



**SPECIAL
SUBSECTION
COMMENTARY**

Data Versus Belief - Interpretation, Ideology, and the Limits of Science: Afterword to the Special Subsection

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HIGHLIGHTS

When scientist's examine a method of treatment encapsulated in ideology, to what extent to they examine their own unproven assumptions during their analyses?

KEYWORDS

Philosophy of science, limits of perception, limits of measurement, ideology, belief.

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INTRODUCTION

Tramont's Target Article in this issue and the invited Commentaries have given me much to ponder regarding the process and use of Science itself. Being trained as a social psychologist and sociologist, I have no visceral negative response to a therapeutic practice set within the context of a spiritual belief system. These are certainly not unheard of in Western culture given that Christian therapy systems (e.g., Wade, Worthington, & Vogel, 2007), and certainly, other less-known esoteric spiritual practices in therapy (Levin, 2021), are present in today's society, and generally show at least promise of efficacy. After all, with all of its flaws, social psychology is essentially the study of large belief systems that vary in size and effect while producing behavioral differences in groups between cultures.

And rather than give you my own critique of Tramont's observations and arguments, I think both her article and the corresponding responses themselves pro-

vide our community of anomalists an opportunity to see broader and scientifically relevant issues when it comes to humans applying the processes of Science. In Tramont's article, we see a common challenge in the study of anomalistics. That is the role of complicated cultural spiritual ontologies intertwined with the effects we wish to study. Given my preference for applying principles of interactionism (i.e., separating the interpretation of the phenomena from the observed phenomena itself: Laythe et al., 2022), it should surprise no one that I am applying it here, but with a twist. The question I propose in this concluding essay is: *To what extent do we as scientists account for our 'assumptive ideologies' when examining 'data' or 'evidence' such as what Tramont has provided?*

Thus, in these closing remarks, I wish to analyze and leverage the expertise of our commentators to make what I believe to be crucial critical thinking points for all of us as scientists when separating beliefs and assumptions from observable and measurable evidence. In essence, I wish to demonstrate the role of ideology within Science



when we apply our trade to others who are not scientists. Thus, my intention is to use the invited Commentaries as examples to remind us that, scientists or not, we work with and apply unprovable assumptions in the ways that we examine data and evidence.

Making a Transparent Case of Science in Contrast to the Directly Unmeasurable

In order to make my points while avoiding hypocrisy, I should briefly highlight some limits and strengths of Science. Although perhaps pedantic, in this case, it seems appropriate to clearly state the rules and assumptions that guide my commentary. These are presented as bulleted points for ease of review.

- a. No form of applied measurement is perfect. Science is limited factually by the limits of perfect measurement (e.g., Bound, Brown, & Mathiowetz, 2001), the limits of observable evidence that our limited technology and biological perception allow (Proctor & Proctor, 2021), and the former is reinforced by all of our mathematics used to verify a series of repeated measurements (e.g., error terms, variance explained, i.e. Meyers, Well, & Lorch, 2013)
- b. Following the above (and also from our application of samples to populations, which by definition inhibits absolute measurement (e.g., Hansen & Hurwitz, 1943), no absolutes exist in Science (Kuhn, 1996; Popper, 2014). Practical absolutes (e.g., gravity), yes, but technically, exception(s) are allowed to occur because of the above limits.
- c. Science (as part of empiricism, e.g., Churchland & Hooker, 1992) may only make claims based on directly or indirectly observable or measurable evidence.
- d. Any claims made within Science in which observable data is not available is a violation of a science truth claim. Further, a lack of evidence holds no value in Science (Altman & Bland, 1995), and a lack of evidence does not validate a claim either (e.g., appeal to ignorance, Walton, 1999). In sum, A lack of evidence essentially results in the **inability** of Science to make a claim.

To the best of my knowledge and understanding, none of these four assumptions can be factually refuted. Indeed, the above tenets of Science seem to be strong enough that simple layperson observation and evident

thought experiments can verify them (i.e., I have no ability to know what is going on in Africa right now, so my perception is obviously limited). Essentially, they are the groundwork rules for conducting honest Science.

