

ON SOURCES FOR THE HOSTILITY TO PSYCHICAL RESEARCH

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We consider this paper to be of the greatest relevance, inasmuch as the factors that militate against public acceptance of the existence of UFOs and/or of their operators seem likely to be the same sort of factors that are responsible for hostility to psychical research and to such mind-boggling new ideas as were advanced by the remarkable pioneer Velikovsky, whose most important book, in my opinion, is his posthumous and little-known *Mankind in Amnesia*. — EDITOR

ASPECTS of the controversy over the work of Immanuel Velikovsky are used to outline a speculation on the hostility to psychical research of critics. Several features of psychical phenomena and research are set within the framework of this speculation.

"The gigantic catastrophes that threaten us are not elemental happenings of a physical or biological kind, but are psychic events ... Instead of being exposed to wild beasts, tumbling rocks, and inundating waters, man is exposed today to the elemental forces of his own psyche."

C.G. Jung (1934) (1953, 305)

1. The Velikovsky Controversy

When phenomena in an area of study are difficult to understand or even classify, a usual philosophical rule is to examine the epiphenomena — that is, the surrounding phenomena — as a source of insights. I have long been struck by the similarities between the hostility shown to psychical research by some of its critics and the controversy of the last thirty years surrounding the suggestions of Immanuel Velikovsky (1895-1979) that globally catastrophic events have occurred on this planet during man's lifetime and are described in the ancient records, which modern man has mis-matched in comparing the chronologies of these records from different cultures and thus misinterpreted. "The idea of a cosmic catastrophe in historical times came to me one evening in October 1940," Velikovsky recalled later (1981, 50):

"it was inspired by the chapter [10] in the Book of Joshua where it is told about the stasis of the Sun and Moon, and the stones that fell from the sky. In a few weeks the major part of the theory presented in *Worlds in Collision* was conceived. The first impulse after reading the Book of Joshua was to investigate Chinese records in order to see whether anything is known about the stasis of the Sun; then I addressed myself to authors who narrate the ancient history of the New World."

The controversy began with (in fact, even before) the publication of *Worlds in Collision* in 1950. Psychical researchers will feel in familiar country when reading remarks against Velikovsky such as this one of 1950 (quoted from Kallen, 1977, 61) by the astronomer B. McLaughlin:

"Can we afford to have 'freedom of the press' when it permits such obvious rubbish to be widely advertised as of real importance? ... Can we afford 'freedom of the press' when it can vitiate education, as this book can? ... No, I have not read the book ... And I do not intend to waste my time reading it ..."

The conduct of the Harvard astronomer H. Shapley is quite revealing. The following two passages were written by him in January and September 1950, the first to Velikovsky's publisher, the second at Harvard University (Kallen, 1977, 55):

"And frankly, unless you can assure me that you have done things like this frequently in the past without damage, the publication [of Velikovsky's *Worlds in Collision*] must cut me off from the MacMillan Company ..."

"The claim that Dr. Velikovsky's book is being suppressed is nothing but a publicity stunt ... Several attempts have been made to link such a move to stop the book's publication to some organisation or to Harvard Observatory. This idea is absolutely false."

Prior to taking up these studies, Velikovsky had practised as a psychoanalyst in Tel Aviv and Haifa after studying with Freud's student W. Stekel. Indeed, in the late 1930s, he had been preparing a volume on Moses, Akhnaton and Oedipus as archetypal figures, as a confrontation of the ideas presented in Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, and had moved to New York in order to have access to better libraries, when the idea of catastrophism came to him.

Thus, when the fierce controversy broke out, and continued, Velikovsky was able to study it as a psychoanalyst. Struck by the behavioural similarities to hysterical amnesia as witnessed in his clinical practice — especially the simultaneous desires both to reject the offending ideas and also to discuss them — he

united Freud's interest in amnesia and Jung's notion of the collective unconscious, and suggested that mankind, in experiencing the terrestrial catastrophes that his interpretation of ancient records asserted, had received such deep psychological shocks (from the large-scale destruction of the species at these times, for example) that it was in a state of collective amnesia when confronted by the evidence preserved in the record.¹ He wrote a book on the hypothesis which was published posthumously in 1982 under the title *Mankind in Amnesia*.

