

Renaud Evrard

Renaud Evrard is a French clinical psychologist with a particular interest in the clinical, historical and theoretical aspects of parapsychology.

Career

Renaud Evrard obtained a master's degree in psychology from the University of Strasbourg in 2007 and a PhD from the University of Rouen in 2012, comparing and contrasting psychotic and exceptional experiences in adults and adolescents. From 2009 to 2015 he was a full time clinical psychologist at the Regional Hospital Center Metz-Thionville. Since 2015 he has also been assistant professor in psychology at the University of Lorraine, France, and the associated Laboratoire Interpsy, a laboratory that develops mutually convergent research approaches from clinical and interaction psychology and attempts to understand paranormal experiences from within a subjective and environmental context. Additionally, he is co-founder (with [Thomas Rabeyron](#)) and member of the [Center for Information, Research and Counseling on Exceptional Experiences](#).

Evrard was elected president of the [Parapsychological Association](#) in 2019 and is co-editor of its bulletin *Mindfield*.

Model of Exceptional Experiences

Evrard describes a model that attempts to accommodate exceptional experiences as deconstructions of a person's worldview, which he terms 'The Paradigmatic Breakdown'. The model is a development of several lines of independent thinking regarding the ontology of exceptional experiences; at its heart is the tenet that someone's 'reality' is merely a representation, or model, of the underlying 'real'. Evrard regards each person's worldview as a 'global variable', and an exceptional experience as a 'local variable' that clashes with the global variable. This resonates with psychologist [John Mack's](#) ontological crisis/shock response for such experiences in which a person's worldview is shattered. Evrard is cautious about encouraging paranormal labels for such experiences and encourages definitions of exceptional experiences in broad terms that avoid the idea of a paranormal reality.¹

Neuroimaging Psi Studies

With Thomas Rabeyron and David Acunzo, Evrard reviewed the neuroimaging psi data. They considered six functional neuroimaging studies of distant intentionality/telepathy, where a remotely-located individual attempts to send information to, or simply focus on, a receiver, also a brain imaging precognition study. They found the overall evidential base to be quite high (one negative study) but marred by poor methodology ; accordingly, they proposed improvements in experimental rigor: counter-balancing of trials, proper randomization techniques,

adequate shielding between receiver and external environment, and sufficient powering by recruiting enough subjects.²

Pierre Janet

Evrard has profiled significant figures in the history of psi research. With [Etzel Cardena](#) and Erika Pratte, he discusses the role Pierre Janet – one of the founding figures of French psychology – had in establishing the study of psychical ‘marvels’ at the turn of the twentieth century. Evrard discusses how Janet’s interest in psychical research was eventually supplanted by a more conservative attitude and a desire to protect the nascent field of conventional psychology from the harm that could potentially result from association with its more esoteric sibling. In the process, he illuminates the development of French psychology and its eschewing of all things paranormal,^{3 4} Evrard has also published a book on the history of French Parapsychology.⁵

Telepathy and Psychotherapy

In a paper coauthored in 2021,⁶ Evrard discusses the writings of Freud in relation to the topic of thought-transference and its relationship with psychotherapy. The concept of telepathy has influenced several psychoanalytic concepts including transference (redirecting emotions experienced during childhood to a substitute, typically a therapist) and projective identification (projecting qualities that are unacceptable to the self onto another person). Evrard and coauthors discuss epistemological implications of telepathy and its integration within contemporary psychoanalytic theory.

Near Death Experiences

Evrard and co-authors consider how our understanding of near death experience (NDE) can be informed by historical accounts. In a typical modern account, NDEs occur during a life threatening emergency; however, in several historical accounts an individual, faced with the prospect of demise, summons outstanding intellectual and physical abilities to escape from the situation. This ‘energy of despair’ also seems to occur in a subset of contemporaneous NDE accounts, as the experient becomes aware of the imminent prospect of death. Evrard discusses these accounts in the context of psychodynamic theory that incorporates both psychology and evolutionary theory, proposing that NDEs in their simplest manifestation might hold survival value.⁷

A paper published in 2019⁸ describes ‘fear-death’ experiences in which individuals facing danger of death discovered new abilities that helped them to survive. Evrard and coauthors compare these with NDE accounts, concluding that they may be part of the same continuum.

Exceptional Experiences and the Emergence of Spirituality

Evrard discusses research that shows a high prevalence of paranormal or exceptional experiences in the general population that appear psychotic. Treating them in this way imposes a stigma on the experience, even even when the experiences are of a positive or helpful nature. To avoid this, the experiencer seeks out alternative worldviews that can accommodate the experience without feeling shame and insecurity. Evrard therefore encourages fellow health care professionals to be circumspect in these situations and help clients integrate their experience into a more holistic worldview before prematurely closing it down down as pathological.⁹ Evrard develops this argument more fully elsewhere, arguing that standard psychopathological classifications such as dissociation, trauma and schizotypy fail to account for positive exceptional experiences.¹⁰

Pre-Birth Communication

Evrard and coworkers have described the first known attempts to communicate psychically with the consciousness of a fetus during pregnancy, motivated by traditional beliefs that human consciousness may be present before birth.¹¹ In this well-controlled exploratory study, employing a triple-blind design, mediums posed questions to 11 pre-birth infants, collecting a total of 1,500 statements. Information that was given spontaneously was found to correspond to subsequent parental reports more closely than answers to structured questions, 69.4% and 17.6% respectively. The authors conclude that communication with pre-birth consciousness is possible and encourage future research in this domain.

Experiences with Deceased Loved Ones

A paper published in 2021,¹² coauthored with [Callum Cooper](#) and [Chris Roe](#) at the [University of Northampton](#), describes an online questionnaire study of after-death contacts by deceased loved ones. One-hundred and eight testimonies were collected. Most of the messages conveyed by the deceased to the living were positive and had a beneficial psychological impact. Even those that were experienced as frightening proved to be a catalyst for positive bereavement. The authors conclude that such reports support the [Continuing Bonds Model](#), which emphasizes the benefits of continuing a healthy relationship with a loved one who has passed, rather than the [Rupture Model](#), which encourages an acceptance of death.

Michael Duggan

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Endnotes

Footnotes

- [1](#). Evrard (2015). Shared November 2019.
- [2](#). Evrard et al. (2013).
- [3](#). Evrard et al. (2018).

- [4.](#) The history of this is described in detail in Evrard (2016).
- [5.](#) Evrard (2016).
- [6.](#) Rabeyron et al. (2021).
- [7.](#) Evrard, Toutain et al. (2018).
- [8.](#) Evrard et al. (2019).
- [9.](#) Evrard (2012).
- [10.](#) Evrard (2013).
- [11.](#) Guittier (2023).
- [12.](#) Evrard 2021).

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