

OBITUARY

JULE EISENBUD (1908–1999)

Psychiatrist Jule Eisenbud, one of parapsychology's most original and subtle thinkers, died March 10th, 1999 in Denver at the age of 90.

Eisenbud was born in New York on November 20th, 1908. He received his B.A. from Columbia, his M.D. in 1934 from the Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons, and his D.Med.Sc. in 1939 from Columbia University. In 1938 he began private practice in psychiatry and psychoanalysis and for 12 years served as associate in psychiatry at the Columbia University Medical School. In 1950 he moved his family to Denver, where he continued his private practice and became associate clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of Colorado Medical School. Eisenbud was the first psychoanalyst to establish a private practice in Denver, and he continued to see patients until shortly before his death. Eisenbud was a fellow of the American Psychiatric Association, a member of the American Psychoanalytic Association, and a charter member of the Parapsychological Association.

Like many others, Eisenbud had played at 'mind reading' as a child, and his wife Molly seemed to be particularly gifted telepathically. But Eisenbud began noticing more than mere home-style mind reading during his psychiatric training and residency. He was particularly intrigued by presumptively telepathic material emerging in his psychoanalytic practice, especially by dreams (some of them his own) that seemed to be psi-conditioned. Throughout this period, Eisenbud struggled with his own resistance to psi. He wrote, "I finally overcame my resistance to doing anything but gawk at the strange occurrences. I had to almost literally take myself by the scruff of the neck and force myself to annotate what I was observing" (Pilkington, 1987, p.11). After that, Eisenbud's interest in and respect for the subtle operations of unconscious psi grew steadily. It's likely, also, that during this period he began to develop his later insights into more widespread manifestations of resistance to psi, one of the major themes running through his later writing in parapsychology.

Eisenbud's active involvement in parapsychology began while he was in New York. In 1942 he attended Gardner Murphy's Saturday afternoon sessions and began to correspond with parapsychologists in Europe. Soon thereafter, he joined with Jan Ehrenwald, Montague Ullman and other physicians in forming the Medical Section of the American Society for Psychical Research. This group met monthly to present case material and discuss their views on parapsychology. Through Ullman, Eisenbud learned of various New Yorkers who were experiencing table levitations, psychic photography, and other physical phenomena. And it was also around this time that Eisenbud experienced apparent macro-PK first-hand. He arranged to attend a weekly table-turning session at which a heavy card table careened madly around the room. At the season-ending seance for the group, the table led the group out the door from their substreet level Brownstone, up the stairs and into the street, to the "startled gaze of a couple of dumbly uncomprehending passersby" (op.cit., p. 12). Eisenbud later got similar results in his own apartment.

In 1945 Eisenbud went public with his interest in the paranormal. He presented his paper "Telepathy and Problems of Psychoanalysis" at a meeting of the New York Psychoanalytic Society, and several months later the paper was published in *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* (Vol. 15, 1946, pp. 32-87). Some of his colleagues interpreted this as a sign of regressive magical thinking, and they began lobbying to have him ousted from the Society. But Eisenbud hoped, and continued to hope throughout his life, that he could engage his peers in serious open-minded discussions about the phenomena and perhaps help them to observe psi-conditioned interactions with their patients. He was usually frustrated in these attempts, but he was seldom treated with outright anti-pathology. More frequently, the attitude he encountered was expressed by a colleague who said to him, "Look, you're a nice guy but you're crazy."

Eisenbud is perhaps most famous for his extended series of thoughtography experiments with the Chicago bellhop, Ted Serios, which were described in his book *The World of Ted Serios* (1967/1989). This work began in 1964, and many consider it to be a landmark of psychological research. Predictably, the investigation of Serios provoked an outcry among critics of the paranormal, who attacked both Eisenbud and his experiments. But despite occasional ill-informed or outright dishonest claims to the contrary, no one has been able to demonstrate that Serios's results can be duplicated normally under the controlled conditions imposed during the experiments. James Randi confidently and flamboyantly accepted a wager from Eisenbud on national television to duplicate the Serios phenomena. But as Randi's subsequent correspondence with Eisenbud shows (and which Randi, probably wisely, has not granted permission to publish), after his television appearance with Eisenbud he began backing down on that wager. As Randi no doubt realized, confident posturing before the public was all he needed. In the second edition of *The World of Ted Serios*, Eisenbud responded to many of the criticisms that had been lodged against his investigation.

In many cases, Serios's so-called 'thoughtographs' were pictures of real objects. But the images were altered or distorted, apparently by Serios's unconscious mind, in a manner similar to symbolic transformations during dreams. These distortions were not of a kind that could be produced by photographic or darkroom tricks. Moreover, photographic chicanery was often out of the question, given the experimental controls—for example, placing Serios and the camera in different rooms, having Serios wear clothing supplied by the experimenters, and using Polaroid film. In addition to producing images on film, Serios also produced 'blackies', in which the film would look as though it had not been exposed, and 'whities', in which the film would look overexposed. On occasions when Serios obtained several blackies in a row, images would emerge gradually over the sequence of shots. As the shots progressed, the images would become clearer and more recognizable. Eisenbud and his colleagues were unable to duplicate these various results in control photos taken under the same conditions.

