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## **1. Introduction**

Events of extraordinary characteristics have been part of the history of mankind since remote times. Kripal (2010, p. 253) claims that the paranormal is at the heart of religions and nowadays neuroscience wants to reduce it to a set of neurological processes. He argues that paranormal phenomena are worth studying, but if taken seriously, we are surrendering to the faith of religious tradition - therefore a third way needs to be found.

On the other hand in academia there has always been a widespread resistance to anything associated with the paranormal. According to Kastrup (2016, p. 54) the reason is that academia is plagued with the deprived myth of materialism and insists on rejecting even the possibility of transcendence. More specifically, in the field of psychology, Brottman (2012, p.36) argues that to express any interest in paranormal elements of psychoanalysis would mean to abandon the medical model. A phenomenon such as telepathy, to those who use the term, refers to something outside the bounds not only of sensory experience, but also of the current laws of science. Rao (2012, p. 176) claims that the investigation of psychic phenomena has not emerged as a viable academic discipline, and this is surprising in the light of the fact that the majority of people around the world not only believe in the reality of these phenomena, but also report that they have had in their lives some form of paranormal experience.

Many significant personalities in Western culture have been interested in this area and have experienced paranormal phenomena themselves. Brottman (2012, p. 29) points out that Freud had a life-long interest in the supernatural but soon learned to keep quiet about this fascination that carried a stigma in scientific circles. He was always fascinated with the notion of telepathy and believed the phenomenon was genuine, and described it as "a mental act in one person instigating the mental act in another person". It was even speculated that telepathy was the original method of communication between individuals. However, when the psychiatrist Jules Eisenbud tried to extend the theory that Freud had ambivalently proposed, he encountered ridicule and rejection from his colleagues. Similarly, the Swiss psychiatrist C. J. Jung admitted the paranormal played a crucial role in his interest in psychology and later development as a

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researcher. He also claimed that the relationship between doctor and patient can lead to parapsychological phenomena (Jung 1995, p. 159).

Kripal (2010, p. 257) argues that the theory of Human as Two can offer a plausible explanation to the existence of paranormal phenomena. He suggests that these phenomena are expressions of a deeper nondual reality that has both "mental" and "material" qualities that manifest according to the subjective or objective structure of an experience or experiment. In his view, paranormal phenomena are functions of this nonduality and are designed to pop us out of our dualistic, either-or ways of thinking about the world. For him, this is another reason why the paranormal and the mystical should not be separated, as both are pointing or expressing this nondual or both-and level of the real.

My interest in this topic arises from a personal experience in which I felt very distinctly these two different beings in myself. At the time I was 40 years old and this had never happened before in my life. Although I looked for professional help in order to understand the experience I was going through, none of the experts I consulted was able to help me understand my own psychological state. It was an experience that involved paranormal phenomena, namely telepathy, altered states of consciousness, and hallucination, when at the time I did not know this was happening to me. It was only after a long and deep analysis and recounting of the situation that I came to understand part of what had happened, as until this day there are some aspects that still remain a mystery to me. However, a detailed account of that experience falls out of the scope of this work.

In this essay I will discuss Kripal's theory of Human as Two and how his ideas can offer a new approach to the study of these extraordinary phenomena. In the next section I will provide a detailed discussion of this theory.

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## 2. The Human as Two

The idea that there are two different sides or aspects in the human being can be understood in different ways. Kripal (2014, p. 346) mentions other authors that have given different reasons for the existence of two well-differentiated sides of the human being, or Human as Two. One of them is Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist who claimed that man is double, that there are two beings in man: an individual being which has its foundation in the organism and a social being which represents the highest reality in the intellectual and moral order that we know by observation. Kripal claims that this is Durkheim's version of what he has called "the Human as Two" and it means we are smarter as a group than we are as individuals, and we worship that which is greater than us.

Another way of looking at these two sides of the human being is given by the philosopher and psychologist William James, who witnessed psychical phenomena up close, although never claimed to understand what he had witnessed (Kripal 2014, p. 379). He discussed the notion of a "subliminal self", which he borrowed from Frederic Myers. This referred to a vast region of human personality that exists and works below the threshold of normal consciousness and that may be responsible for extraordinary capacities like telepathy and clairvoyance. James, in his own use of the subliminal self, discussed how dramatic conversion experiences in which a person suddenly changes character overnight, even instantly, appear to require some sort of "leaky" or "pervious margin". He seems to suggest that in some individuals the conscious sense of self is porous and open to "external influences", which may be in fact "internal" - the Human as Two again.

