

Arguing for an Observational Theory of Paranormal Phenomena

JOOP M. HOUTKOOPER

*Centre for Psychobiology and Behavioral Medicine at the Justus-Liebig-University of Giessen,
Otto-Behaghel-Strasse 10, D-35394 Giessen, Germany
e-mail: joop.m.houtkooper@psychol.uni-giessen.de*

Abstract—The problem of devising a theory for paranormal phenomena (psi) may be separated into, first, the basic physical mechanism and second, the psychological aspects of how and when people are able to elicit psi.

Observational theory addresses primarily the first aspect, the basic physical mechanism of psi. A problem is that the known types of physical interaction do not fit the existing data.

The measurement problem in quantum mechanics can be used to hypothesize an observer who adds information at the collapse of the wave function. For each random event one of the possible outcomes becomes realized as the event is being observed. The basic tenet of observational theory is: the statistics of single events become biased if the observer is motivated and prefers one of the possible outcomes over the other.

Features of observational theory are: its predictive power, proven with regard to retroactive psychokinesis (PK); parsimony: the same mechanism explains ESP as well as PK; fruitfulness, as there is a direct relationship with quantum mechanics; and openness to crucial experiments. The falsifiability criterion poses some problems: these are discussed in relation to Lakatos' methodology of research programmes.

Observational theory is a solution to the problem of the mediation of psi, thus providing a framework for the psychological problem of the manifestation of psi. Henceforth, the observation of the outcome should be regarded as formal part of parapsychological experiments. There is reason for cautious, patient optimism about the acceptance of observational theory.

Keywords: observational theory — parapsychology — quantum mechanics — non-locality — causality violation — precognition — psychokinesis — philosophy of science

Introduction

Since the early 1970's, an approach to the theory of paranormal phenomena has been developed, which has become known as "observational theory". What, then, is observational theory? As I will show, it is an attempt to explain the basic mechanism of the paranormal phenomena, that is, telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition (collectively called ESP) and psychokinesis (PK). The generic term for these phenomena, psi, hitherto has been a collective term without a clear basis. Observational theory, however, does provide a theoreti-

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Table of Contents Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena

1. Understanding the eBook Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena
 - The Rise of Digital Reading Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena
 - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena
 - Exploring Different Genres
 - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
 - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
 - Popular eBook Platforms
 - Features to Look for in an Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena
 - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena
 - Personalized Recommendations
 - Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena User Reviews and Ratings
 - Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena and Bestseller Lists
5. Accessing Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena Free and Paid eBooks
 - Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena Public Domain eBooks
 - Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena eBook Subscription Services
 - Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena Budget-Friendly Options
6. Navigating Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena eBook Formats

- ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
- Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena Compatibility with Devices
- Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena Enhanced eBook Features

7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience

- Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena
- Highlighting and Note-Taking Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena
- Interactive Elements Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena

8. Staying Engaged with Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena

- Joining Online Reading Communities
- Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
- Following Authors and Publishers Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena

9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena

- Benefits of a Digital Library
- Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena

10. Overcoming Reading Challenges

- Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
- Minimizing Distractions
- Managing Screen Time

11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena

- Setting Reading Goals Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena
- Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time

12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena

- Fact-Checking eBook Content of Observational Theory A Research Programme For Paranormal Phenomena
- Distinguishing Credible Sources

13. Promoting Lifelong Learning

- Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development
- Exploring Educational eBooks

14. Embracing eBook Trends

- Integration of Multimedia Elements
- Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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