

# Callum E Cooper

Callum E Cooper is a British psychologist working at the University of Northampton. Cooper frequently appears in the media promoting critical thinking in science, and discussing his research in parapsychology and thanatology.

## Remote Viewing and the Ganzfeld

Cooper has been involved in [ganzfeld ESP research](#) since 2009 through his interest in altered-states of consciousness. In 2020, the *Journal of Parapsychology* published three remote viewing/ganzfeld comparison studies carried out by the Northampton team, comprising 118 trials. Some subjects [remote viewed](#) a distant location after undergoing a ganzfeld induction procedure and their scores were compared with those obtained by others who did not undergo an induction. The overall ganzfeld induction hit rate of 39% was highly significant by the conservative first choice method ( $p = 0.0007$ ). The more appropriate sum-of-ranks method gave more convincing support ( $p = 0.000012$ ). Remote viewings without induction gave a hit rate of only 27.5% – modestly significant ( $p = 0.036$ ).<sup>1</sup>

## Floation Tanks

Cooper has investigated floatation tanks as a vehicle for enhancing ESP expression. In a pilot study with Dr David Saunders and Dr Glenn Hitchman, Cooper acted as a ‘receiver’ – the person who receives telepathic information – during twelve sessions using video clips as targets. Cooper attempted to judge his own mentation against the target and decoy clips in a blinded fashion. At the end of the experiment, the mentation reports were given to an independent judge to match to the targets.

Both receiver and judge scored well within chance. This was expected, given the low number of trials, but the main aim was to re-explore the potential of the tanks, following a similar 1980 study by American parapsychologist and author [D Scott Rogo](#),<sup>2</sup> and highlight ethical and methodological issues in preparation for a major research program. Much was learned about the practicalities of using floatation tanks, and the appearance of several close correspondences provided motivation for a larger trial involving a greater number of participants.<sup>3</sup>

## Experiential Research

### Telephone Anomalies

Cooper has explored accounts of ostensible telephonic communication with discarnate intelligences, in which a person typically receives a telephone call from a close friend or relative who died moments or hours before. Although this phenomenon is rarely experienced, the few cases on record have been exhaustively investigated. In his book *Telephone Calls From The Dead*,<sup>4</sup> Cooper describes

research carried out in this area by Rogo. The book has been praised as a thorough sceptical examination of such claims.[5](#)

## **Paracoustics**

Paracoustics is concerned with sounds associated with anomalous phenomena and includes electronic voice phenomena, haunting phenomena, through to music and shamanic uses. With Steve Parsons, Cooper details these investigations in a book.[6](#)

## **Staring Detection**

Cooper has supervised research into the sense of being stared at ([scopaesthesia](#)). Two undergraduate students, Chambers and Unick-Wagg, conducted an [ecologically-valid](#) field study at the [University of Northampton's Waterside Campus](#): one person gazed at a randomly selected individual from an elevated position while another approached the individual to inquire if they felt they were being stared at. Unick-Wagg's study demonstrated statistical significance ( $p = 0.0164$ ), while Chambers' study was well within chance ( $p = 0.689$ ). The combined result was not significant but trended in the predicted direction ( $p = 0.1573$ ). However, the combined studies achieved a hit rate of 55%, consistent with effect sizes documented in previous research.[7](#)

In a comprehensive 2021 review of the evidence for scopaesthesia, Cooper identifies important tasks for researchers: to make the act of staring matter to participants; to employ independent judges; and to observe physiological reactions. Arguing that scopaesthesia may have an evolutionary purpose, he also highlights the importance of observing this phenomenon in natural settings.[8](#)

## **Thanatology**

Cooper's main work is thanatology – the scientific study of death, especially its psychological and social aspects. Cooper has investigated bereavement and positive psychology collaborating with [Chris Roe](#) and Graham Mitchell[9](#) on work indicating that bereaved individuals who had had anomalous experiences enjoyed higher levels of hope than those who had not ( $p = 0.008$ ). Cooper argues that anomalous experiences help the bereavement process.

