

The Science of Spirit
Possession
(2nd Edition)

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By

Terence Palmer

Cambridge
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My discussion, I may say at once, will avoid metaphysics as carefully as it will avoid theology. For somewhat similar reasons I do not desire to introduce the philosophical opinions which have been held by various thinkers in the past, nor myself to speculate on matters lying beyond the possible field of objective proof.

Frederic W.H. Myers (1843-1901)

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FOREWORD

I feel blessed to be writing this foreword; blessed and excited. Why? Because Terry's book is the longed-for sequel to the work of an illustrious line of pioneers and unnamed therapists around the world whose efforts have benefited countless sufferers of spirit possession. Now at last comes the scientific connection - so necessary for the establishment of spirit release as an accepted therapy. Terence Palmer is unknown to literary and scientific circles, and yet he has the vision, commitment and courage to write a book with the resounding title, *The Science of Spirit Possession*. With commendable clarity, Terry outlines the type of evidence that is required to support a scientific approach to the problem. In particular, he describes how research in telepathy can throw light on the dynamics of possession.

Much space is given to the work of Frederic Myers (1843-1901), co-founder of the Society for Psychical Research, whose analytical and experimental genius Palmer celebrated in the PhD thesis which seeded this book. Myers' principle research tool was "magnetism", Mesmer's technique for inducing trance by silent passes. Magnetism is a wonderful key with which to access the subliminal mind, where one can reach those hidden aspects of personality which we term spiritual. With the enthusiastic support of William James, Myers insisted that spirit possession is a reality which demands thorough investigation. Palmer takes Myers' creative research in telepathy as foundation for a fresh examination of spirit possession in the light of later developments and the conceptual freedoms afforded by quantum theory. The book has three parts:

Part I. "Possession and Exorcism Methods and Theories", gives a comprehensive account of the history of spirit possession, both invited and imposed, and of contemporary attitudes. It includes several vivid case descriptions. Different treatment methods are outlined and both academic and popular opinions analysed. Palmer stresses the importance of personal experience in accepting possession as a real phenomenon.

Part II. "Myers' Conceptual Framework" considers Myers' theoretical and experimental approach to the study of human personality. With his subjects in trance he studied induced hallucinations, automatic writing, telepathy (his neologism), channelling and many other phenomena. With his colleagues, Edmund Gurney and Frank Podmore, Myers focused particularly on extreme phenomena, such as telepathic hypnosis which,

together with Pierre Janet and others, he studied in detail. An example of Myers' ingenuity is his study of taste transfer between blindfold subjects.

Part III. "Myers and Modern Science" contains the meat of the book. Here Palmer examines how Myers' framework relates to modern scientific research into psi, esoteric healing practices and the nature of consciousness. The section gives a wide-ranging survey of phenomena in humans, other animals, plants and bacteria, which illustrate the mechanism of non-sensory communication. It also explores the nature of animal magnetism as a possible source of physical energy in the healing process and goes on to discuss the profound effect of magnetism on animals from fish to elephants. Next comes research on healing, remote viewing, awareness of staring from a concealed observer, mediumship, near-death and out-of-body experience, instrumental voice communication and much else. That the many fascinating accounts of research relate only indirectly to spirit attachment is because of the lack of the necessary facilities and the funding to launch a major research project.

Palmer is in full agreement with Myers' insistence on a continuum linking all psychological phenomena. He maintains that Myers' thought can be included within an expanded science in which quantum theory, with its three dominant concepts of non-locality, the relationship between matter and empty space, and coherence-and-wave-resonance, opens the door to many, apparently incompatible, spiritual phenomena. I believe that this is a crucial insight, which brings spirit possession within the scope of scientific research.

An index and two new chapters, *Psychography & Neuro-imaging* and *Draft Project Proposal* for the release of spirits from schizophrenics add substance to this revised edition.

As a practising spirit release therapist I find this fine book convincing. The material is carefully organised and the case for the reality of spirit possession clearly put. I particularly like the refreshing directness with which Palmer expresses his unconventional views. Much remains to be done, but there is now a promising basis for scientific research, and valuable guidance for those who are drawn to this important work. I expect *The Science of Spirit Possession* will become a major influence and a source of reference for the subject, which will run to many editions. Terry makes it clear that he has a more immediate aim. He plans to use the book to promote research projects to academic institutions. I wish him success in this great enterprise.

Alan Sanderson

Consultant psychiatrist, Founding chair of the Spirit Release Foundation.

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

This second edition benefits from valuable constructive criticism from my peers, to whom I am much obliged. First of all I must make it clear that this is not a manual for student practitioners of Spirit Release Therapy (SRT) who are advised to obtain and read monographs from the selected bibliography in Appendix A. It is hoped that a university-accredited training programme for medical students and professionals will one day be introduced for aspiring SRT practitioners. In the meantime, this book is a study of the scientific framework that can accommodate spirit possession as a valid human experience rather than as an outdated notion of supernatural beliefs. The ultimate objective of writing this book is to promote serious scientific research and experimentation in the alleviation of distress by the treatment of spirit attachment and possession disorders. It is therefore primarily for the research scientist and clinical practitioner with an interest in clinical trials and experiments that have yet to be conducted in this difficult area of medicine and psychiatry.

