on him by the experimenters and never tried to introduce procedural modifications of his own.

Had Gardner really cared to report objectively, he could have printed the authentic photograph of the experimental situation,¹ which shows that (in those experiments when P. S. was allowed to touch the outer covers) he held the covers differently from the way shown in the speculative illustration in Figure 2 in Gardner's book; or, Gardner could have used a photograph in which the experimenter held tight exactly those flaps which, according to Gardner's hypothesis, P. S. supposedly opened to peek inside. Of course, such a photo was not used because it would immediately show the absurdity of Gardner's hypothesis.

Or, I may illustrate how a skillful choice of one single word in the right context may suffice to distort meaning and create the impression of something dubious. On page 95, Gardner mentions that the Dutch psychologist J. T. Barendregt did not believe in ESP, and in this connection Gardner mentions vaguely that Barendregt was "embarrassed... by the outcome of the experiments in Prague." Why "embarrassed"? We do not learn it from Gardner, but I can provide some illumination on the nature of this "embarrassment" from my recollection of a conversation which Barendregt when I saw the Dutch investigators off at the Prague airport after the experiments. (Barendregt and Barkema are dead and cannot vouch for this conversation, but J. Kappers, the third member of the Dutch team that worked with P. S., was present and may still remember it.)

When parting, Barendregt said to me, in effect, this: "Do you know what for me was most impressive in this experiment? I'll tell you. When you welcomed us at the airport at our arrival I made a remark, by way of conversation, that I was curious how the experi-

¹See Milan Ryzl, *Hellsehen in Hypnose*, German version, published by Ramon F. Müller Verlag (now Ariston Verlag), Geneva, Switzerland, 1971, p. 201.

ment would turn out. You then in all seriousness reassured me: 'Don't worry, the result will be OK.' I was surprised then by your certainty of success, and I am all the more shocked now that the result was really positive, just as you assured me it would be." So it was the calm repeatability of P. S.'s performance (at that time) that could be embarrassing for a disbeliever.

One minor factual error should be corrected also (p. 259): The name of P. S.'s friend is Dagmar Rillova (not Ryzlova; no family relationship).

Also, I want to put on record that I have been informed recently by P. S. that Gardner tried to open further correspondence with him, suggesting that P. S. write an article or give an interview in which he would reveal how he cheated.² Gardner went on to offer his good offices and his connection with an organization to help publicize his report and arrange to produce a documentary film that would make him at once internationally famous and at the same time enable him to receive substantial honoraria. That P. S. resisted all these inducements to testify falsely that he cheated is a testimony of his honesty and integrity. It is for the reader himself to judge Gardner's motives and tactics in offering such inducements to tempt P. S. to testify in support of Gardner's conjectures.

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² Editors' note. The Editors have reviewed the letter from Martin Gardner to P. S. to which Ryzl refers, and in their opinion his description of it is accurate. Gardner confirmed the authenticity of the letter although he disputed the purpose for which it was transmitted. The letter itself is not being published because Gardner said it was intended to be private and that he would sue if it were reproduced in the *Journal*.

BOOKS RECEIVED

- BELOFF, J. (1990). *The relentless question: Reflections on the paranormal*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland. Pp. ix + 221. \$29.95, cloth.
- FEUERSTEIN, G. (1990). *Encyclopedic dictionary of yoga*. New York: Paragon House. Pp. xxix + 430. \$24.95, cloth.
- FREY-ROHN, L. (1990). *From Freud to Jung: A comparative study of the psychology of the unconscious*. Boston: Shambhala. Pp. xvi + 345. \$17.95, paper.
- GRIM, P. (Ed.). (1990). *Philosophy of science and the occult* (2nd ed.). Albany: State University of New York Press. Pp. 395. Price not given, paper.
- HARARY, K., & WEINTRAUB, P. (1990). *Mystical experiences in 30 days: The higher consciousness program*. New York: St. Martin's. Pp. xii + 89. \$5.95, paper.
- HARDY, J. (1989). *A psychology with a soul: Psychosynthesis in evolutionary context*. London: Arkana. Pp. xiv + 245. \$9.95, paper. (Original work published 1987)
- KOESTLER, A. (1989). *The act of creation*. London: Arkana. Pp. 751. \$10.95, paper. (Original work published 1964)
- KOESTLER, A. (1989). *The ghost in the machine*. London: Arkana. Pp. xiv + 384. \$9.95, paper. (Original work published 1967)
- KOESTLER, A. (1989). *The sleepwalkers*. London: Arkana. Pp. 623. \$9.95, paper. (Original work published 1959)
- PRICE, H. (1940). *The most haunted house in England*. New York: Longmans, Green. (1989 Time/Life reprint of original work for Collector's Library of the Unknown series)
- RHINE, L. (1961). *Hidden channels of the mind*. New York: William Morrow. (1989 Time/Life reprint of original work for Collector's Library of the Unknown series)
- RONNER, J. (1990). *Seeing your future: A modern look at prophecy and prediction*. Oxford, AL: Mamre. Pp. 173. \$10.95, paper.
- TENDAM, H. (1990). *Exploring reincarnation* (A. E. J. Wils, Trans.). London: Arkana. Pp. xviii + 433. \$9.95, paper. (Original work published 1987)