

# Lawrence LeShan

Lawrence LeShan (1920-2020) was an American psychologist and parapsychologist, the author of numerous books and articles on paranormal topics.

## Life and Career

Lawrence LeShan was born in 1920 in New York City. He served in the armed forces, then in 1954 was awarded a PhD in human development at the University of Chicago. He was appointed head of the department of psychology at the Institute of Applied Biography in New York (1954-64) and was a research associate of the Ayer Foundation in New York (1954-70). His mainstream research focused on cancer and therapy, war, the state of psychology, psychotherapy, and transpersonal experiences.

## Psychical Research

Wishing to take a break from his work with terminal cancer patients, LeShan conceived a project to come up with a diagnosis for the strange malady, as he conceived it, of otherwise sensible people believing in claims of paranormal phenomena. He won a year's funding and set about finding a 'quack' to study.<sup>[1]</sup> This brought him into contact with Eileen Garrett, an Irish-born trance medium who herself was interested in psi research and who in 1951 set up the Parapsychology Foundation in New York for this purpose.

LeShan closely observed Garrett performing psychometry, a process in which she was given an unfamiliar object to handle and then described people and incidents associated with it, information which she had no normal means of knowing but which proved to be largely accurate. Unable to come up with an explanation, LeShan changed his mind about trying to debunk psychic phenomena and switched to researching it.<sup>[2]</sup>

In one early incident, Garrett reported an ESP dream in which she had been visited, she said, by Hereward Carrington, a recently deceased psychical investigator and author, urging her to give badly needed support to his widow. LeShan and Garrett's staff traced the woman's address in England with some difficulty and alerted the local police, who discovered her in a bad way, having fallen and broken her hip three days earlier.<sup>[3]</sup>

LeShan also became actively involved with the American Society for Psychical Research. During the late 1960s and early 1970s he collaborated with Gertrude Schmeidler, analysing data from ESP tests and investigating the interrelationship between consciousness, reality and paranormal perception.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Theory

In a 2011 interview,<sup>[5]</sup> LeShan stated that that his most important contribution to the field of parapsychology was in theoretical modeling. For instance, in a monograph published in 1969, he argued for the existence of alternative 'individual realities' (IRs) that are equally valid. He thought of the 'sensory' IR of ordinary consciousness as a state in which the world consists of separate objects, information is gained only through the senses, and time flows from past to present and future. Here, a person's decisions can affect the future, amounting to free will. By contrast, in the mystical IR there is only an eternal 'now' and people and objects are all interconnected, enabling the flow of information from one to the other (psi). LeShan considered that this mystical IR was implicit in modern physical theories of general relativity and quantum mechanics.<sup>[6]</sup>

## Select Publications

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Books

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### Articles

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## Video

The Parapsychology Foundation has shared an extensive [Interview with Lawrence LeShan](#).

Melvyn Willin

## Literature

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## References

### Footnotes

- 1.^ Cooper & Saunders (2021), 125.
- 2.^ LeShan (1967), 46-72; LeShan (1968), 14-19.
- 3.^ Cited in Cooper & Saunders (2021), 126.
- 4.^ Berger (1991), 242.
- 5.^ Pilkington (2013), 230.
- 6.^ For a brief consideration of these views, see Stokes (2008), 14-15.