Scientific research is dynamic and constantly evolving at an accelerated pace, especially in the domains of quantum theory and brain function imaging. In contrast, the foundation for religious beliefs has traditionally been grounded in faith and in the teachings of religious mystics such as Christ, Mohammed and the Buddha, together with sacred texts from Eastern philosophies such as the *Upanishads*, the ancient *Vedas* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. Since the emergence of the scientific enlightenment the gulf between mechanistic science and the teachings of religion has widened in the populist consensus of Western, materialist culture. But this gulf is rapidly closing with what some may call a New Renaissance in spirituality, an emergence of a “Transcendent Movement” (Beasley, 2013) or a so-called “New-Age” revision of what the prophets of old were teaching about spirituality.

Bridging the gap between this modern spiritual movement and neuroscience is the “transpersonal” which is now tentatively being recognised as an emergent new paradigm in modern psychology (Friedman and Hartelius, 2013). Indeed, the sciences of quantum mechanics and neurology are beginning to contribute to what the American philosopher and father of modern psychology William James advocated as a “science of religions” (1902). This vision of James was partly inspired by his active

participation with the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) that was founded in London in 1882 by a group of scientists and philosophers who wanted to apply scientific investigation to those areas of human experience that had hitherto been confined to religious beliefs and to those phenomena that were considered to be paranormal or supernatural. One SPR member in particular, F.W.H. Myers was active in investigating the proposition that the human mind survives the death of the physical body, which is still considered in the modern-day to be beyond the reach of the accepted physical sciences. However, Frederic Myers is now being acknowledged as a pioneer in the scientific investigation of the nature of consciousness, and with recent developments in quantum theory and neuroscience the nature of consciousness has become a fashionable line of enquiry for scientific research.

I first encountered the methods and theories of Frederic Myers when I was studying for a master's degree in mysticism and religious experience at the University of Kent between 2004-2006. First I need to explain why I was studying for a degree in mysticism.

In 1998-2000, as a hypnotherapist, I was invited by a GP to attend to his chronic patients, and following the successful treatment of several cases I began to encounter some that challenged accepted psychological and psychodynamic theories. These cases were not only challenging to my training in hypnotic suggestion, but were threatening to me personally both physically and emotionally. These cases were so confusing and emotionally traumatic for me that I was no longer able to work as a therapist.

I started reading earnestly about multiple personality, dissociation and borderline personality. The thought of spirit possession passed fleetingly across my mind and I mentioned it to a colleague who dismissed it immediately, and so did I.

But then I was approached by a sales assistant in my local book shop who had noticed the books I was reading, and she asked me if I could help her. I told her that I was no longer a practicing therapist, but she insisted that I could help. The woman complained of experiencing intense unexplained anger, and as I was working with her, one minute she was a sensible, peaceful woman and the next she wanted to kill me. This reminded me of my previous unsolved cases. The personality of a North American medicine chief emerged and told me he wanted to kill all the white men for their genocide of his entire tribe. Just as before, I had no idea how to deal with this encounter and I felt that I was being forced to do something positive about learning how to deal with it.

Enquiries led me to psychiatrist Dr Alan Sanderson who had set up an organisation whose objective was to provide support in such matters. The Spirit Release Foundation (SRF) was new and had no training programme of its own at that time, so Alan directed me to specialist trainers in Kent who had been trained in the US by psychiatrist Irene Hickman, a pioneer of SRT.¹

During the practical training in spirit release I was given the opportunity to release the earthbound spirit of the medicine chief who had been attached to the woman from the book shop. This was my first personal experience of spirit attachment and release where I became at-one with the medicine chief and went with him to *The Light*. It took me several months to recover from the intense emotions I experienced, but gave me the courage to accept the challenge and apply what I had been taught. This account has been published in the journal *Paranthropology* (Palmer, 2011).

After my training I went through a period where I had a string of cases, all treated with success using the techniques I had learned. Here are a few examples:

The schoolgirl who couldn't walk. This was a teenaged girl who had progressively lost the use of her legs until she had to be taken to school in a wheelchair. There was no medical explanation for her condition and when I visited her home she was seen to be crawling on her elbows from room to room as she dragged her legs behind her. On investigation it was discovered that when she was about eight years old she had been playing in the garden of a friend when her friend's uncle had tried to abuse her. The fear generated from this experience attracted a discarnate entity that used fear to attach itself and incapacitate her. On removal of the entity, the patient regained the use of her legs. This case is representative of how fear is used as an attractant and reinforces the hypothesis of "sympathetic resonance" where emotions emit an energetic frequency that acts as a beacon to attract negative spirit entities.

