

Journal
of
Near-Death Studies

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Who's Afraid of Life After Death? • *Neal Grossman, Ph.D.*

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Journal of Near-Death Studies

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JOURNAL OF NEAR-DEATH STUDIES (formerly ANABIOSIS) is sponsored by the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS). The Journal publishes articles on near-death experiences and on the empirical effects and theoretical implications of such events, and on such related phenomena as out-of-body experiences, deathbed visions, the experiences of dying persons, comparable experiences occurring under other circumstances, and the implications of such phenomena for our understanding of human consciousness and its relation to the life and death processes. The Journal is committed to an unbiased exploration of these issues, and specifically welcomes a variety of theoretical perspectives and interpretations that are grounded in empirical observation or research.

The **INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR NEAR-DEATH STUDIES** (IANDS) is a worldwide organization of scientists, scholars, healthcare providers, near-death experiencers, and the general public, dedicated to the exploration of near-death experiences (NDEs) and their implications. Incorporated as a nonprofit educational and research organization in 1981, IANDS' objectives are to encourage and support research into NDEs and related phenomena; to disseminate knowledge concerning NDEs and their implications; to further the utilization of near-death research by healthcare and counseling professionals; to form local chapters of near-death experiencers and interested others; to sponsor symposia and conferences on NDEs and related phenomena; and to maintain a library and archives of near-death-related material. Friends of IANDS chapters are affiliated support groups in many cities for NDErs and their families and for healthcare and counseling professionals to network locally. Information about membership in IANDS can be obtained by contacting IANDS, P.O. Box 502, East Windsor Hill, CT 06028-0502, USA; telephone (860) 644-5216; fax (860) 644-5759; e-mail office@iands.org; Internet website: www.iands.org.

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Editor's Foreword

We lead off this issue of the Journal with philosopher Neal Grossman's Guest Editorial addressing resistance to the concept of an afterlife. Grossman argues that the evidence for survival of bodily death is strong enough to challenge the materialistic worldview, and he explores various explanations for the failure of the academic community to consider that evidence.

Next, Richard Kelly, a law enforcement officer and professional counselor, presents an empirical study of emergency service workers who experienced the post mortem presence of, or communication from, victims of fatal injuries whom they had attended at death. Kelly found that 28 percent of police officers and firefighters/emergency medical service personnel described such events, which were similar to accounts of near-death experiences.

This issue includes four book reviews. Physician Grant Bishop reviews near-death researcher Arvin Gibson's *Fingerprints of God*, a personal account of Gibson's struggle as a scientist to come to terms with the evidence for the existence of God from near-death research, scientific research on creation, and Mormon theology. Next, psychiatrist Stuart Twemlow reviews near-death researchers Kenneth Ring and Sharon Cooper's *Mindsight*, an empirical study of near-death and out-of-body experiences in blind persons, in which Ring and Cooper consider various explanations for the apparent ability of blind people to see while ostensibly out of the body. Then health scientist John Tomlinson reviews pediatrician Melvin Morse and writer Paul Perry's *Where God Lives*, a broad view of the frontiers of science that addresses not only the hypothetical "God spot" in the brain's temporal lobe, but a wide-ranging cosmological model linking various paranormal phenomena to contemporary science. Finally, psychologist Joel Funk reviews dentist and biological scientist Donald Morse's *Searching for Eternity*, a personal account of his scientific and spiritual journey to explore the evidence for survival.

We end this issue with four letters. German psychiatrist Michael Schroeter-Kunhardt raises questions about Hubert Knoblauch and colleagues' interpretation of their survey of German near-death experiences reported in the Fall 2001 issue of the Journal; and Knoblauch

answers those questions. Finally, near-death experiencer and author P. M. H. Atwater challenges the "Binary Soul Doctrine" that Peter Novak presented in our Spring 2002 issue; and Novak responds to her critique.

Bruce Greyson, M.D.

Who's Afraid of Life After Death?