But we have to complicate the above because humans conduct Science. Using these methods above, there are some additional evidential assumptions that seem highly likely to be true due to the interaction of the fallible human using Science. Those principles can be most easily encapsulated in the principles of basic human behavior and functioning, as well as interactionism (Turner, 1988). Thus, we come to a second set of rules/liabilities/assumptions:

- a. From general cognitive psychology (e.g., Eysenck & Keane, 2020), sensation and perception, as well as neuroscience, the observation of a thing is not equal to the interpretation of a thing (and likely causes bias; see Tesser & Leone, 1977). This is a root fundamental process of the human mind that does not appear to have exceptions.
- b. The interpretation of stimuli (internal or external to the self) is guided by schemas, group interaction and belonging, and cognitive structures, all of which work in a stereotypical manner and influenced by the sum of experience (i.e., developmental interactions and culture; Dickinson & McCabe, 1991; Reynolds et al., 2010).

As such, the often-touted confirmation bias (Klayman, 1995), driven by our cognitive biases inherent in our functioning, creates issues of bias and interpretational 'error' as we use beliefs to give meaning to data, evidence, and measurement (i.e., empiricism).

The essence of the above can be easily summed to much more general points, which essentially are encapsulated by:

- I. Science has limits of knowing based on its inherent methods and inability to 'absolutely or perfectly' measure existence.
- II. Because of I., absolutism, due to a belief that cannot be absolutely verified through the scientific method, is a violation of a putative scientific claim.

Certainly, philosophers with better knowledge than myself could find some type of exception to the above claims, but as general rules, the above holds much more often than not. Yet, I am not alone in this perspective, as Maraldi (2023), within this commentary section, essen-

tially sums the above for me:

“Science has more to do with a certain attitude toward the data, with the methods used rather than the assumptions made. In this sense, it is not in itself materialist or spiritualist. Put otherwise, Science should have no partisan.... Science is a human activity and, as humans, we cannot be completely neutral” (p. 741)

To belabor Maralidi’s (2023) quote, Applications of the Thomas Theorem (Merton, 1995), evidence of belief perseverance (Anderson & Kellam, 1992; but see Anglin, 2019 for methods exceptions) self-serving bias (Shepherd, Malone, & Sweeney, 2008), and false consensus (Marks & Miller, 1987) all point to human’s self-esteem and beliefs as primary motivators for their truth conclusions, scientist or otherwise. Unfortunately, a brief observation of current media propaganda and, frankly, the monetary success of all marketing in a capitalist society provides ample evidence of the above. As I have stated previously in several works, society works under a “popular equals correct” method of validation (Hill et al., 2019; Laythe et al., 2022), often regardless of what evidence is or is not present.

I only wish to make the very evidential point that unprovable and unknowable assumptions within the framework of Science are made with both spiritual and skeptical claims. There are unprovable assumptions at the base of every scientific model. At a broad level of comparison in terms of what is evidentially demonstratable, they do not differ. This, unfortunately, is a limit of the applications of Science and our own nature. As a broad example, how can the materialist make an absolute claim in materialism when Science does not allow an absolute claim? Similarly, scientists of a spiritual inclination cannot make an absolute claim (more correctly called a belief or assumption) of a metaphysical nature (i.e., a hierarchy of discarnate agency), given that observable evidence in a materialist sense is not available to measure.

The guiding principle that allows the *JSE* to publish unpopular topics is that we should not apply our beliefs to what others believe is worth studying. Instead, recognizing Science for the method and technique that it is, we should allow anyone to study anything of potential relevance, so long as they clearly and openly separate their application of Science with clear methods and analysis, and with the honest declaration of their assumptions and beliefs that they bring to their work. This honesty with self and others about where the boundaries of evidence and assumptions meet is the most honest policy with regard to what we *can* and *cannot* affirm with Science.

THE SCIENTIFIC CRITIQUES OF METHOD, THEORY, AND OUTCOMES

Klauber

I am not a physicist, but, will admit to being an amateur hobbyist of the field, particularly when it comes to the EM spectrum, probabilities, and quantum mechanics. As such, there are those much more qualified than I to debate the innate details of this commentary. However, at a broad level, Klauber provides us with an honest assessment of his assumptions and perspectives he brings to his commentary of Tramont and further highlights the rules I outlined where a lack of evidence does not negate a claim.