2. A Speculation

During his career as a psychoanalyst, Velikovsky took an interest in psychical phenomena, publishing a paper (1931) on the "energetics of the psyche" in which he asserted that "so called spirits are projections of the thoughts of the medium or thoughts of someone present under whose telepathic influence the medium finds himself in this moment".² But he did not try to make connections between psychical phenomena and the catastrophic events described in his later writings. I am not concerned with the veracity of his catastrophist writings (I am not competent to appraise them anyway); the interest lies in the epiphenomenal link, via the similarities in the hostility shown to Velikovsky and to psychical research. In 1979 I sought, and obtained, the opportunity for discussions with Velikovsky on these similarities. As a result, I was led to formulate the following speculation concerning psychical phenomena and psychical research:

Whether or not the earth has experienced the global catastrophes that Velikovsky asserts, there is no doubt that it has been through major disturbances. By and large, scientists have not faced up to the broader consequences of this apparent fact; Velikovsky (1982) discusses some who have. He pointed out to me the remarkable case of Laplace, who tried to prove mathematically that the planetary system is stable (and thus, by implication, that the earth is a safe ride) and yet let himself go in one passage in his *Exposition du Système du Monde* (1796, Book 4, Chapter 4):

"However, the small probability of a similar encounter [of the earth with a comet] can become very great by increasing over a long sequence of centuries. It is easy to represent the effects of this impact on the earth. The axis and the motion of rotation changed; the seas abandoning their position hurl themselves towards the new equator; a large proportion of men and animals drowned in this universal deluge, or destroyed by the violent shock inflicted by the terrestrial globe; entire species eliminated ... the human species reduced to a very small number of individuals and in the most deplorable state, solely occupied, during a very long time, with the care of preserving itself, must have lost entirely the memory of its sciences and arts ..."³

Even without such catastrophes, it is obvious that,

now as then, man's existence on the earth can be precarious in the face of flood, famine and predatory beast. *With* that assumption, the quotation at the head of this article from Jung contains more connections than Jung, writing just after Hitler's rise to power, intended.

What we now call "psi" could have been part of the normal sensory apparatus of early man, developed primarily as survival mechanisms. One can easily envisage the vital roles of telepathy as means of human contact, clairvoyance and extra-corporeal travel as surveying procedures, precognition as an anticipatory device, levitation as a mode of travel or escape, and psychic healing as a collection of medical techniques. As man gained more control over his environment, the need for psi would decrease so that, by recent centuries, it would have become not merely "rusty", but even alien to his sensory experience and related behaviours.

3. Some Consequences

The context outlined above draws on Velikovsky's views as an *analogy* for psychical phenomena, not as a *cause*. Adopting the context as a general premise, various features of these phenomena, and research carried out upon them, can be set within it, with others drawn as further consequences:

(i) The extreme forms of hostility shown to the subject resemble amnesiac defence against some horrific memories, no matter how those memories were caused. This suggests the view, possibly true though unfortunately unfalsifiable, that the hostility is itself evidence for the genuineness of its own target.

Similarly, amnesia may be involved in negative effects such as psi-missing, dream resistance, failure to produce phenomena when desired, and so on. It may even be a factor in the psychotic personalities exhibited by some psychics, and the apparent reluctance of some psychical researchers to obtain good results.

(ii) The psychical phenomena listed as possible survival mechanisms in section 2 are intrinsic to the person. Others, such as psychokinesis, thoughtographic effects, poltergeists, UFO sightings, and apparitions, are external to the person, and appear to be rejective projections from him. (For example, just as sleepwalking occurs when the person is in a dissociated state, so apparitions may be induced in part by a similar process involving the observer.) Under this view, the phenomena just mentioned have an important pathological component.

(iii) The main source of the difficulty in producing psychical phenomena at will is the "rustiness" mentioned in section 2. The problem-situations which psi was developed to handle are now virtually impossible to reproduce, and we have to resort to worthless and contrived pseudo-aims, such as guessing Zener cards

or bending forks. For normal people only exceptional situations, such as imminent death, would require psi aid; but it is known that psi *can* then operate.