Neal Grossman, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT: The evidence for an afterlife is sufficiently strong and compelling that an unbiased person ought to conclude that materialism is a false theory. Yet the academy refuses to examine the evidence, and clings to materialism as if it were *a priori* true, instead of *a posteriori* false. I suggest several explanations for the monumental failure of curiosity on the part of academia. First, there is deep confusion between the concepts of evidence and proof. Second, materialism functions as a powerful paradigm that structures the shape of scientific explanations, but is not itself open to question. The third explanation is intellectual arrogance, as the possible existence of disembodied intelligence threatens the materialistic belief that the educated human brain is the highest form of intelligence in existence. Finally, there is a social taboo against belief in an afterlife, as our whole way of life is predicated on materialism and might collapse if near-death experiences, particularly the life review, were accepted as fact.

KEY WORDS: near-death experience; resistance to evidence; survival as an empirical hypothesis; fundamaterialism.

For more than a hundred years there has been a small but persistent effort on the part of dedicated researchers to discover solid empirical evidence that supports the thesis that our mind or consciousness survives the death our physical bodies. Beginning with William James' research on mediumship and culminating in contemporary research on the near-death experience (NDE), this body of research provides solid ground for believing that the materialist paradigm currently in fashion among academics is severely limited, and fails to account for the accumulated data. Although this evidence has convinced the majority of people who have taken the time to examine it carefully that materialism is no longer an adequate paradigm, the overwhelming majority of academics do not

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bother to examine the evidence, and seem to believe *a priori* that materialism *must be* true.

It is not my purpose here, except for a few examples below, to review the wealth of data that falsifies materialism. Rather, I wish to examine here the academy's failure to examine the evidence—a failure that is especially perplexing when one considers the immense importance the question of an afterlife has for human beings. In this editorial I will take the position that the evidence against materialism has accumulated over the years to the point that it is now reasonable to assert that materialism has been shown to be empirically false; hence, what needs to be explained is the academic establishment's collective refusal to examine the evidence and to see it for what it is. The academic establishment is in the same position today as was the bishop who refused to look through Galileo's telescope. Why is that the case?

Before addressing this question, it is probably incumbent on to me to say a few words about the kind and strength of evidence that refutes materialism. Emily Cook, Bruce Greyson, and Ian Stevenson described "three features of NDEs—enhanced mentation, the experience of seeing the physical body from a different position in space, and paranormal perception—that [they] believe might provide convergent evidence supporting the survival hypothesis" (Cook, Greyson, and Stevenson, 1998, p.377). They then went on to describe 14 cases that satisfied those criteria. From an epistemological perspective, the third criterion, paranormal perception, is the most important. The materialist can, in principle, give no account of how a person acquires veridical information about events remote from his or her body. Consider, for example, the kind of case where the NDEr accurately reports the conversation occurring in the waiting room while his or her body is unconscious in the operating room. There is no way for the relevant information, conveyed in sound waves or light waves, to travel from the waiting room, through corridors and up elevators, to reach the sense organs of the unconscious person. Yet the person wakes from the operation with the information. This kind of case—and there are lots of them—shows quite straightforwardly that there are nonphysical ways in which the mind can acquire information. Hence materialism is false.

Perhaps the "smoking gun" case is the one recently described by Michael Sabom (1998). In this case, the patient had her NDE while her body temperature was lowered to 60 degrees, and all the blood was drained from her body: "her electroencephalogram was silent, her brain-stem response was absent, and no blood flowed through her brain"

(Sabom, 1998, p.49). A brain in this state cannot create any kind of experience. Yet the patient experienced a profound NDE, which included detailed veridical perception of the operation. Those materialists who believe that consciousness is secreted by the brain, or that the brain is necessary for conscious experience to exist, cannot possibly *explain*, in their own terms, cases such as this. An impartial observer would have to conclude that not all experience is produced by the brain and that, therefore, the falsity of materialism has been empirically demonstrated. Thus, what needs to be explained is the abysmal failure of the academic establishment to examine this evidence and to embrace the conclusion: materialism is false, and consciousness can and does exist independently of the body.