The essence of his argument is clear, with assumptions neutrally defined; nothing in known physics would prevent the potentiality of discarnate agency, given the presence of additional “newly discovered” known energies (i.e., dark matter and dark energy), and the implication that they follow a quantum model similar to what we observe with measurable particles. And if we accept his clearly defined applications of known quantum physics to unknown particle quantum physics, he models a system of evolution on the unknown based on the known. Of course, the above assumptions are debatable, but it is evidentially clear where the assumptions are and how they are applied. Further, the assumptions are clearly based on previously evidentially derived models of observable data.

My only commentary here is the connection between this type of physics (or general Science) argument to much older esoteric belief systems and mainstream religious belief systems (Adair-Toteff, 2015). I bring this up as a reminder that our modern forms of philosophy and Science certainly have a connected history to older (and theological) systems of thought. In religious theology and metaphysics, it is typically bandied about as the concept of “as above, so below.” (The Emerald Tablet, Hauck, 1999). The premise is essentially the same as Kauber’s argument in that the workings of the spiritual unseen mimic the workings of the known and seen. Thus, many religions and belief practices made the more simplified arguments along the lines of the rulership structure here reflects an unseen spiritual structure (as a famous example, see the Bible, Matthew 6:10).

Obviously, Science has greatly refined the detail and evidence of this type of argument, but I bring it to the attention of the reader that it is an often used (and frequently verified model), it remains an ultimately unprovable tenet of faith when applied to things which are not yet measurable or observable.

Castro

Perhaps unsurprisingly, I am in full agreement with Castro's (2023) commentary, noting that this author clearly stated her assumptions up front, noting her expertise, and clearly indicated that she endorses an "agnostic position towards past lives, spirit mind fragment and entity attachments" (pg. 755). In fact, much of what I would have, Castro provides for us. Castro clearly identifies the potential variables at play within this worldview while neither endorsing nor condemning them. Specifically, she correctly notes that various forms of spiritual practice and past life regression are present in lesser degrees in dreamwork and, I may add, are also used quite openly in PTSD trauma reduction (Blake & Bishop, 1994; Jain et al., 2012). Although at a more micro level than I typically work with, she highlights the role of culture and belief systems with regards to memory and recall and, more importantly, the sociocultural narratives that invariably influence any form of interaction, of which my colleagues and I have modeled in more overtly paranormal context (Hill et al., 2018, 2019; Laythe et al., 2022).

Notably, Castro emphasizes ethical issues that might surround this type of practice, as well as the degree to which PLR and CT in this particular belief system are, in fact, demonstrating therapeutic efficacy. In this sense, I would similarly emphasize that the loosely qualitative data provided by Tramont is in need of additional measures, controls, and likely formal psychometric assessment of Tramont's clientele in order to make a claim with sufficient scientific rigor.

I might add two supporting points to Castro's analysis. With regards to "Shamanic Traditions," it is worth noting that history strongly suggests that the root of all clinical and psychotherapeutic practice originated with priests, shamans, and magic practitioners of the previous ages. Certainly, in a Western tradition documentation of altered states of consciousness, inductive hypnotic states, guided imagery, and in a psychiatric vein, the use of psychedelics, all seem rooted early in history within a magical (and highly spirit/entity infested) cosmology (e.g., Hygromantia circa 1140 A.D.; Torijano, 2002) as well as its proliferation in the Victorian grimoires (e.g., Mathers, 1999; 2021). Clinical psychology is certainly not the originator of these practices, noting Jung's overt use of mystical systems (Jung, 2014). Second, and notably, in my opinion, it is both correct and refreshing to see non-Western ideologies and cosmologies referenced on scientific grounds. Our extreme Western focus on what is and is not acceptable medical and therapeutic practice is highly short-sighted (but profitable) in terms of the research and efficacy of practices from other cultures.