In the case of the school teacher with an impulse to electrocute herself investigation revealed that this woman had been a healer in a previous life and had been hanged as a witch in sixteenth-century Scotland. Although she had a leaning towards nursing, her past-life experience prompted her into the teaching profession, but her healing abilities were being thwarted by a Dark Force Entity (DFE) whose job it was to prevent her. The entity was responsible for inducing her into the potentially lethal obsession to place her fingers into electrical sockets. Successful removal of the

¹ These trainers have since moved to Florida in the United States.

offending entity returned the patient to a healthy outcome with no compulsions or fears. This case prompts the question, “What causes dangerous obsessions and compulsions?”

In my third example, Dark Samuel was a discarnate entity who believed that the patient was his property and he was determined to control her life. He was escorted away from the patient by the Archangel Gabriel and the patient regained her freedom and independence.

On the foundation of these and other successful cases, I received an invitation to go to the USA to do some work with an American member of the SRF and to be interviewed for American television. In the US, whilst working with a facilitator for the rehabilitation of convicted wife beaters and sexual abusers, we discovered several cases of spirit attachment that caused the destructive behaviour. The rehabilitation facilitator asked his employers if we could conduct a clinical trial and document the results of our work. They agreed provided we could be supervised by an established scientific institution. That was in 2004 and my search for such an institution began.

On my return to UK whilst I considered how to find an institution to help me with the proposed research in America I went on to study for an MA in mysticism at Kent University, and this was where I first discovered the work of Frederic Myers.

I had already learned from practical experience that there is confusion between what could be a dissociative disorder, obsessive compulsions and possible spirit possession, and I wrote a dissertation on the *Clinical and Mystical Perspectives of Dissociation* that remains unpublished, but is held in Kent University’s archives. In my dissertation, I noted that according to modern psychiatric theory all saints, mystics and prophets are mad and are given diagnoses accordingly. (That includes Spiritualist mediums by the way). This introduced me to the philosophy of William James and to the theories of Frederic Myers who both disagreed with this view. I realised that I was definitely on the right track towards an academic and scientific explanation for those cases that had so confounded me earlier. The first edition of this book was initially written as a thesis on the work of Myers.

This second edition of *The Science of Spirit Possession* builds on the observations contained in the first edition with references to the most recent research findings that relate consciousness with quantum theory and neuroscience. In so doing it further reinforces the proposition that spirit possession is a scientifically verifiable fact as well as a subjective reality in the lives of many people.

A further addition to this book is the inclusion of several references to literature that have been neatly sidestepped by both mainstream science and parapsychology in the English-speaking world. However, the pioneering work of scientists in South America offers the most promising avenue for future research into the validity of channelled works including automatic writing.

In addition to the recent advances in quantum theory, the science of neuro-imaging is offering a new dimension of understanding into the relationship between the mind and the brain, or thought and matter. This second edition therefore includes summaries of recent research conducted in the field of neuro-imaging where the brain activity of Spiritist mediums are analysed whilst in and not in trance and whilst actively engaged in “automatic writing”. It is my contention that this domain of scientific research will eventually become recognised as a significant step towards an understanding of how spirit entities communicate with living persons.

The final chapter in this second edition presents a preliminary draft of a research project protocol that may stand alone as independent of this volume. It is therefore written with background information and references that are contained within the main text and may therefore appear to be a duplication of what has gone before.

FOREWORD TO THE FIRST EDITION

It is to the detriment of mankind that a strange malady seems to affect many senior practitioners in virtually all professions. It takes the form of those people reaching the upper levels of their chosen careers and then purposely ignoring any fresh or new ideas that might upset the apple-carts with which they have been associated for so many years. Seniority, coupled with peer-pressure within a profession, can crush fresh or unusual research possibilities so easily!

When new ideas of a controversial nature are put to such doyens then the shutters often come down rapidly and concepts that could be earth-shattering in the long run are never researched but are instead purposefully ignored. It is only too obvious that some senior professionals have neither the will nor the intellect to tackle unusual ideas. Fortunately, a trickle of far-seeing and open-minded people from the above ranks sooner or later emerges and it is they who are the mould-breakers; it is to them we are indebted. Dr Terence Palmer is one such person; one such author.

Even a cursory glance at his work shows both the knowledge and open-mindedness of this author, and those qualities, coupled with the care that he takes with the minute details of his arguments, gives the reader as clear a picture of the psychic world and its amazing powers as any of us are going to get since the work of Frederic Myers.

We are reminded that the period of history to which Myers belonged did not have the benefit of the highly technical knowledge concerning particle physics that is so widespread in our own times. With the arrival of ever-increasing understanding of the weird nature of quantum physics, this author sees clearly that our generation is far more likely to penetrate the mysteries surrounding psychic activity than any previous group.

In December 2005 a prestigious American physicist who had been flown in to Glasgow as an invited lecturer, was bold enough to declare to his university audience:

The speed of light is no longer considered a limiting factor in the conveying of information between sub-atomic particles. Twin entangled-particles having the capacity to do identical things simultaneously at either "side" of the universe has become a reality that is slowly being understood!