Moreover, the evidence against materialism comes not only from the NDE, but from other areas of research as well. Both mediumship, which has been extensively investigated since the time of William James, and cases of children, such as those investigated by Stevenson, who have verified memories of past lives, offer an abundance of evidence against materialism. The best epistemological analysis of the evidence was given by Robert Almeder (1992). After a lengthy and detailed discussion of children who appear to remember previous lives, he twitted Stevenson for concluding only that "it is not unreasonable to believe in reincarnation," given the evidence. The proper conclusion, according to Almeder, should be "it is unreasonable to reject belief in reincarnation," given the evidence (Almeder, 1992, p.62). I agree with Almeder.

Our collective irrationality with respect to the wealth of evidence against materialism manifests in two ways: first, by ignoring the evidence, and second, by insisting on overly stringent standards of evidence, which, if adopted, would render any empirical science impossible. The refusal of academics to examine the evidence against materialism is not new. Writing one hundred years ago, William James complained

...I invite eight of my scientific colleagues severally to come to my house at their own time, and sit with a medium for whom the evidence already published in our *Proceedings* had been most noteworthy. Although it means at worst the waste of the hour for each, five of them decline the adventure. I then beg the "Commission" connected with the chair of a certain learned psychologist in a neighbouring university to examine the same medium, whom Mr. Hodgson and I offer at our own expense to send and leave with them. They also have to be excused from any such entanglement. I advise another psychological friend to look into this medium's case, but he replies that it is useless, for if he should get such results as I report, he would (being suggestible) simply believe himself hallucinated. . . . This friend of mine writes *ex cathedra*

on the subject of psychical research, declaring (I need hardly add) that there is nothing in it; . . . and one of the five colleagues who declined my invitation is widely quoted as an effective critic of our evidence. So runs the world away! (James, 1986/1869–1909, p.194)

More recently, Michael Grosso reported a similar experience in attempting to get colleagues to read anything on the evidence for life after death:

The type of person I have in mind will come up with weak, if not irrational, excuses for not reading the book I place in his hand. In one case, the argument ran: "It's only words on paper; no reason to take any of it seriously." Another academic said he didn't have the time. "You mean you can't find a few hours to read a book that might change your basic outlook on life and death?" I asked.

How strange that these intelligent people should be not merely indifferent but *resistant* to the data. It's as if there were a conspiracy against this information, a need to make it harmless, irrelevant, or nonexistent. (Grosso, 1990, pp. 241–242; italics added)

One of my earliest encounters with this kind of academic irrationality occurred more than twenty years ago. I was devouring everything on the near-death experience I could get my hands on, and eager to share what I was discovering with colleagues. It was unbelievable to me how dismissive they were of the evidence. "Drug-induced hallucinations," "last gasp of a dying brain," and "people see what they want to see" were some of the more commonly used phrases. One conversation in particular caused me to see more clearly the fundamental irrationality of academics with respect to evidence against materialism

I asked, "What about people who accurately report the details of their operation?"

"Oh," came the reply, "they probably just subconsciously heard the conversation in the operating room, and their brain subconsciously transposed the audio information into a visual format."

"Well," I responded, "what about cases where people report veridical perception of events remote from their body?"

"Oh, that's just a coincidence or a lucky guess."

Exasperated, I asked, "What will it take, short of having a near-death experience yourself, to convince you that it's real?"

Very nonchalantly, without batting an eye, the response was: "Even if I were to have a near-death experience myself, I would conclude that I was hallucinating, rather than believe that my mind can exist independently of my brain."

He went on to add that dualism—the philosophical thesis that mind and matter are independent substances, neither of which can be reduced

to the other—is a false theory and that there cannot be evidence for something that is false. This was a momentous experience for me, because here was an educated, intelligent man telling me that he will not give up materialism, no matter what. Even the evidence of his own experience would not cause him to give up materialism.