(iv) Psi-faculty theories, such as Stanford's PMIR model, amount to calls to adjust our behaviour patterns so as to restore as far as possible the problem-situations within which psi can properly function.

(v) For the reasons discussed above, *virtuosi psi* (strong psychical capacity) is very rare. However, despite everything, *routine psi* still seems to be quite widespread, implying its deep-rooted place in our psyche. In particular, children are still often born with some psychical capacity; but they usually grow up in an environment dominated by adults who have lost most or all awareness of psi (and quite possibly, as explained in (i) above, have some fear of it). Thus, when children face their early manifestations of psi, they are bereft of guidance as to its control or significance, and so suppress the capacities which they have. This factor is additional to the suggestion that familial relationships (Oedipal fear, for example) help to cause the decline of juvenile psi. The parental and educational background of psychics should be studied very carefully, especially concerning the balance between adult and child influences in their childhood; for example, whether or not they were first-born, oldest children, orphans, and so on.

(vi) Women are more psychic than men because, particularly as mothers, they are more likely to face problem-situations in which psi is properly needed.

(vii) The development of society led to an increase in man's control over the environment. In turn this may have caused a decline in the need for psi, and thus to the rustiness noted earlier. Psi has been better preserved in societies which we call primitive, where our degree of control over the environment has not been achieved.

(viii) A particularly relevant aspect of the development of society has been the growth of science and technology. One consequence is that psychical researchers can now use sophisticated equipment to detect psychical phenomena. Thus the developments which provided these facilities for psychical research also, in view of (vii), decrease the opportunities for psychical phenomena to occur in the first place. In other words, if technology can detect a phenomenon, it can (probably) produce it as well; so why should a psychic bother to produce it, even if he is not subject to the personal fears noted in (i)? Again, metal-bending could be seen as a rejective effect (in the sense of (ii)) against a symbol of technology.

(ix) Since, as noted in (v), routine psi seems to remain ubiquitous, the chances are still good that, despite the considerations of (viii), sophisticated equipment will detect phenomena. Hence, because of the amnesiacally inspired hostility described in (i),

there are strong reasons to prevent psychical researchers having enough funds to obtain such equipment (and perhaps cause for some researchers not to use it properly anyway and thus avoid obtaining good results, as noted in (i)).

(x) The development of science during the last 500 years has seen branches of science not only rise but (eventually) replace older doctrines, developed during the era when psi was apparently prominent: chemistry for alchemy, astronomy for astrology, number theory for gematria, medicine for healing. Philosophy has seen similar changes: precognition gave way to theories of linearly ordered time, and occultism was replaced by "rational" epistemologies and methodologies.

Thus it is not surprising that psychical research has largely failed to fall within the realm of orthodox science. Indeed, the hope that it can be rendered scientific may be basically mistaken, at least if science does not alter the boundaries of "permitted" phenomena and cognitive means.

(xi) Among occult doctrines which are now generally discredited, probably the best known, and the one most subject to hostility, is astrology. Students of Velikovsky need no reminding of the concern of astrology with the motions of the planets.

4. Concluding Remark

A variety of views have been offered to explain the hostility which psychical research receives; apprehension of the potential of psi for evil, and so on. The framework outlined in section 3 is intended to complement, not supplement, them (as in (vi), for example). Further, it does not offer any explanation of lack of interest in psychical phenomena and research which many people show, or (apart from the contrast as such) of success in psi, such as psi-hitting.

Many general problems are raised here, and I hope that those people with a proper training in psychology will be able to take the ideas presented here further than I can. Whether or not such a development will occur is, of course, another matter. "*We want to know,*" Velikovsky said to me on one occasion, "*but we don't want to know too much.*"

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Notes and References

1 One might apply this hypothesis also to circumstances surrounding the Velikovsky controversy, such as Shapley's mistaken denial which might have been due to a fugue state rather than deliberate lying. An interesting parallel figure to Shapley was his Harvard astronomer colleague D. Menzel, who thought that ufology was total rubbish — but said so again and again, and collected a vast collection of newspaper clippings on UFO sightings. (I personally doubt the claim of Henry Adams that if Harvard gives nothing else, it

gives calm).