Eight years later, Professor Peter Higgs' theory regarding the presence of "bosons" in matter was declared proven. This theory explains why some matter appears to us as solid and having mass, while "boson-less" matter exists in just the same way but can have no solidity.

While Dr Palmer fully acknowledges that such complicated new scientific theories are not readily understandable, at the same time he has the wisdom to see that they must inevitably lead to a better understanding of all things of a psychical nature. "Paranormality" may well turn out to be more normal than any of us have hitherto realised!

I perceive this book to be not only a compendium of a vast number of exciting ideas and findings by many of the most knowledgeable psychical researchers since Victorian times, but also a classic example of a book that is able to be read comfortably, not only by dedicated researchers but also by most members of the general public who find themselves becoming increasingly interested in psychical matters.

Archibald A. Lawrie, July 14th 2013

President: The Edinburgh Society for Psychical Research

Vice-President: The Scottish Society for Psychical Research

Head of Research: The Sir Arthur Conan Doyle Centre, Edinburgh

**Author, Lecturer, Broadcaster,
Advisor to the BBC for specific programmes**

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

It never was my intention to produce any such work as this. It was never my intention to be an academic, or a scientist, or a healer of any kind. As a boy in South London in the 1950s (I was born in 1947) I had a sense of adventure and as soon as I was able I joined the Army as a boy soldier at the age of fifteen with no academic qualifications and set off to see the world. Although I signed on for life I only served seven years, and all I saw of the world was North Wales, West Germany and the Trucial Oman (now the United Arab Emirates) in the Middle East and was given a medical discharge in 1969 with the diagnosis of chronic osteoarthritis in both knees. Army doctors told me that I would be a cripple by the time I reached the age of forty and I was packed off to civvy-street¹ to learn how to earn a living. I started as a bus driver, then went into the transport industry, progressing on a career path from truck driver to transport supervisor to distribution systems analyst and computer systems conference and exhibition organiser. I reached the peak of my profession when commissioned by Save the Children to go to the Sudan on a transport consultancy project for UNICEF and the Sudanese Ministry of Health. During my absence in December 1990 the UK economy collapsed and took my hard-earned exhibition business with it. I lost everything – business, two houses, income... However, contrary to what the army doctors had told me, I did not become crippled by arthritis. I had no intention of accepting that prognosis. I did not want it and therefore I do not have it.

Following the collapse of the UK economy and my business I found myself as a homeless hermit on a Cretan mountain asking myself (and the Universe) “What am I doing here?” It was as if the Universe answered me directly because that was when some very interesting things began to happen.

I discovered, as if by chance, that I could take physical pain away from others simply by placing my hand near to a painful part; be it an insect bite, a bruise or a hangover headache. Then one day a friend asked me if I could attend to the wife of a Greek friend of his who had been suffering from a bad back for the past eight years, since the birth of her last child.

¹ Army vernacular for civilian life.

Her husband was upset because he couldn't make love to his wife any more, whom he loved very much, because of her painful back. Naturally I was very reluctant to try anything because I had no skill or knowledge and I couldn't speak any Greek and was therefore unable to explain myself. But my friend insisted by taking me forcefully by the arm and dragged me to the house of the Greek couple. Without the benefit of experience or training in the healing arts I motioned for her to sit on a straight-backed chair and close her eyes and stood behind her with my hands close to the back of her neck. After a few moments she opened her eyes and smiled at her husband. I motioned for her to stand up and then to bend down and touch her toes. She did this with no discomfort and smiled at me. Her husband then asked with a wide-eyed look of astonishment on his face, "What kind of magic is this?"

I hunched my shoulders and spread my hands in a gesture that demonstrated my ignorance and told him simply, "I have no idea."

I needed answers. I was completely in the dark and had no idea what I was doing or how it worked, and I needed to find out how. But in my confusion who should I ask? Where was I to find answers to these enigmas? Suddenly the name "James" kept coming into my thoughts, like a recurring idea that would not go away. My middle name is James and my father's name was James, but there was no one in the immediate vicinity with that name, and there was no rational explanation for this name to keep coming into my mind. This was my very first inclination that eventually led to the writing of this book, of a thought that did not originate from my own creation. It was also then that I experienced my first compulsion to act without conscious volition. I went to my little camp-site in the mountains and rummaged around in my pack to retrieve a book that a very dear friend in Germany had given me as I passed by on my way overland to Crete. My German friend was a devout Mormon and the gift she had given me was her old and much-valued copy of the *King James Bible* in English. In my ignorance I had given her gift to me little value as I was not a religious person, but there, on that day at my camp site in the mountains, I was given the first of many answers to many more questions that would come my way through a variety of mystical experiences. I found the book in my pack and as it lay in my hands it fell open at the *Epistle of James*. I remember my absolute astonishment and dropping into a squatting position as I read, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; it shall be given him" (James 1:5). I felt stunned by the impact of those words and without fully understanding the enormous significance of what I had read I knew then that an important journey had begun. Since that