I realized two things in that moment. First, this experience cured me of any impulse to argue these things with recalcitrant colleagues; it is pointless to argue with someone who tells me that his mind is already made up, and nothing I can say will change it. Second, this experience taught me that it is important to distinguish between (a) materialism as an empirical hypothesis about the nature of the world, which is amenable to evidence one way or the other (this is the hallmark of a *scientific* hypothesis: that evidence is relevant for its truth or falsity) and (b) materialism as an ideology, or paradigm, about how things “must” be, which is impervious to evidence (this is the hallmark of an *unscientific* hypothesis: that evidence is not relevant for its truth). My colleague believed in materialism not as a scientific hypothesis that, as a scientific hypothesis, might be false; but rather as dogma and ideology which “must” be true, evidence to the contrary notwithstanding. For him, materialism is the fundamental paradigm in terms of which everything else is explained, but which is not itself open to doubt. I shall coin the term “fundamaterialist” to refer to those who believe that materialism is a necessary truth, not amenable to empirical evidence.

With respect to (a) materialism held as an empirical hypothesis about the world, the evidence against it is overwhelming. With respect to (b) materialism held as an ideology, evidence against it is logically impossible. A complicating factor is that fundamaterialists typically hold the metabelief that their belief in materialism is not ideological, but empirical. That is, they misclassify themselves under (a), while their behavior clearly falls under (b). Debunkers believe that they are being “scientific” in ignoring and rejecting the evidence against materialism. They claim that the evidence is weak, that it is not compelling, that it can be easily explained away by the materialist paradigm. But when asked what kind of evidence it would take to convince them that materialism is empirically false, they are, like my colleague, usually at a loss for what to say. If they are not familiar with the data, they will come up with a criterion of evidence that in fact has already been met. When it is pointed out to them that there exist many well-documented cases that satisfy their proposed criterion, they will simply make their criterion more stringent, and at some point cross the line between the

reasonable demand for scientific evidence and the unreasonable (and unscientific) demand for logical proof.

This is not a minor point. Fundamaterialism is so deeply ingrained in the academic establishment that most near-death researchers fall prey to it. For, after presenting case after case that would satisfy any reasonable standard of empirical evidence against materialism, even sympathetic researchers almost always deem it necessary to add the disclaimer that their research does not prove that there is life after death. But no scientific hypothesis is ever proven in this sense. Theorems in logic and mathematics can be proved. In science, hypotheses are not proved; rather, empirical evidence renders a given hypothesis more or less probable. There is no logical or mathematical certainty in science. The fundamaterialists are correct in that the hypothesis that consciousness exists independently of the body cannot be proven with mathematical certainty. But neither can any other scientific hypothesis, because empirical science deals with evidence, not proof. Evidence never "proves" a hypothesis; it just makes the hypothesis more probable. And, when evidence for a given hypothesis accumulates to a certain degree, we accept the hypothesis as true. But "true" in this scientific sense never means "proven"; it means very, very probable. In science there is always the possibility that a given hypothesis may turn out to be false. The fundamaterialists will not accept the hypothesis of an afterlife until it is "proven" beyond a logical possibility of being false. That is, they use a concept of proof that belongs in logic and mathematics, not in science. And near-death researchers are playing the fundamaterialists' game when they utter caveats that their research does not prove the hypothesis of an afterlife. What researchers should say, in my opinion, is simply that they have amassed sufficient evidence to render the hypothesis of an afterlife very probable, and the hypothesis of materialism very improbable.