Kripal (2014, p. 377) also mentions Jung and his understanding of reality to offer another take on the idea of the Human as Two. Jung's notion of synchronicity relates to the fact that sometimes what is going on inside the subject corresponds in a profound way to what is going on outside the subject, as if the mental and material dimensions of those special moments had "split off" from some deeper one single thing. Jung speculated that this was precisely the case and referred to the deeper superreality as the *unus mundus*, that is, "the one world" or "the unitary world". Here the human being

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would be a double expression, material and mental, of the deepest levels of the real world.

The two sides in the human being could also be referred to what Kastrup (2016, p. 41) calls the intellect and the "obfuscated mind". He points out that there are aspects of reality that cannot be unambiguously represented in any language and asks the reader to assess how open they are to this idea. The intellect cannot go where language cannot take it, but according to him the human mind is more than this. We have what he calls the "obfuscated mind", which in his view represents a link to a broader reality. Among other characteristics, he claims that the obfuscated mind can embody a much greater range of cognition than the intellect, and its depth, breadth, and flexibility may represent a huge and untapped potential in every human being.

According to McGilchrist (2007, p. 5) there are two fundamentally different versions of the world delivered to us by the two brain hemispheres, both valuable, but they stand in opposition to one another, and need to be kept apart from one another- hence the bihemispheric structure of the brain. McGilchrist (2007, p. 137) claims that the history of Western philosophy is essentially a left-hemisphere process. It is verbal and analytic, requiring abstracted, decontextualized, disembodied thinking, dealing in categories. These dichotomies may depend on a certain, naturally dichotomising, 'either/or' view of the world, and may cease to be problematic in the world delivered by the right hemisphere, where what appears to the left hemisphere to be divided is unified, where concepts are not separated from experience.

There are a number of people whose experiences have provided insight into the nature of the Human as Two. Among others, Kripal (2010, p. 259) talks about the brain anatomist Jill Bolte Taylor, who experienced a massive stroke and who for several months while her left side was gradually coming back online found herself alternating between two different realities, in Kripal's words, she knew consciousness as consciousness instead of as a culture. After that experience she said that she understood how it is that we are capable of having a mystical experience and concluded later that we are not who we think we are. For Kripal (2014, p. 390) the case of the neuroscientist Taylor shows us that the Human as Two is not just an ancient mystical doctrine, but a universal neuroanatomical fact. This is not a truth that you are free to accept or deny, as

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if denying it would suddenly turn your two brain hemispheres into one. In essence we have two brains.

Similarly, Jung (1995, p. 50) recalls in his memories an experience he had out of which sprang the feeling that he was actually two different persons. He also acknowledges the crucial insight that "there are things in the psyche which I do not produce, but which produce themselves and have their own life" (ibid, p. 207). He claimed that some of these images made the distinction clear between himself and the object of his thought.

In order to give an explanation to these kinds of experiences Kripal (2014, p. 380) argues that the filter thesis is something similar to what is implied by Plato's famous parable of the Cave and also in the Hindu Tantric kundalini yoga. In his view, it can explain the idea that a paranormal event can be both real and unreal, both fiction and fact. It can be real because it can be a genuine expression of the Mind beyond the brain, and unreal to the extent that it is filtered, translated, or imagined expression of Mind in and through the linguistic, identity, and cultural capacities of the (left) brain. From his point of view (Kripal 2014, p. 381) the filter thesis has the advantage of being capable of embracing both the findings of modern psychology, neuroscience and cognitive science, and some of the most astonishing moments in the general history of religions.

It seems that altered states of consciousness put the human in touch with realms of existence that may have powerful consequences in the life of individuals and there is a well documented correlation between dissociative states and paranormal powers (Brottman 2012, p. 39). Kripal (2014, p. 381) points out the problems of Aldous Huxley and his mystical experience when he took mescaline and in Kripal's view the problems were rather theological, ethical and philosophical. They stemmed from the fact that any person could come to know something of what the mystics, mediums, and saints of the world religions had known, without their beliefs, without their rituals, or without their moral development. All one needed was the right chemical trigger. The philosophical problem was whether such states were simply a matter of brain chemistry. To explain the experience, Huxley adapted the filter thesis and used it to explain how psychedelic substance might well be necessary catalyst of such mind manifestations without ever causing them. Similarly, Kripal (2007, p. 17) claims that after a critical period he went through while suffering from anorexia, what finally healed him was what appeared in

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his dreams (that is, in an altered state of consciousness) now translated and analysed through the hermeneutical methods of classical psychoanalysis.