profound moment, which marked the beginning of my education, every question I have asked has been answered, and this book is one result. This book holds all the answers to all the questions that I have ever asked about the magic of healing, about the nature of the soul (or spirit) and the teachings of the great religions. It has taken me twenty years of questioning, three university degrees and a great deal of painful practical experience and joy to arrive at my conclusions that consciousness is universal and fundamental and that the spirit world is a reality. At the beginning of my quest for answers the book of James told me to ask God who would give me all the answers I needed. At the end of my quest I can now answer the question put to me by the Greek man whose wife I helped when he asked, “What kind of magic is this?” At the end my quest I have discovered another way of addressing the same question. In the introduction to his book *The Reality of ESP* (2012) Russell Targ states:

... numerous laboratory experiments indicate that we have the opportunity to know anything upon which to fix our attention. In my experience and according to most other researchers, it appears that *an experienced psychic can answer any question that has an answer*. I cannot wait to see what the future holds when we fully open the doors of our perception (Targ, 2012, 12).

For me personally, the God that James referred to is the Universe that my first question, “What am I doing here?” was directed to. In short *God* and *universal consciousness* are one and the same, and we are all capable of accessing it through our own perception when the blinkers come off.

Where the *Epistle of James* was the start of my quest for answers and understanding, the work of Frederic Myers, the nineteenth-century researcher into the nature of man’s consciousness, marks a valuable conclusion, and provides a foundation for the continued exploration of the human psyche and the scientific testing of yet-to-be explored hypotheses that concern the relationship between spirit possession and mental health.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The first edition of this book was originally written as a thesis for the academic qualification of Doctor of Philosophy, and is the culmination of an academic and spiritual journey that has taken twenty years to bring me to this point. I have learned that there are two ways to learn; by being taught by others and by one's own experience. I have learned from my teachers, from science and from many life experiences. I have also learned through the experience of my personal relationship with what some may call *God*, what others may call *Absolute Reality*, and what others may call the *Transcendent*. There are many names for it and each of us has our own understanding of it depending on our unique religious, spiritual or mystical experiences. I therefore feel obliged to acknowledge, first and foremost, the guidance that I have been given by God in bringing me to this place at this time in presenting this book, for it is to the glory of the unseen and unknown universal power that we call God that it is written.

Next I would like to acknowledge the advice and help from my academic supervisor Dr Lucy Huskinson of the School of Theology and Religious Studies at Bangor University. I consider myself lucky that Lucy, in addition to being an excellent academic, also held a firm belief in me as a person and in my aspirations to plough a furrow in very stony ground.

I would further like to thank my mentors, Doctor Alan Sanderson and Doctor Andrew Powell who, as professionals in the treatment of mental health are shining lights who are there to illuminate the way for us all. They have demonstrated to me that it takes courage to offer mainstream science complementary approaches rather than to challenge it with alternatives, and that to be a true healer means having no fear. Thank you both.

I am indebted to Professor Alexander Moreira-Almeida of the School of Medicine of the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil for his help in accessing hard-to-find scientific papers. My grateful thanks are further extended to His Grace Ambrose Griffiths, Bishop Emeritus of Hexham and Newcastle for his declaration that the information contained in this book should be common knowledge. My sincere thanks to the Bishop for his encouragement and spiritual support.

I thank you all.
Terence J. Palmer

INTRODUCTION

POSSESSION, EXORCISM AND SPIRIT RELEASE THERAPY

The term “spirit possession” has negative connotations, but not all spirit possession is negative. Spiritual healers can be possessed by the Holy Spirit and trance mediums can be possessed by their spirit “Guides”.

This second edition further builds upon the contribution made by Frederic Myers to our understanding of one of the most profound of spiritual experiences - the possession of an individual by a spirit entity that can be perceived as benevolent or malign, creative or destructive, healthy or unhealthy. Spirit Release Therapy (SRT), which I explain more fully below, can be used as a method of intervention to relieve individuals of the influence of unhealthy spirit influences that are often attributed to the earthbound spirits of the deceased. It is comprised of an eclectic mix of secular and spiritual concepts and procedures that are not dependent on traditional psychiatric models of mental health care, or religious exorcism, but are complimentary to them. The experience of SRT therapists, together with the theoretical concepts and experimental methods of Frederic W.H. Myers, provide the phenomena of spirit possession and exorcism with a dimension of understanding that previous anthropological, theological and medical methods and theories lack.

In Part I of this book I will highlight the general problems that Western society has with the concept of spirit possession, and where sociological and observation-led ethnographic research reinforce society’s tendency to perceive possession as a remnant of outmoded superstitious beliefs. I will examine the methodologies currently used by the social sciences and psychological research into beliefs in the paranormal to outline the epistemological foundations that underpin contemporary research methods, and to highlight some of their deficiencies.