In the above paragraphs, I have been using the terms "science" and "scientific" in their epistemological sense. Science is a methodological process of discovering truths about reality. Insofar as science is an objective process of discovery, it is, and must be, metaphysically neutral. Insofar as science is not metaphysically neutral, but instead weds itself to a particular metaphysical theory, such as materialism, it cannot be an objective process for discovery. There is much confusion on this point, because many people equate science with materialist metaphysics, and phenomena that fall outside the scope of such metaphysics, and hence cannot be explained in physical terms, are called "unscientific." This is a most unfortunate usage of the term. For if souls and spirits are in fact

a part of reality, and science is conceived epistemologically as a systematic investigation of reality, then there is no reason why science cannot devise appropriate methods to investigate souls and spirits. But if science is defined in terms of materialist metaphysics, then, if souls and spirits are real, science, thus defined, will not be able to deal with them. But this would not be because souls and spirits are unreal, but rather because this definition of science in terms of materialist metaphysics has semantically excluded nonphysical realities from its scope.

Peter and Elizabeth Fenwick used the term "science" in this metaphysical sense when they wrote:

So far we've taken a largely scientific, and therefore a rather limited view of the NDE. We've been looking at mechanism, and almost everything we have said has been based on the assumption that the NDE takes place in or is constructed by the brain. We've confined 'mind' to the brain because, scientifically, . . . we have no other option. When the brain dies, the mind dies; the scientific view does not allow for the possibility of a soul, or for any form of personal survival after death.

It is only by looking at some non-scientific views that we might find a wider explanation of the NDE. . . . (Fenwick and Fenwick, 1997, p.249)

If the term "materialistic" is substituted for "scientific," then the above passage is an accurate statement with which I have no quarrel. The last sentence becomes: "It is only by looking at nonmaterialistic views that we might find a wider explanation of the NDE. . . ." And this is absolutely correct. Materialism is a woefully inadequate framework in terms of which to understand the NDE. And, I wish to insist, it is science itself, understood epistemologically as a metaphysically neutral method of inquiry, that has discovered the limitations of materialism. After all, the primary researchers in the field are not philosophers or theologians, but well-trained scientists and physicians, who, using standard scientific methodology, have been forced by their data to conclude that materialism cannot be the whole truth.

I stress this semantic point about how the word "scientific" should be used in part because the term carries a lot of emotional weight. To be labeled "unscientific" is sufficient for having one's work or one's self dismissed and ignored by the academic establishment. And I think this is part of the reason academics are in fact dismissive of the research on the NDE. The reasoning goes something like this: to be scientific is good; to be unscientific is bad. Science equals materialism. To believe in souls and spirits, or even to talk about souls and spirits, is to talk about and/or believe in something that is not materialistic. Therefore it is unscientific, which is bad, and hence we should not waste any time

on it. I believe that most of my colleagues think like this. The false premise upon which the argument hangs is the equating of science with materialism, an equation so deeply ingrained that it is difficult to root out. But I think even the most die-hard materialist ought to grant the following argument: If souls are real, that is, if nonmaterial objects exist, then it should be possible to study them, to acquire data about them, to construct generalizations and theories about them, and so on; which is to say, it should be possible to study them scientifically. Hence science ought to be construed as a method of inquiry only, not as a metaphysical theory that stipulates by definition what there is, and what can or cannot exist.

I wish to turn my attention now to the discipline of philosophy. It would seem that, of all the disciplines, philosophy ought to be most interested in, and meticulously study, all the research on the NDE. After all, is philosophy not supposed to be concerned with questions of ultimate meaning, of the purpose of life, of the relation between mind and body, of God, and so on? NDE research has data that are directly relevant to all of these questions. So how is it possible that philosophers have collectively managed to ignore and even ridicule this research? To those outside of academic philosophy, it may come as a surprise to learn the great majority of academic philosophers are atheists and materialists. While, as I have argued above, they incorrectly use science to support their materialism, they systematically ignore the findings of science—which I take near-death research to be—that refute their materialism. Since their materialism is not empirically based, I call it *fundamaterialism*, to make explicit comparison with fundamentalism in religion. Fundamentalism connotes an attitude of certainty towards one's core belief. Just as the fundamentalist Christian is absolutely certain that the world was created in the manner described by the Bible—fossil evidence notwithstanding—so also the fundamaterialist is absolutely certain that there exists nothing that is not made up of matter—NDEs and other evidence notwithstanding. In fact, and this is the crucial point, their respective beliefs have nothing to do with evidence. As my fundamaterialist colleague put it: "There can't be evidence for something that's false."