Finally, with some experience in the clinical realm, I might write a note of caution with regards to the controversial diagnosis of dissociative identity disorder and its particular application to a discarnate agency belief system. From Tramont's notes, it is clear that while in hypnosis or PLR, 'negative entities' would speak either through the hypnotized client or Nancy Tramont as a surrogate. However, and through the available notes and case studies presented, these processes seem much more similar to "channeling" as commonly seen with mediums and psychics (Beischel, Mosher, & Boccuzzi, 2014, 2017; Wahbeh, 2023) or in some magical ritual practices (i.e., taking on the God form, Howe, 1985; Regardie, 1998). In the former, the agent channeling the "discarnate agent" has a much greater degree of control over the presence of the purported entity.

In contrast, the diagnosis of DID requires a "loss of time" and repeated intrusions of alternate personalities, often against the will of the core personality (DSM V). These features of DID lend themselves more to traditional possession cases (persistent unwanted intrusion of a mental and somatic nature), both in Western and Eastern domains (Ross, 2011). However, let us also be clear that comprehensive models for explaining either DID or possession are utterly lacking in Science (Cardena, 1992; Serch, 2012). As such, both DID and possession cases remain 'scientifically labeled' but certainly do not adequately explain aspects of human (or spiritual) behavior, notably given the well-documented cases of ostensibly paranormal phenomena that occur around them in legitimate cases where psychotic disorders and dissociative disorders can be reliably ruled out (e.g., Betty, 2005).

Maraldi

Maraldi's (2023) contribution to the critique fits nicely with Castro, noting that his analysis of Tramont early on highlights the power of belief systems, the potential problems of the positive and negative effects of varying ideological systems, and the complexity of deriving appropriate measurement to assess and separate the outcomes of Tramont's treatments from the belief system within which the practitioners and clients are both entrenched within. These are all excellent and detailed points, so I will not repeat them here. But, Maraldi provides us all with some additional powerful considerations beyond a call for engaging with sufficient operational definitions and data collection to assess this type of ideology-embedded therapeutic practice.

Maraldi states, "That's when science comes in to help us evaluate the evidence and separate what is relevant from what may appear effective but has not been

rigorously demonstrated to be so" (p. 741), and subsequently states, "Most of the training in different scientific disciplines involves the assumption of "methodological agnosticism," which requires a suspension of beliefs and ideological preferences while carrying out scientific research" (p. 741). Notably, between these two quotes, Maraldi specifically tips his hat to social and cultural paradigms via Khun (1996). So, to be clear, we are not at all in disagreement. However, I might emphasize the cultural component further within Science, which we often like to ignore as we all belong to the field of Science (self-serving bias, Sidikides et al., 1988). Aside from the most obvious points that two of our commentators certainly did not engage in "methodological agnosticism," there are more principled issues of scientific accuracy attached to when we do not personally engage with our ideological preferences.

However, Maraldi's own discussion speaks of a need to separate our spiritual beliefs from the practice of Science at the risk of "legitimacy or scientificity of their work" (p. 741), which clearly points to ideological belief systems within Science that proclaim what Science is focused upon as "wrong," or to quote Brugger, "delusional." But let us be clear; these are social and belief-driven pejorative acts (e.g., Social Identity Theory, in-group bias, or derogation of the outgroup, Brewer, 1979; Hogg, 2016; Laythe et al., 2022, ch.3.). From a pure perspective of Science, why should any scientist objectively care what another scientist is choosing to apply Science to? If, in fact, the practices and methods of the scientist's skill are evident, and data is honestly interpreted in terms of its findings as well as applications, the general field of Science wins. In essence, *more* evidence has been collected about our world and the role we play in it.

As I stated earlier, and as Maraldi hints, to what extent are we aware of and applying our own subtle preferences to the interpretation of our data? What assumptions are we not clearly identifying? Certainly, any of us who review papers will see skeptics cite certain like-minded authors while believers do the same in the opposite vein. And similar to the media's attempt at providing news, these papers will certainly not engage with competing information and theories. There is a strong temptation to weave the story around our data that suits our perspective...at the cost of the evidence that we are required to honestly use as scientists to promote or reject a claim.