For most of the experiments, Eisenbud and his collaborators used Polaroid cameras for immediate feedback, and in most instances the experimenters would hold the camera themselves, point it at Serios, and shoot when he was ready. Typically, Eisenbud supplied the cameras and film, but in many cases

they were provided by skeptical scientists who wanted to investigate the matter for themselves. Serios sometimes held a 'gismo', a hollow tube of plastic or paper which apparently helped him concentrate. Not surprisingly, this 'gismo' became the object of suspicion, but attempts to duplicate Serios's photos by inserting a lens or negative in a tube were unsuccessful. Besides, Serios often used no props at all, and at other times investigators made a gismo for him out of paper and then held it between Serios and the camera. These precautions did not inhibit Serios's ability to produce the psychic photos.

Although the Serios experiments earned Eisenbud international acclaim, his other contributions to parapsychology were at least as important. In a series of books and articles, he continued to explore the subtle manifestations of ESP in the psychotherapeutic setting, the resistance to psi, and other intricate connections between psychic abilities and our deepest fears, needs, and interests. Eisenbud's other books on parapsychology were *Psi and Psychoanalysis* (1970), *Paranormal Foreknowledge* (1982), and *Parapsychology and the Unconscious* (1992). He also authored *Love and Hate in the Nursery and Beyond* (Eisenbud, 1996), a fascinating study of maternal attachment and abandonment, and their effect on the lives of famous people (including Descartes, Audubon, and Hitchcock). Sometimes the intricacy of Eisenbud's syntax matched the complexity of his thought. Nevertheless, his writing was consistently elegant and fresh, brimming with insightful and novel observations, peppered with amusing asides, and always reflecting his compassion and good humor.

The subtlety, sophistication, and profundity of Eisenbud's theoretical writings rendered his work inaccessible to many. Others were repelled by the world view he proposed—in particular, his suggestion that psi might be unlimited in its scope and refinement. Moreover, many of Eisenbud's positions were simply unpopular or unfashionable. For example, he was one of only a few in the field who had the perspective, breadth of knowledge, tenacity, and clarity to challenge the received dogma, canonized by Rhine, about what scientific inquiry is, and what sort of field parapsychology can be and should be. Although Eisenbud was often ridiculed by his critics and ostracized (or at least ignored) by his colleagues in parapsychology, he courageously continued his investigation of Serios and others, and he continued to press questions and raise issues that many preferred to avoid. Those who have taken the time to examine Eisenbud's investigative and theoretical work carefully hold it in high esteem, and they recognize the importance of the legacy he has left to science generally and psychical research in particular.

Jule was also one of my closest friends. We met in 1978, and Jule astounded me with his breadth of education, the depth of his thought, his prodigious memory, critical acumen, and insatiable curiosity. He had a remarkable command of the technical literature in many fields, including anthropology, philosophy, mathematics, and physics. He could quote extensively from Freud, Shakespeare, the letters of Mozart, and Wittgenstein. He was a talented and discerning musician, and also a rugged outdoorsman who could spend long hours contentedly repairing fences on his ranch and riding his horses. He was a devoted husband, father, and grandfather; his infectious and hearty laugh could light up a room; and he had a deep love and respect for all living things

(even the mice that once threatened to overrun his house). He was supremely confident, but also unpretentious and self-critical; and although he was very serious, he was a person of great humor and kindness, and he never took himself too seriously. Contrary to what Jule's former colleague said to him, he was *not* crazy. But he was a genuinely nice guy.

Department of Philosophy
University of Maryland Baltimore County
Baltimore, MD 21250, U.S.A.

STEPHEN E. BRAUDE

REFERENCES

- Eisenbud, J. (1946) Telepathy and Problems of Psychoanalysis. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 15, 32-87.
- Eisenbud, J. (1967/1989) *The World of Ted Serios*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co.
- Eisenbud, J. (1970) *Psi and Psychoanalysis*. New York: Grune & Stratton.
- Eisenbud, J. (1982) *Paranormal Foreknowledge: Problems and Perplexities*. New York: Human Sciences Press.
- Eisenbud, J. (1992) *Parapsychology and the Unconscious*. Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books.
- Eisenbud, J. (1996) *Love and Hate in the Nursery and Beyond: Voices from the Unconscious*. Berkeley, California: Frog, Ltd.
- Pilkington, R. (ed.) (1987) *Men and Women of Parapsychology: Personal Reflections*. Jefferson, N.C. & London: McFarland & Co.