As a brief aside, I believe there are some interesting parallels to be drawn by comparing fundamaterialists' and fundamentalists' attitudes towards data that challenge their respective worldviews. Fundamentalists are just as inventive in explaining away fossil evidence as fundamaterialists—at least those who bother to look at paranormal research—are at explaining away near-death research. One particularly

ingenious fundamentalist explanation is that, when God created the world some 5000 years ago, He created it with fossils and dinosaur bones in place, to make it look as if the world were older, as a sort of test of our faith. The Creationist then challenges the evolutionary scientist to "prove" that God did not in fact create the world in this way. One does not need to be an astute logician to see that the Creationist's hypothesis is unfalsifiable in principle, hence unscientific. Hence, the evolutionary scientist does not need to show—because it cannot in principle be shown—that God did not create the world with the fossil evidence in place. The arguments of those fundamaterialists who look at the evidence from paranormal research are just as convoluted, involving unfalsifiable premises, confusing evidence with proof, and so on. See Almeder's book cited above for a more detailed examination of some of the convolutions the fundamaterialists must undergo in order to save their materialism.

And, more surprisingly, even those philosophers who are not materialists refuse to look at the data. One would think that a Cartesian dualist, or a Platonist, would eagerly devour the wealth of data that strongly support their point of view. I would like to share a few more personal experiences that highlight some of the attitudes involved. In the late 1970s, when the early research on the NDE was just being published, I was involved in team-teaching a course with one of the campus chaplains. Excitedly, I shared what I was learning about the NDE with the chaplain, thinking that he would welcome empirical data that, at the very least, constituted strong *prima facie* evidence for much of what he believed in—soul, afterlife, ultimate responsibility for one's actions, Higher Power, and so on. To my astonishment, he was just as dismissive of the evidence as was my fundamaterialist colleague. When I questioned him about why he was so resistant to the data, he said, in effect, that his belief in God and the afterlife is based on faith, and if these things were decidable empirically, there would be no room left for faith, which for him was the foundation of his religious convictions.

I knew then that the NDE was between a rock and a hard place, as far as being taken seriously by the two disciplines, philosophy and theology, that should be the most interested in it. On the one hand, fundamaterialist philosophers believe in the truth of materialism *a priori*; empirical evidence is not relevant to them, and they are committed to ignoring and/or debunking anything that looks like evidence. On the other hand, theologians and other intellectuals who do believe in an afterlife tend to base their belief on faith, which they feel would be seriously undermined if empirical evidence were relevant to their beliefs.

Moreover, once theologians and religionists open the door to empirical evidence, they allow the possibility that the evidence may contradict some aspects of what was believed solely on the basis of faith. Indeed, this has already happened. The evidence from the NDE, for example, suggests that God is not vengeful, does not judge us or condemn us, and is not angry at us for our "sins"; there is judgment, to be sure, but the reports appear to be in agreement that all judgment comes from within the individual, not from the Being of Light. It seems, in fact, that all God is capable of giving us is unconditional love. Because the concept of an all-loving, nonjudgmental God contradicts and undermines the teachings of some religious denominations, it is no wonder that some religious fundamentalists are up in arms about the NDE.