Rao (2012, p. 185) argues that there is a strong resistance from the mainstream science community against accepting the parapsychological data as evidence of anything significant that would add substantially to our knowledge of human nature and our potentials. The main reason in his view is that this data does not fit into the categories of understanding we are familiar with and the epistemology we subscribe to, they are not merely unusual, but are compellingly contrary to common sense and uncomfortably offensive to the accustomed scientific outlook. However, Kripal (2010, p. 262) points out that there are perfectly rational reasons to advance a nonmaterialist science that posits the Mind as distinct from the brain, that understands brain as a kind of supersensitive receptor or reducing valve that the Mind uses to interact with the material world. Moreover, Beaugard (2007, cited in Kripal 2010, p. 265) suggests that a nonmaterialist science may accelerate our understanding of the process of spiritualization and significantly contribute to the emergence of a planetary type of consciousness.

In the previous paragraphs I have given an account of Kripal's theory of the Human as Two and how it can be understood and explained from different angles. However, in his view we must move beyond this duality and find a third place where we could see both aspects in perspective. Anticipating criticism, he responds to the views that claim that if we take the sacred seriously we are surrendering to the faith of the religious tradition (Kripal 2010, p. 254). For him the sacred is not faith but a third thing, and the paranormal is also a third thing.

Regarding the study of religions, Kripal (2007, p. 12) claims that it can be defined as a movement between two modes of human functioning, two sides of the brain, as it were, analogous but not identical to those associated with faith and reason. His model aims to honour and respect the truth of both sides of this tension, seeing them as opposite, but intimately related, poles of a deeper unity. This produces a third realm of knowing that resembles but cannot be reduced to what has traditionally been called gnosis. From his point of view this word has three edges, implying at once a privileging of knowing over believing, an affirmation of altered states of consciousness and psychic functioning as

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valuable and legitimate modes of cognition. This kind of gnosis, moreover, presumes a certain individualism, an inviolable intellectual and moral integrity, and a privileging of individual conviction, dream, conscience, and vision over any and all authorized truths or revelations, even as it recognizes, through reason, that its own individual convictions have been nurtured and formed by community and tradition.

Furthermore, Kripal (2007, p.23) proposes to fuse faith and reason into a deeper gnosis that appears to be much more radical and potentially transformative than any social-scientific or purely rational method. He argues that perhaps we should imagine a new classroom of gnostic epiphany - what he calls the third classroom. In the gnostic classroom religious identity is respected but never made an absolute marker of humanity or a boundary marker for what can or cannot be said; anything can be said and everything can and should be questioned, actually, it encourages you to say whatever you think, even and especially if it shakes people up. In the gnostic classroom people are rewarded for being uncertain and for asking questions that cannot be answered with any of the categories, beliefs, or ideas that we have inherited from our pasts, and the goal here is to provoke, to criticize, and to transgress.

Finally, Kripal (2010, p 270) considers that someone who knows that the Human is Two and One is what he calls an *Author of the Impossible*, someone who has gone beyond all these dualisms of right and left, mystical and rational, faith and reason, self and other, mind and matter, consciousness and energy, and so on. It is somebody who has ceased to live, think, and imagine only in the left brain, who has worked hard and long to synchronize the two forms of consciousness and identity and bring them both online together.

From my point of view Kripal succeeds in giving an account of how to live, study or react beyond dualisms and I consider his proposals valid both personally and also professionally. Being myself a teacher, interested in the development of individuals so that they can reach their full potential, it is essential that we take the third classroom stance if we want to move forward, beyond the mere passing of official exams. However, I am well aware that perhaps we are not ready yet for such a shift, as it would imply a radical change of the role of teachers and students.

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### **3. Implications for paranormal research**

In the previous section I have referred to different cases of people who experienced a situation in which they felt two distinct parts of themselves and how this had positive effects in their lives. In this section I will discuss the relevance of carrying out studies on the paranormal and how this could be done.