As an indisputable fact, our entire Western medical and mental health treatment classification system, as well as the use of psychotropic medicines to treat illness, are all couched in a for-profit system. There is nothing wrong with this itself but let us be clear that money is both an influence and a bias in terms of acceptable stan-

dards of treatment within clinical psychology and psychiatry. I do not need to engage in conspiracy theory to apply basic operant conditioning to a body of practitioners or a corporation that is "punished" by loss of revenue or job if a profitable method of treatment is somehow threatened. Similarly, a not-at-all-small temptation exists to ignore research or bury it if the reinforcement of increased income or sustained profit will grace an institution.

As such, when examining alternative therapies, particularly couched in a complex ideology such as Tramtom's, our comparisons comprise much more than just our own ideology. They also contain tradition and orthodoxy in terms of practice and treatment, which may well be better justified by the profit they bring, as opposed to conclusive empirical evidence. A case in point to the latter, is that many in mainstream science condemn parapsychology, but notably, have never examined the literature. Did social and ideological pressure and perhaps academic laziness contribute to their conclusion? In my estimation, yes. Is part of that motivation fear of the loss of resources they need to survive? Also, likely yes.

Ideological Denigration, Ideological Endorsement

Brugger

Brugger's commentary was highly problematic for me, and for the sake of transparency, please allow me to make some disclosure statements before continuing. First and foremost, I have no issue with skepticism. In fact, I regularly work with, in bulk, skeptical scientists when publishing research. I am of the belief that 'adversarial collaboration' (Houran, 2017) leads to better predictive models and tentative explanations of various strange and odd phenomena. Second, I am an unapologetic believer in 'the paranormal' and certainly personally believe that discarnate agency is some 'type of real' either in an internal Jungian archetype sense or as external agents...or perhaps both. However, I accept and have no problem with the fact that what I believe and what I can prove as a scientist are two very different things.

So, with the above transparency, Brugger's (2023) commentary essentially translates to a large authority-derived faith-based claim of condemnation. Stating early on that "Neuroscience alone cannot provide the sole "explanation" (pg. 748) regarding religious "delusion," and also provides himself an exception from scientific analysis by informing us indirectly that, "Be it as it may, the fact that I do not have to comment on a scientific text frees me from having to stick to orthodox rules of commentary" (pg. 747). In this sense, his statements are honest with Science, but what follows is a materialist sermon a Southern Baptist would be proud of.

Brugger (2023) spared no time describing Tramont's work as "a testimonial of religious delusion" (p. 747), as well as claiming that the Tramonts have "fallen back" (p. 747) and "Naive notions" of spirits as outside agents" (p. 749). More stinging, he labeled the Tramonts as "naive, gullible," and "craving for crap" (p. 749), referring to all spirituality as "popular delusions" (p. 749) and describing Tramont's career as a "sad developmental trajectory." (p. 749) Put bluntly, the entirety of these statements are based on beliefs, ideology, and assumptions that are necessary to 'believe in' in order for any of them to have merit. To highlight a couple of points to the above, I would note that invoking James Braids' belief system before modern neuroscience is a simple appeal to a similar belief system without evidence. Braid in the 1800's certainly did not have access to MRI technology. Further, it is fundamentally unclear to me how either neurology or neuroscience applies comprehensively and completely to the functionality and broad-based predictive outcomes of belief systems, despite his proffered caveat about ignoring 'orthodox rules of commentary.'

Indeed, not being a neuroscientist, I estimate that I need further education on how a mechanistic low-resolution mapping process of the brain, which has failed to solve the hard problem of consciousness (Chalmers, 2017), has empirically and absolutely determined that all religions and spiritual belief systems throughout all of history are delusional. I would enjoy seeing the best argument possible for this claim given the myriad of assumptions required outside the realm of provable Science to establish it.

