

PETER LAMONT, *Extraordinary Beliefs: A Historical Approach to a Psychological Problem*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. Pp. 321. ISBN 978-1-107-68802-5. £19.99 (paperback).
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This book's expressed aim is to help us understand why people believe in alleged extraordinary phenomena that define the research agenda of modern parapsychology – telepathy, clairvoyance and psychokinesis. The author, a historian, magician and member of the Koestler Parapsychology Unit at Edinburgh University, makes clear from the outset that he does not believe in any of those things. Employing conjuring theory, frame analysis and discourse analysis to reveal how affirmations, as well as rejections, of belief in these phenomena were made convincing, Lamont takes his readers through a history of modern empirical approaches to occult phenomena from the nineteenth century to the present day. Essentially limited to English-language sources, the book reconstructs selected debates around extraordinary phenomena that have been associated with animal magnetism, spiritualism, psychical research and modern parapsychology.

Lamont's focus on rhetorical discourse, such as avowals of prior scepticism by those claiming conversions to a belief in the reality of extraordinary events, and of open-mindedness by non-believers, reveals the robustness of rhetorical patterns over time. But the main achievement of the study is to tease out the often-neglected variety of stances of historical actors involved in these debates, and significant subtleties in degrees of belief and scepticism. There was, for example, a considerable number of intellectuals who became convinced that some of the phenomena of spiritualism constituted genuine scientific anomalies while dismissing or suspending belief that they were actually caused by spirits. So far, not many historians of modern empirical approaches to the occult have done a better job at raising sensitivity in the reconstruction of various attitudes to these hotly disputed phenomena. Not least, by criticizing the continued lumping together of all sorts of deviant beliefs in modern psychological scales measuring (or rather policing) 'paranormal beliefs', the book is an example of how history can be practically useful to non-historians.

An apparent core virtue of the book is its strong commitment to symmetry. In Lamont's account there are neither heroes nor villains, and most of the time his actors appear to have perfectly good reasons to believe or disbelieve. In his discussions of the age-old question of authority to evaluate extraordinary phenomena, Lamont also reminds us that professional conjurers have always been on either side of the debate, and that we can hardly rely on them as impartial judges regarding the scientific status of 'paranormal' phenomena.

Lamont stresses that psychological interest in extraordinary beliefs 'itself has a history. By looking back, we can understand not only why people have believed, but also why this became the key question asked by psychologists' (pp. 6–7). However, in his account of boundary disputes during the professionalization of psychology Lamont tries a little too hard to maintain symmetry. He confirms previous historians' arguments that debunking exercises by American psychologists worried about their leader William James closely collaborating with the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) were politically instrumental in asserting the usefulness of the fledgling science in the battle against 'epidemic delusions' like spiritualism. But I rather disagree with statements like 'So far as "psychologists" engaged in the testing of psychic claimants, far from combatting psychical research, they were, by definition, doing psychical research' (p. 196). In fact, the book's commitment to never go beyond discourse comes at the cost of a critical failure to reveal just how methodologically thorough the best of James's and the SPR work was, and how poor in comparison most critiques of their psychical research were. This is important, since one of the standard rhetorical strategies of opponents of elite psychical research that continues to inform its historiography was the conflation of the hard-nosed empiricism typical of the early SPR with superstition and uncritical belief, i.e. the kind of lumping together of positions which Lamont rightly criticizes in present-day 'paranormal-belief' scales.

Just to give one example, Lamont tries to capture a key episode in the public repudiation of psychical research from nascent psychology's territories, the debate concerning James's star medium Leonora Piper, on less than three pages. Much of the space is dedicated to G. Stanley Hall's and Amy Tanner's *Studies in Spiritism* (1910), which was based on just six sittings with Piper and published shortly after James's death. Readers unfamiliar with the sheer wealth of primary sources concerning Piper, however, will not get the slightest idea of the outstanding quality of the studies previously published by the SPR, let alone the extent to which Hall and Tanner misrepresented these sources and engaged in other remarkable acts of intellectual dishonesty. Together with detailed critiques of Hall and Tanner's book by the sceptical Andrew Lang and some of Piper's surviving investigators, such as Eleanor Sidgwick and James Hyslop, these primary sources (of which not a single one turns up in Lamont's bibliography) document in great detail that in the strange case of Leonora Piper debunkers like Hall, Tanner and James McKeen Cattell were overwhelmingly wrong and James and fellow psychical researchers overwhelmingly right as far as basic standards of scientific methodology and fair play were concerned.

A disbeliever in 'paranormal' phenomena, Lamont does well to distance himself from prominent representatives of the modern 'Skeptics' movement, whose methods have provoked protests from sociologists like Harry Collins, Trevor Pinch and Robert Evans. Taking issue with the evangelism displayed by self-appointed 'sceptical' experts such as Richard Dawkins, James Randi and Michael Shermer, Lamont argues that a true sceptic 'needs to distinguish between the wheat and the chaff' (p. 215). But he also should have pointed out that methods and rhetorical styles employed by Hall, Tanner, Cattell, Joseph Jastrow, Hugo Münsterberg and other opponents of psychical research are virtually indistinguishable from those of Dawkins, Randi *et al.* Hence *Extraordinary Beliefs* offers little help to those willing to distinguish the wheat and the chaff in the still hopelessly biased historiography of the modern occult.

Perhaps ironically, Lamont himself experienced the kind of treatment characteristic of assaults on James, the early SPR and present-day parapsychologists in a 2013 review in *PsycCRITIQUES*, an online review published by the American Psychological Association. The reviewer, Jonathan C. Smith, indirectly accused Lamont of advocating for parapsychological pseudoscience, which Smith informs us is motivated by the same mentalities responsible for the continued burning of witches, global warming denial and, of course, 9/11. In his published response, Lamont corrected evident misrepresentations of his arguments and even identified a fabricated quote. One could say that Smith by definition reviewed Lamont's book, but I suppose Lamont would be appreciative of future historians reconstructing discourses regarding science and the occult for including his reply.

ANDREAS SOMMER
University of Cambridge

FRANK BIESS and DANIEL M. GROSS (eds.), *Science and Emotions after 1945: A Transatlantic Perspective*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2014. Pp. vi + 432. ISBN 978-0-226-12648-7. £28.00 (paperback).
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It is difficult to do justice to the intellectual sophistication of this edited volume. Not all the chapters are equally dazzling and there is some clunky academic writing, but these are outweighed by the truly pioneering arguments and insights that characterize most chapters. The seventeen authors are all intrigued by the relationship between science and emotion in the post-Second World War period, primarily from European and American perspectives.

The editors, Frank Biess and Daniel M. Gross, have exerted a strong editorial hand. They have a very clear idea of what questions this book is addressing. They want to illuminate the role of emotions in the scientific process, explore the changing fortunes of emotions as an object of the scientific gaze, suggest ways in which scientific approaches to emotions echoed wider preoccupations, and