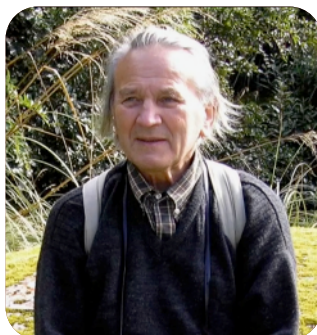


IN MEMORIAM:
H. H. Jürgen Keil (1930–2024)¹

Jim B. Tucker

University of Virginia



Jürgen Keil, a parapsychologist who researched topics such as psychokinesis (PK) and past-life memories, died on January 7, 2024, at the age of 93. Keil was born and raised in Germany before immigrating to Australia as a young man. Once there, he attended the University of Tasmania at Hobart, obtaining both an undergraduate degree and a Ph.D. in psychology. He then spent his career as a faculty there, eventually retiring as an Emeritus Professor.

Keil only became interested in parapsychology when, as a student, he was introduced by chance to psychokinesis. While studying psychology, he was also working as a fitter and turner to earn extra income when the head of the physics department asked him to help construct a microbalance apparatus to be used in PK experiments. Those experiments produced statistically significant results, and having “observed phenomena in a sophisticated scientific setting which strongly suggested PK” (Keil, 1987, p. 2), he wanted to explore more.

This led to a collaboration with Gaither Pratt, a noted figure in the field, and a long, productive career in parapsychology. Highlights include work with Nina Kulagina, a Russian woman who appeared capable of what is now referred to as macro-PK,

¹ Address correspondence to: Jim B. Tucker. M. D., University of Virginia Division of Perceptual Studies, jbt8n@uvahealth.org

seeming to move small objects and cause other directly observable PK effects using only her mind. Following studies by Russian scientists, Keil and his colleagues used various controls with Kulagina and concluded that a good case could be made that her PK abilities were genuine (Keil et al., 1976).

In later years, Keil joined the work on cases of the reincarnation type (CORT), the term Ian Stevenson used to describe children who report memories of a previous life. Keil published numerous papers on the topic, both with colleagues and independently. He conducted one of his more important studies with Stevenson. Keil reinvestigated 15 cases that Stevenson had studied some 20 years before, to determine if the reports by the families had become exaggerated over time. When Keil and Stevenson compared notes, they found that the cases had not become stronger in the intervening years (with one exception). Instead, 11 of the 15 had become weaker, as the families gave fewer details. Thus, the findings contradicted the idea that families over time credit the children with more knowledge of the past life than they had actually demonstrated (Stevenson & Keil, 2000).

All told, Keil made significant contributions in multiple areas of parapsychology. In so doing, he was not afraid to push against prevailing thought—outside of parapsychology to be sure, but in it as well. For example, in the CORT research, he accepted that the cases indicated a paranormal process but argued against the proposition that reincarnation was the best way to explain them, as Stevenson had concluded. Instead, he suggested that the child had a connection with thought pools associated with the previous person. These pools had persisted but the term *survival* was not justified (Keil, 2010). Right or wrong on that issue, the ability Keil demonstrated throughout his career to question rather than assume is one that all scientists can aspire to emulate.

References

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