However, on a broader scale and perhaps when examining these Commentaries in a case-study type manner, Brugger's response brings me back to earlier research in religious fundamentalism and right-wing authoritarianism (Altemeyer & Hunsburger, 1992). Brugger is not wrong to claim that religion can be detrimental. However, there are significant well-researched caveats here. People who have inherent degrees of authoritarianism (which is certainly not unique to right-wing ideologies) inherently hold dogmatic and religious absolutism in their beliefs (Ambrose & Sternberg, 2011; Hunsberger, Pratt, & Pancer, 1994; Weeks & Geisler, 2019). Case in point, within a conservative Christian religious system, it is clear that it is this dogmatism through right-wing authoritarianism is, in fact, the prominent predictor of both racial and homosexual prejudice (Laythe et al., 2001, 2002). In essence, it is not the beliefs held but the ways(s) in which they are held that lead to prejudicial thinking and action. Outside the psychology of religion, the entire body of social identity theory and self-categorization theory (Hogg, 2016) demonstrate that assumptive dogmatism is the problem

variable with regard to negative outcomes in belief systems. In essence, an atheistic or materialistic ideology is not psychologically different than 'religion' with regards to dogmatic behavior and its psychological correlates.

This point is clearly evident in Brugger's claims, as he condemns the faith-based claims of Tramont that he himself espouses in his writing. The essence of Brugger's critique is a faith-based condemnation of the worthiness of Tramont's work, lacking either analysis or objectivity. His approach prefers not to engage with Science-based evidence claims, as opposed to engaging with assumptive and prejudicial ideological preference. Thus, we could nit-pick or debate line by line here, but in sum, Brugger's argument basically boils down to "Your beliefs are bad and unworthy of analysis because mine are right, which I will also not justify." This is the logical equivalent of the claim: "My red apple is different from your red apple." Readers can decide for themselves whether good Science is conducted when the researcher dogmatically "knows" what the correct answer is (or must be) ahead of time.

Hunter

In a lightly comparable manner, Hunter's anthropological Commentary mirrors Brugger's, albeit in a much more humble and less overtly offensive manner. Whereas I am in partial agreement with Hunter's perspective and note that there is value in making comparisons across esoteric and new-age belief systems, his essay reads very much as a 'carte blanche' endorsement of these belief systems without any critical reflection. In this sense, Hunter's commentary is simply an endorsement commentary. There is no argumentation or critique of Tramont's work, merely (but notably, relevant) cultural and sociological comparisons with other esoteric practitioners within the realm of mediumship.

Hunter (2023) best summarizes his commentary himself, where he advocates "re-engagement with the concept of 'high strangeness' and a loosening of the 'boggle threshold'" (pg. 739) and "biographical details....the sketching out of a 'gothic psychology.' (p. 739). I think Hunter's perspective nonetheless highlights a large 'boggle' that anomalists may not be confronting. Specifically, his Commentary did not address either the truthfulness or efficacy of the beliefs of Tramont's spirit releasement therapy; it merely compares these beliefs to other beliefs of a similar nature. And this does raise questions about to what extent esoteric or new-age beliefs (and related practices) can or should be examined.

Personally, I sit somewhat agnostically with the above. On the one hand, belief systems do not have to be true to be applied to our judgments and worldview (e.g.,

Fong & Markus, 1982; Krahe, Temkin, & Bieneck, 2007; Narvaes & Bock, 2002). Certainly, reviewing these articles proves that. At the same time, if the truth is valuable to us as scientists, we have to engage in a thoughtful critique of issues in mediumship, notably a hodgepodge of inconsistent and sometimes contrary metaphysical systems with a variety of entity structures that do not often align (for an excellent example, see Wahbeh, 2023).

In this sense, I am reminded of an online agora or conference where mediums were present. I asked one medium about demons, who noted they did not exist, while another medium in the chat swore that they did. Being a person known, perhaps shamefully, for asking awkward questions, I asked how they reconciled this considerable difference in theological cosmology. And both quit talking to me. In truth, I was hoping for a really comprehensive answer.

While being a studious consumer and practitioner of esoteric theology, we must obviously raise an eyebrow when a 'speaker of spiritual truth' in an authoritative position posits truths when other 'speakers' provide different and contrary testimony. I think we are on safe philosophical ground when I say that 'truth' (however close we can get to it) is unlikely to have forty versions of absolute truth. One might apply Heideggerian existential concepts to truth in an 'Aletheia' (ἀλήθεια) method (2010) or perhaps apply Plato's cave, (Annis, 1981) but multiple blatant and outright contradictions when all are presented as 'truth' create all sorts of problems both scientifically and theologically.