First of all, Kripal's theory may provide a ground to revisit our view of paranormal phenomena and to encourage the study of these aspects of human experience. On the other hand, Kripal (2010, p. 252) claims that he would like to establish a dialogue among the ancient theory of homo duplex or the Human as Two, the filter or transmission thesis, contemporary neuroscience and his own dialectical model of consciousness. In his view (Kripal 2010, p. 266) consciousness is as unitary as it is modular, and most significant brain processes cannot be located simply on the left or right hemisphere.

Kripal (2010, p. 24) explains that the psychical and the paranormal appear in that space where the humanities and the sciences meet beyond both, where mind and matter, subjectivity and objectivity merge in ways that can only violate and offend our present order of knowledge and possibility. Accordingly, to approach such phenomena as subjective things, as "anecdotes" or "coincidences", as interesting internal states that have no real connection to the external physical world of objects and events is to seriously misunderstand them. Similarly, however, to approach such phenomena as objective, quantifiable, replicable things "out there" is inevitably to miss them, or just barely see them.

Perhaps it would be useful to reflect upon the methods needed to study these phenomena. Kripal (2010, p. 266) argues that our present methods represent only half the picture, as they are left-brain methods. For him, it is not possible to explain these phenomena using the methods of social constructivism, discourse analysis, and historical criticism, and he claims that we have not accepted and significantly developed right-brain methods. However, this does not mean he is denying the analytic and linguistic capacities of the left brain. Along these same lines, Rao (2012, p. 174) claims that we need a shift in the techniques and technologies we use to study psi, based on the

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assumption that psi is neither an anomaly nor an aberration but a genuine, inherent principle embedded in reality and accessible to human experience.

Kripal (2010, p. 257) argues that paranormal and psychical phenomena are hermeneutical realities that work like texts and stories, they are about meaning as much as they are about matter. If we want to understand about the communication's source we must translate them or interpret them. It may be useful to see what Kennedy (1995, cited in Rao 2012, p. 205) explains about research on the effects of psi experiences. This particular study has found that the predominant effect is to alter the person's worldview and increase his or her sense of spirituality, connectedness, and meaning in life.

Finally, I agree with Kripal (2007, p. 18) when he points out that not everything can be explained in scientific or psychological terms, that at least some of what we do and who we are is fundamentally anomalous and inexplicable. He refers to people who have been through different types of experiences and who later found themselves entering, often spontaneously, into extremely positive and healing altered states of consciousness. They do not accept of understand, they know. And they are perfectly aware that very few people will ever understand them, as they have not been through the same life-altering experiences and had their consciousness and energies permanently shifted into other dimensions of knowing and being.

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#### **4. Conclusion and reflection**

In this essay I have shown that Kripal's theory of the Human as Two may be a plausible explanation for the existence of paranormal phenomena. I have highlighted the importance of adopting this perspective mainly because it may allow the human being to access new potentialities that would remain otherwise hidden.

Perhaps it is difficult, if not completely impossible, to understand the idea of the Human as Two unless one has been through an experience of this type. Similarly, it may be true that one needs to experience or see a paranormal event with their own eyes in order to believe in them. And not only to believe in them, but to also find their hidden meaning and perhaps a new way of understanding life. It certainly was my case, and I appreciate having found out about other people going through the same kind of experiences. This has greatly helped me to understand mine. In my case I am reluctant to call this a religious or mystical experience but I am much more comfortable with the idea of having caught a glimpse of not so well studied aspects of the human mind. Since I had this experience my life has become much more meaningful to me, I have a feeling that I could happily die tomorrow having seen in life what I wanted to see. Because I am not a religious person maybe that is why I was encountered with these aspects of the paranormal rather than with an image of god or something similar.

Moreover, it may be relevant to acknowledge that we have personalities that we are not aware of, that we do not know who we really are deeply and unless we first recognize this fact and start to get to know ourselves we may not be fully developed individuals and reach our full potential. I hope I have shown that paranormal phenomena may have the function of awakening us to this realm of existence.

Finally, it can be added that there is enough evidence now to at least consider that there is something out there worth exploring and that new methods need to be developed and employed in studying these phenomena. The benefit of studying the paranormal is that it can serve to develop the individual and have access to all our potentialities as human beings, and at the same time perhaps create a better world, a more peaceful one in which there were less suffering and most people could enjoy their lives.

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