In Part II, I introduce Myers’ expanded conceptual framework and experimental methods that address those deficiencies identified in Part I. Part III applies the conceptualisations, methods and theories of Myers, together with the findings of contemporary science into the nature of

consciousness and psi phenomena to the problem of spirit possession. It is the application of twenty-first century science to the phenomenon of spirit possession that makes this book unique.

Perceptual Differences between Science and Religion

Different scientific disciplines approach the study of the natural world from an epistemological foundation that is grounded in the empirical data presented to them. This gives rise to their respective perspectives, or world-views. Similarly, different religious traditions and practices have their own epistemologies that are grounded more in a belief or faith, or very often in profound subjective experiences. Therefore, it may be concluded that the topics of possession and exorcism will elicit different responses that are dependent on a range of different epistemologies and general perceptions. The positivistic sciences that study the physical world we inhabit are not able to acknowledge unseen determinants of human behaviour such as *volition* (that is deliberate *intention* or the exercising of *free will*), and yet there are countless numbers of people who believe in the existence of an alternate reality or a transcendent realm that is beyond the four-dimensional physical space-time continuum. There are some scholars of theology and transcendent cosmology who refer to this transcendent realm as a “fifth-dimension” (Hick, 1999). Nonetheless, there is a perceptual schism between the monism¹ of mechanistic science and the dualism² of religious faith that has fluctuated in its divergence and convergence since the emergence of the scientific enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Scientific enquiry claims to be objective, and yet, as individuals we have subjective experiences that are extremely difficult to quantify objectively, and this is just one reason why mechanistic science has such problems with spiritual matters.

However, there are those individuals who have a religious faith in the transcendent and who are also scientists, and there are other scientists such as physicist Fritjof Capra (1992), professor of astrophysics Victor Mansfield (2002), laser physicist Russell Targ (2012) cellular biologist Bruce Lipton (2010) and Cambridge scholar Rupert Sheldrake (2012) (to name but a few) who have had personal mystical, spiritual or religious experiences that have radically influenced their beliefs and given them

¹ Monism is the idea that the universe is comprised only of matter.

² Dualism is the idea that mind and matter are different.

http://www.philosophyonline.co.uk/pom/pom_monism_and_dualism.htm
Accessed on 20/01/2012.

knowledge, or at the very least, *insights* of the transcendent. Personal experience has its impact on the beliefs and perceptions of scientists just as much as non-scientists and a recurring theme that has emerged from my research for this book is the importance of personal experience in explaining the concept of possession and how it is perceived.

In this second edition, I will show further evidence that the chasm between scientific knowledge and religious belief is closing, and the proposition for a “Science of Religions” put forward by William James in *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902, p. 489) is coming to fruition.

Contemporary enquiry into the nature of consciousness has matured into a recognised science (Radin, 1997, 2006; Targ, 2004, 2012; Tart, 2000), but the general impression gained from its enquiry is that investigators have a tendency to believe (or convey) that they are discovering something new. What they are discovering is not new at all, but has its origins in a concept that is common to all religious and spiritual traditions throughout history. Religious mystics have been teaching us for centuries that there is a realm beyond the physical, and Mr Frederic W.H. Myers, together with his colleagues at the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) set out in the late nineteenth century to prove its existence by using those scientific methods that were available to them at that time. This book sets out to examine those theories and methods of Myers that have been lost, ignored, derided or forgotten by modern mainstream science (with notable exceptions that shall be referenced where appropriate) and resituate them in their proper place: in the scientific enquiry into the spiritual nature of man and the fundamental nature of the human mind.

Psychiatry historian Henri Ellenberger (1970) has argued that the fashions of scientific enquiry are dependent on the socio-political climate that prevails at the time that new discoveries are made. It could further be argued that there is a tension between the need for science to maintain its rigid epistemological foundations that are grounded in the consensus of materialistic positivism and the need for its assumptions and empirical methods to be challenged. Myers’ research challenged the positivistic epistemology of nineteenth-century science, but he was working against a tide that he was unable to overcome at that time. Whether the socio-political climate is conducive to paradigm shifts in scientific enquiry or not, should not in my view, detract from the objectivity of science. There is scientific evidence to support the hypothesis that consciousness survives the death of the body, that consciousness is fundamental, and that there is a constant interactive relationship between the two worlds of the conscious awareness and the spiritual. This book acknowledges and brings this

scientific evidence into the controversial arena of the relationship between the influence of discarnate spirit entities and mental illness.

The pragmatic clinical approach and positive therapeutic outcomes of Spirit Release Therapy (SRT) supported and reinforced by the scientific conceptual framework of Frederic Myers can help us to understand more fully the difficult relationship between the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual domains of human experience.

It is with this understanding that the emergent spiritual psychiatry now being practised by an increasing number of psychiatrists (Cook, Powell & Sims, 2009; Fenwick, 2009; Powell & MacKenna, 2009; Sims & Cook, 2009; Clarke 2008, 2010) can be validated and incorporated into a viable and acceptable scientific conceptual framework that can make better sense of spirit possession. I shall show how the concepts of SRT and Myers can be integrated into a scientific model that incorporates both the physical domain of neurology and the non-physical spiritual mind.