To the point, and with Tramont as an excellent example, we should up our 'boggle threshold' and embrace high strangeness, but where I would diverge from Hunter's written word is that we apply our critical mind and scientific methodology towards sorting out what may or may not be 'more likely than not' truthful when examining spiritual/paranormal claims. My colleague and I have argued previously (Houran & Laythe, 2022) that there is no phenomenological reason to treat the experience of high strangeness any differently than any other perceptual phenomenon. Notably, sensation and perception psychology has been clear in the sense that our biological and cognitive-perceptual mechanisms are constant. Thus, if we constantly perceive through our biological and perceptual systems, there should be no bias in how we evaluate seeing a 'ghost' versus a 'deer'. Arguments attempting to separate these two perceptive phenomena are deeply flawed and presumptive. Perceptual aberrations are frankly not frequent enough to encompass the sheer frequency in the population of paranormal occurrences. Our model would loosely propose that 39% of paranormal experiences cannot be accounted for by any skeptical or

mundane mechanisms (Houran & Laythe, 2022).

Evidentially, it is clear that separating the observation of a UFO versus a school bus is one of social-cultural prejudice and very little else. The latter is socially accepted as 'normal,' and the latter as 'taboo'. In fact, I would challenge any reader to provide a legitimate argument as to why these are different aside from the fact that one threatens and contradicts our accepted worldview and one does not.

Particularly as scientific anomalists, we should be 'all in' examining these oddities and "damn facts" to quote Charles Fort (2008). Evidence either in the phenomenological study or ontology of both belief and practice within these systems are necessary to see what *does and does not align* with what we can observe and reliably know (actually know, not presume...for the record). My argument to this is more ethical than scientific, as a brief perusal into the historical formation of religion and cults (benign or otherwise) has and still can have staggering and horrible consequences for the people who believe in them and those whom they impose them on. Beliefs are insanely powerful, and historically, millions of deaths, tortures, and sexual assaults can be securely laid at the feet of beliefs gone wrong. Truth probing is a necessary test of belief systems, as beliefs lead to behaviors that have consequences.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

My goal in writing this paper was to highlight the critique of an 'ideology derived' spirit releasement therapy and, in turn, compare and contrast the 'ideology' present with our scientist commentators. The goal, if not painfully obvious by now, was to emphasize that beliefs and ideology (unproven assumptions) are obviously extant in Science and in ourselves. This bias, in turn, affects our ability to apply the tool of Science to other belief systems. And our commentators did not disappoint. I am personally heartened, as we can see that many of our commentators applied fair critiques with regards to better forms of measurement, as well as limits as to what we are able to assess in such a complicated ideology. And in a similar vein, most of our commentators provided clear statements upfront about their perspectives and assumptions. In my opinion only, anomalists appear to be much more honest and transparent than our pseudo-skeptical colleagues (note that I used pseudo-skeptic, and not skeptic alone).

To Tramont, a largely unresolved question here is similar to the questions raised recently in this journal by Wahbeh (2023) and her comparison of spiritual information provided by mediums. Can the methods of Science be applied to at least partially examine the hypotheti-

cal structure of spiritual ontologies? I personally think the answer is “yes,” provided that we *transparently* allow the assumption of the possibility of discarnate agency and then subsequently review spiritual accounts across a wide body of paranormal cultures and experiences for commonalities. If nothing else, comparing the testimonies of near-death experiencers from mediums, occultists, psychics, and then hauntings and poltergeists could at least help us identify common core theological and cultural assumptions across these domains. Certainly, psychometrics could be used with these populations to deduce positive and negative trait and behavioral outcomes as they align to universally congruent spirit ontologies, as opposed to incongruent ones. It is an exciting research program with a mixture of anthropology and experimental psychology.

Of course, the problem with beliefs is that we tend to treat them as absolutes and subsequently depend on them, which, of course, makes us resistant to information or data that might not suit our tried-and-true methods of perceiving and evaluating the world around us. Some of these groups might be greatly disturbed by the findings of such a research program. And similarly, we might have to treat such comparisons as nothing more than common cross-cultural ideological themes, as opposed to evidence of ontological spiritual constants. Then again, the latter can really only be demonstrably claimed if we initiate the studies to do the former.

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