Further research has shown that those who reported such experiences reported a shift in how they conceptualize dying.[10](#) Cooper has also investigated the impact of such experiences on self-professed sceptics[11](#) Currently, Cooper is involved with a team of researchers – supported by the Scientific and Medical Network – analysing after-death communication (ADC) data to map the phenomenology and impact of these experiences from a variety of cultures.[12](#) This project, involving over a thousand respondents, should be completed by 2030, following output of a potential dozen papers assessing various aspects of the data.[13](#)

## **Diet and Psi**

Supernatural powers are said in spiritual traditions to be facilitated by fasting and vegetarian practices. Cooper, Daw and Roe carried out interviews with seven

adepts, who stated that as well as having a positive impact on their cognitive faculties and overall health, these did indeed contribute to the enhancement of their psi ability.<sup>14</sup> The authors also carried out a ganzfeld remote viewing experiment to investigate the influence of diet on psi abilities in a psi task, comparing vegetarians with meat eaters. The results were non-significant, although vegetarians showed a suggestive trend of better performance and vegans demonstrated a notable 47% hit rate.<sup>15</sup>

## Asserting the Positive

Cooper contributed to an overview of anomalous experiences in the *The Routledge International Handbook of Critical Positive Psychology* (2018). This points out that many of the anomalous experiences reported by some 70% of the population, including 'sense-of-presence' and 'out-of-body' occurrences, are perceived as having positive after-effects. The authors recommend promoting acceptance of anomalous experiences within the psychiatric and psychological communities.<sup>16</sup>

## Biographical and Archival Research

### Alex Tanous

Cooper is an honorary archival research assistant for the Alex Tanous Foundation. [Alex Tanous](#) was a prolific self-proclaimed psychic who was tested by the [American Society for Psychical Research](#) in the 1970s and 1980s. Tanous produced evidence for out-of-body experiences from several controlled tests in which he described a distant target as well as affecting nearby sensitive detectors. Statistical criticisms made by [Susan Blackmore](#)<sup>17</sup> were comprehensively answered by [Karlis Osis](#) and D McCormick, who confirmed that Tanous achieved a range of significant hit rates in his experiments ( $p = 0.05$  to  $0.002$ ).<sup>18</sup>

Cooper has been associated with the Alex Tanous Foundation for Scientific Research since 2011, carrying out variety of archival activities including the editing of previously unpublished material by Tanous.<sup>19</sup>

## Promoting Scepticism and Critical Thinking

Cooper has appeared on radio shows and delivered public talks emphasizing his personal scepticism towards claims of paranormal phenomena. His first public television appearance as a voice for critical thinking in science was on *This Morning* in 2013.<sup>20</sup> Cooper often lectures for interest groups and universities throughout the UK and USA, where he is invited to speak about the latest research in parapsychology and the importance of critical thinking in science. Cooper has promoted parapsychology and critical thinking in podcasts and BBC Radio shows, for example the Trapademic podcast, which can be seen [here](#) (from 31:20) and in which he discusses the dangers of pseudo-scepticism and misguided communication in science. He has also spoken in the media about false qualifications in science and clinical practice on the internet.<sup>21</sup>

In 2018, Cooper was a runner-up for the Ockham's Razor Award for Skeptical Activism sponsored by *The Skeptic* magazine. (See [here](#).) In 2019, a student of Cooper researched the impact and process of dogmatic scepticism.[22](#)

In 2020 at the University of Northampton's PURE Diamond Research Awards, Cooper was awarded the 'Public/Industry Engagement Award' for his contributions to media, outreach and science communication.[23](#)

Michael Duggan

## Literature

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## Endnotes

### Footnotes

- [1.](#) Roe et al (2020).
- [2.](#) Rogo (1980).
- [3.](#) Cooper, Saunders, & Hitchman (2019).
- [4.](#) Cooper (2012).
- [5.](#) Boccuzzi (2013); Colborn (2013); Price (2015).
- [6.](#) Parsons & Cooper (2015).
- [7.](#) Chambers et al. (2023).
- [8.](#) Cooper (2021).
- [9.](#) Cooper, Roe, & Mitchell (2015).
- [10.](#) Cooper (2017).
- [11.](#) Bara & Cooper (2017).
- [12.](#) Elsaesser (n.d.)
- [13.](#) Elsaesser et al. (2019).
- [14.](#) Daw et al. (2022).
- [15.](#) Daw et al. (2023).
- [16.](#) Steffen et al. (2018).
- [17.](#) Blackmore (1982, 1983).
- [18.](#) Osis & McCormick (1981).
- [19.](#) Tanous & Cooper (2013), Tanous, Schwinge, & Bambrick (2019).
- [20.](#) ITV, This Morning, guest psychologist (15<sup>th</sup> March, 2013).
- [21.](#) Biddle (2019); Johnson (1977); Martain (2008).
- [22.](#) Wright & Cooper (2019).
- [23.](#) Psyched! (2020).