What are Possession and Exorcism?

In contrast with the monism of mechanistic science, every culture and religious belief system throughout history has its traditional beliefs of spirit possession in some form or other with corresponding rituals for the release or exorcism of spirit entities (Carus, 1900; Lewis, 2003) and there are no anthropologists, theologians or historians who would argue against this. Christianity, for instance, has its angels, devils and demons (although the majority of modern so-called Christians probably do not believe they really exist). Islam has its *Jinn* and the Hindus have a vast pantheon of spirits.³ As we shall see “possession” is an imprecise term with a variety of definitions. It can mean being possessed by a spirit of either good or evil intent or being possessed by an idea that is particularly compelling or obsessive, as we find in the common expression: “What possessed him to do that?” Where obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is the psychiatric term for irrational, ritualistic behaviour (APA, 2004, p. 456) *obsession* was the term adopted in Catholic theology to differentiate between the somnambulist form of possession, where the subject loses consciousness of his self-awareness, and the milder, lucid form of spirit influence where there is no such loss (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 14). Yet another form of possession is where one person has such a strong emotional attachment to

³ There is a vast literature on the phenomenology of spirit possession in all its forms, and the prospect of a full review of all the literature is far beyond the scope of this book.

another to the degree that they have no free will. See Crabtree (1985, pp.166-170) for an example of possession by family members, and for examples of possession by a group-mind (ibid, pp.171-179). A possessor need not be in close proximity to the possessed for their influence and spiritual presence to be any less powerful (Baldwin, 1995, p. 255).

The modern use of the word *possessed* within the context of a compelling, irrational motivation is a residual use left over from the medieval period when it was commonly thought that most, if not all, destructive behaviour was caused by possession or influence from the devil: “Possession was an idiom that was a part of the cultural vocabulary of early modern people” (Sluhovsky, 2007, p.15).

A primary theme of this book is to highlight the difficulty in discernment⁴ between autogenic (that is self-created) thought-forms, pseudo (imagined) possession, and authentic possession or spirit influence. Within the realm of abnormal psychology the *autogenic thought form* is a concept that Pierre Janet ascribed as the “fixed idea” (Janet, 1976, p. 596), which is an essential component in his dissociation theory of hysteria. Thus Janet writes:

Hypothetically we may say that such fixed ideas are dangerous because they are no longer under the control of the personality, because they belong to a group of phenomena which have passed beyond the dominion of the conscious will (ibid, p. 596).

It is unfortunate that there is no academic forum (yet) where modern practitioners of SRT can present their findings for peer review, but one of the most common forms of possession being experienced by individuals is that of the self-created thought form that can take on demonic characteristics. Pierre Janet’s case of “Achille” (1894) is one of those cases that can provide a model for understanding the concept of the self-created demon. Janet’s case of Achille provides a foundation for those clinicians who specialise in the treatment of Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) (which was formerly known as Multiple Personality Disorder [MPD]) and reinforces the theory that all cases of possession are autogenic. However, once we have understood the concept of possession within the scientific framework of Myers, we will be in a position to demonstrate that not all cases of possession are autogenic, and to assume that they are can result in the misdiagnoses of chronic mental illnesses that

⁴ Discernment is a term that originates in and is specifically applied to the differentiation between different kinds of spirits. See Sluhovsky, 2007; Baglio, 2009; Caciola, 2003.

are resistant to traditional psychiatric interventions. Janet's case of Achille provides us with an excellent example of how to deal with the demon, whether it is autogenic or otherwise. Janet used hypnosis to cure his patient and rid him of his demon.⁵ Hypnosis is at the very core of Myers' conceptual framework, and, as I shall elucidate in Chapter Seven, hypnosis is a method of exploration, experimentation and clinical intervention that bridges the gulf between anthropological, psychological and religious interpretations of spirit phenomenology.

The dangers of misdiagnosis are important considerations from opposite directions. By this I mean that it is possible to diagnose spirit possession where there is none, and conversely it is much more probable that mental illness is diagnosed where spirit influence is the cause of the illness. In either direction the consequences of misdiagnosis can be catastrophic, and in Chapter One I cite examples where care-givers who believed that children were possessed were found guilty of child-abuse and murder by using extreme forms of physical exorcism in attempts to cure the child. From 2002 to 2009 questions arising from cases of serious child abuse became topical in the UK news media (La Fontaine, 2009). The failings of Social Services were in the spotlight as cases of children being murdered by their primary caregivers were brought to trial. Eight-year-old Victoria Climbié was murdered in 2000 and eight-year-old Child-B suffered serious abuse in 2005 (Barker, 2009, p. 2). Although not specifically reported in the news media as cases of suspected spirit possession at that time, these two cases were the consequence of beliefs that children can be possessed by evil spirits and subsequently have the power to inflict harm and misfortune on others. Exorcism was seen by caregivers as the *cure* to expel the offending spirits, often by violent means (La Fontaine, 2009, p. 117).