2 Velikovsky (1931), 431. This view was not original with him, of course, but it shows the blend of (presumably) Stekel (1921) on telepathy and Freud's and Jung's use of the concept of energy. Elsewhere in the paper, he guessed that the psychic energy "does not stand in the sequence of known flowing energies" but instead "belongs to another scale" (p.437), a possibility that today's physicists in pursuit of the metal-bender might ponder more deeply. He also applied his hypothesis to orthodox scientific questions, proposing that electro-encephalograms could be used as a means of detecting epilepsy (p.437).

3 It should also be noted that some of Velikovsky's cosmological predictions have been corroborated (see Ransom, 1976), and that this has been acknowledged. For example, Bargmann and Motz (1962), while disagreeing with his theories, granted Velikovsky priority in predicting the emission of radio waves from Jupiter, the extension of the terrestrial magnetosphere to the Moon, and the high surface temperature of Venus.

On the early history of the controversy, see Kallen (1977) and Ransom (1976, Ch. 1); and on recent events, see Ellenberger (1980-81) and Ransom (1976, Ch. 8).

THE RUSSIANS AGAIN

FROM time to time we continue to see these delightful reports in our press that the Russians have had a UFO sighting, or that the Russians have *started to investigate* UFOs. The flurry never lasts for long. Like lightning, somebody or something seems to intervene, and the curtain of silence comes down once more, just as it did recently, as will be recalled, in the case of the Sunday newspaper *New of the World*, which, for a few weeks, was all agog with UFOs, and then dropped the hot potato — and that was that.

This time — in the London *Daily Telegraph* oddly enough — which of all our newspapers is anything but well-inclined towards our sort of subject — on January 31, 1985, in its first, second, and third London editions and most of its Manchester editions, there was a serious and detailed report from Nigel Wade, its Moscow correspondent, to the effect that a 'Green Cloud' had 'stirred the Soviet UFO Dispute'. It went on to describe how, according to the Soviet newspaper *Trud* ("Labour" — long known, incidentally for its partiality towards UFO reports) the four-man crew of a *TU-134* airliner, with a total of 27,500 flying hours between them, while on a night flight from Tbilisi (Tiflis) in Georgia to Tallin in Estonia, had seen, over Minsk, a 'large unblinking star' which seemed to project three beams towards the earth from a height of some forty miles! Then a ray of light was projected on to the aircraft, and the UFO 'flared up, leaving a green cloud in its stead'. The 'cloud' then flashed towards the plane. It dropped below them,

then came up level with them at 30,000 ft., and accompanied them 'all the way to Tallin until the end of the flight'.

Meanwhile, said the *Trud* report, ground-control installations registered 'splashes' on radar. Passengers in the plane also observed the strange object which was accompanying their aircraft. By this time the 'cloud' had itself 'assumed the shape of a plane'. And — horror of horrors — the paper went on to report that the same UFO was seen by the crew of another airliner flying in the opposite direction!

Trud reported a vice-chairman of the Commission on Anomalous Phenomena, Associate Member of the USSR Academy of Sciences Dr Nikolai Zheltukhin, as declaring that "the only conclusion to be drawn is that the aircrew encountered an 'unidentified flying object'".

Meanwhile, of course, the Soviet anti-UFO brigade were quoted as saying it was a case of 'Polar Lights'; 'high solar activity'; 'a reaction between atmospheric gases'; 'satellite launchings'; and even 'collective hallucination'. (They seem to have overlooked what we might term 'piezo-perinatal effects'.)

Dr Vladimir Migulin, director of the Soviet Institute of Terrestrial Magnetism, was quoted as saying that "the Academy of Sciences are doing all the research needed into UFOs". And he was quoted as being most critical of "certain amateur groups" which, in his view, "are interested only in biased search for proofs of non-earthly origins".