

**Getting Off The Ground**  
by  
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BMGHA's approach to investigating paranormal activity is standard as far as use of equipment and investigative methods go. Philosophically, we approach reports of paranormal activity in the same way that William James did. James was America's preeminent pragmatic philosopher, and he wrote the first text in psychology. He was also a founding member of the American Society of Psychical Research. James strongly believed in the incorrigibility of voluntary first person accounts. If Smith says he saw a ghost, it is not the place of science to declare that he did not. It is the place of science to accept Smith's report and to explain the experience that Smith had. Perhaps Smith was hallucinating; perhaps Smith was mistaken; perhaps Smith actually saw a ghost. In any case, the investigation begins with Smith's report of an experience, and not with conjecture regarding the presence or absence of paranormal phenomena. Since nothing can be proven in science—let me repeat that, *nothing can be proven in science*—theories are devised to accommodate the preponderance of evidence and to explain the experience. Theories are not force fit to the situation when they do not explain the circumstances.

It is not enough to consider the question “what is paranormal?” It is equally important to consider what people *think* is paranormal, and what they think it means. With the drastic reduction in classical study during the last century, most people have lost sight of where ideas originated, and in what different forms they have come down to us through the ages. The result is misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and conjecture beyond the reasonable. Some people declare with certainty “ghosts are the souls of dead people.” How can anyone know? What about apparitions of horses, cats, trains, and ships? Do these things have souls? When was the last time you heard of a report of a naked ghost or of a Chinese ghost? Why do apparitions seem to always be dressed in “period” clothing, but not in animal skins, leisure suits, or clown costumes? The answer is that people see what their culture has prepared them to see.

The idea that the soul is the essence of the person, that the soul is something separate from the body, and that the soul transcends the physical body at death originated (in the Western world) with Plato. How many of those making definitive statements about the nature of the soul have studied Plato or subsequent commentary to get a sense of what he meant? Perhaps Plato got it right; perhaps he did not. Even if he did, that does not definitively explain any of the numerous things we call *ghosts*. Ghost hunting, or virtually any other activity, is meaningless without critical thought, and critical thought is impossible without sufficient education.

There are those who believe that magic spells are spoken in Latin; they are the children of Christian era theatrics and Hollywood movies. Many spiritualists claiming to be experts in metaphysics are unaware that the term was applied originally, in ancient times, to the book Aristotle wrote after he wrote the *Physics*—it refers to something sequential, not something spiritual. How many of these experts have studied Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, and subsequent developments in philosophy? If they did, perhaps their conclusions about reality beyond the senses might be different. Are we to say that Aristotle is irrelevant when it was he alone who originated the idea behind modern metaphysics? Daniel Robertson used to say if you want evidence of extraterrestrial life, Aristotle is it. So unique, so pervasive, and so influential is this

one man's thought, that it is as if beings on another planet saw that humans were struggling and sent him down to help out.

There are way too many writers who have never been in combat writing about what it means to be a warrior. True warriors do not speak about it, much less are they able to make sense of it. It seems to me that the pop literature about "becoming a warrior" is product to sell and not much on wisdom. It would be a truly sad state of affairs if human potential can only be achieved through warfare. Aristotle did not think so. Neither did Plato.

Those who are sincerely engaged in the adult search for meaning can be forgiven for their intellectual transgressions, and encouraged to carry their thoughts and studies beyond pop literature. Those who spew psychobabble and metaphysical drivel should not be the beacons in our search. They can, however, show us which are the wrong paths to understanding.

Big Muddy Ghost Hunters Association offers, among other things, a certification course in paranormal investigation. The paranormal investigators that we certify are acquainted with, and at least have thought about, the critical philosophical, theological, and psychological issues associated with paranormal investigation in addition to the use of tools and technique. For many, that is too much work. Yet, if anything is to be made of investigating the paranormal, the issues and implications of many tossed off theories about paranormal phenomena must be examined with the same intensity applied to examination of photographs and audio recordings, EMF readings and video images. Are we in it for the fantasy? Or, are we serious about learning something?