There is a danger that the news media are inclined towards pointing the finger of blame at Social Services for their failure to protect children and criminalizing the abusive caregivers - thereby taking any focus away from the possibility that there is something that needs to be addressed within the social and religious belief systems of the perpetrators. La Fontaine's book, *The Devil's Children*, brings these issues into sharp focus and it is for this same reason that I look at possession and exorcism in Chapter One from a social science and Western cultural perspective. The approach I have adopted is, I believe, an essential precursor to examining the work of

⁵ It may be contested that Achille's demon could have been either autogenic or a real possessing entity, and although this case would be of interest for discussion by itself, it is representative of the dilemma facing clinicians and exorcists that I explore in Chapter Thirteen.

Myers and its significance in understanding Spirit Release Therapy as a more effective social and therapeutic tool for mental health that can be applied across all cultures and social groups.

Where misguided beliefs in possession and exorcism on the part of both caregivers and public services could continue to result in inappropriate methods of intervention, an alternative understanding of the concept of spirit possession according to the scientific framework of F.W.H. Myers will enable more appropriate methods of intervention to be applied.

A sudden increase in reported cases of possession in the United States during the 1970s and 80s was deemed the result of William Blatty's film *The Exorcist* (1973) and his book of the same name (1971). Cultural anthropologist Michael Cuneo (2001) explored the impact on North American society of Blatty's work and witnessed more than fifty exorcisms in his investigation. Cuneo's findings, which are also examined in Chapter One, offer a socio/cultural perspective on possession and exorcism, and make an important contribution to our understanding of the impact of the entertainment industry and news media reporting on such controversial and misunderstood topics.

Treatment Approaches to Spirit Possession

Broadly speaking, there are three basic methods that have been traditionally used for treatment of those who have been deemed to be demonically possessed. The first consists of trying to expel the spirit physically by such means as bleeding, beating, or whipping the patient (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 13). It is this first method that was adopted by the caregivers in those cases cited by La Fontaine et al (2009). The second method is to transfer the offending spirit to another body, usually an animal.⁶ The third form, and arguably the "most frequently applied" (Ellenberger, 1970, p. 13) is religious *exorcism*, which is driving the spirit out by conjurations, prayer and ritual. It was this third method that Cuneo sought to examine.

"Exorcism"⁷ is no less an imprecise term than possession. It has been used for any prayerful act by a priest with the intention of releasing a demonic entity from a person or place (Baglio, 2009, p. 35). The same word has been used for a procedure lasting minutes and for one lasting

⁶ As we see in the biblical example of Christ transferring devils to a herd of swine (Mathew, 8:32).

⁷ Derived from the Greek imperative *exo* to "get out".

weeks in which priests and others are involved in intense interaction with a person or place thought to be possessed or harassed by evil spirits.⁸

Modern Christian ministry recognises the problems created by inappropriate beliefs in possession or suspicions that someone is experiencing some kind of paranormal activity and in England there was an attempt to create a national information infrastructure administered at diocesan level (Perry, 1987). According to Perry, the term “deliverance” is adopted by the Anglican Church in preference to exorcism, and those experiencing disturbing psychic or spiritual phenomena were advised by Perry to contact their local parish priest. According to Perry, it is the priest’s role to present their case to the specialist spiritual investigation team, which ought to be comprised of deliverance ministers, psychiatrists and psychic investigators who will be able to advise a course of action depending on whether the disturbance is deemed to be caused by mental illness, paranormal activity or genuine spirit manifestation. Whether this advice has any benefits, or whether such an infrastructure actually exists is a topic that is open to further research.

In addition to the above mentioned initiatives, SRT has been emerging as a collection of methods and techniques used by an increasing number of independent practitioners in a variety of professional therapeutic disciplines. There is therefore a growing need for SRT practitioners to be guided, trained and supported by an institution that has the scientific and educational authority to give accreditation to its training.

What is Spirit Release Therapy?

Spirit Release Therapy (SRT)⁹ is a term that is used by some practitioners, but not all, to describe a treatment modality that has evolved from the pioneering clinical experience of medical practitioners, psychiatrists and

⁸ Examples of the first type can be found in eye witness accounts of the exorcisms performed by highly successful exorcists such as Father Johann Gassner in 18th century Germany (Midelfort, 2005), and in *The Rite* (Baglio, 2009, p. 222) where the daily prayers of contemporary exorcists are applied in modern Rome.

⁹ In addition to Spirit Release Therapy, SRT is also used as an abbreviation for “Spirit Response Therapy”, which was developed by Robert Detzler (1999) as a means of healing in the spiritual domain by use of a dowsing pendulum. In this book, however, the abbreviation “SRT” is used primarily for Spirit Release *Therapy*, although it can be taken to refer to either interpretation because they are both used to release spirits from patients/clients. For a history of *Spirit Response Therapy* see http://www.spiritualresponse.com/?page_id=148. (Accessed on 17th May 2014).