One more story: a few years ago, a Plato scholar from England gave a colloquium at my university. Afterwards, I found myself sitting next to him at dinner, and he politely asked me what my interests were in philosophy. I replied that I was interested in examining the various kinds of evidence suggestive of an afterlife. He, assuming falsely that my interest was in debunking the paranormal, proceeded to tell us of a recent lecture he had attended in England. The lecturer, he said (with a slight sneer of contemptuous ridicule that only the British have truly perfected) was a certain neuropsychiatrist who talked about the NDE, and (with heightened tone of ridicule) actually believed that it was real. Even though I am quite used to the limitations of my metaphysically challenged colleagues, his attitude surprised me. In the first place, here was a Plato scholar, who, like the chaplain, was summarily dismissive of even the possibility that there could be evidence that Plato's views, the views of the philosopher about whom he is an expert, might actually be true. Inasmuch as the first recorded NDE is at the end of Book 10 of Plato's *Republic* (1953/4th century B.C.), I would have thought that a Plato scholar would at the very least be curious about it. But even more disturbing to me was his implied reasoning. Whenever I hear that a highly trained scientist has studied some sort of esoteric phenomenon, and has come to the conclusion, based on research, that there is something to it, such as James on mediumship or Stevenson on reincarnation, or John Mack on UFOs or Brian Weiss on past-life regressions, my curiosity is piqued, and I want to investigate. My reasoning is that, if respectable, well-trained scientists have concluded that there is something to it, then maybe there *is*, and I proceed to read what they have to say. But my colleague, the Plato scholar, was reasoning quite differently: if a respectable, well-trained neuropsychiatrist has come to the conclusion that there might be life after death, what this shows is not

that there might be any empirical reason to believe in an afterlife, but rather, that even a rigorous training in neuropsychiatry cannot protect an individual from believing in such foolish absurdities as an afterlife. This is the reasoning of a closed mind. With respect to the question of an afterlife, his mind was already made up; like most academic philosophers, he believed *a priori* that there is no afterlife, and since there can be no evidence for something that does not exist, anyone who believes otherwise betrays a mind that has fallen victim to superstition, wishful and fuzzy thinking, irrationality, and so forth.

One conclusion I have come to over the years is that both the atheist and the believer, from the fundamaterialist to the fundamentalist, share something in common. In fact, from an epistemological perspective, what they have in common is much more significant than what they disagree about. What they agree about is this: beliefs pertaining to the possible existence of a transcendent reality—God, soul, afterlife, and so on—are based on faith, not fact. If this is true, then there can be no factual evidence that pertains to such beliefs. This metabelief—that beliefs about a transcendent reality cannot be empirically based—is so deeply entrenched in our culture that it has the status of a taboo. The taboo is very democratic in that it allows everyone to believe whatever he or she wants to believe about such matters. This allows fundamaterialists to feel comfortable in their conviction that reason is on their side, that there is no afterlife, and that those who believe otherwise have fallen prey to the forces of irrationality and wishful thinking. But it also allows fundamentalists to feel comfortable in *their* conviction that they have God on their side, and that those who believe otherwise have fallen prey to the forces of evil. Thus, although the fundamentalist and the fundamaterialist are on opposite extremes of the spectrum of possible attitudes towards an afterlife, their extreme positions unite them as strange bedfellows in their battles against the possibility that there are matters of fact about the afterlife that empirical research might discover. The very suggestion that empirical research might be relevant to beliefs pertaining to a transcendent reality—that such beliefs are subject to empirical constraint—runs strongly against this taboo, and is hence very threatening to most elements of our culture.

So, at the very least, there is a failure of curiosity among the academic establishment with respect to a large body of data suggestive of an afterlife. And if I am right, if, to paraphrase Almeder, it is irrational not to believe in a transcendent reality, given the evidence, then academia is permeated by a widespread and recalcitrant irrationality that blinds it to the findings of science. Now, the term “irrational” has a wide range

of meanings, and there is no doubt room for differences of opinion with respect to what constitutes irrational and illogical thinking. But everyone agrees that the domain of rational discourse is structured by basic rules of logic. Those who, while defending their own cherished beliefs, violate these rules may be fairly said to be behaving irrationally. Fundamaterialists, like fundamentalists, are so self-righteously certain of the truth of their beliefs, that they are often blind to the elementary logical errors they commit in defense of their beliefs. James, as far as I know, was the first paranormal researcher to point that out. James got so upset about an 1898 editorial in *Science* debunking mediumship that he wrote a scathing reply exposing some of the errors of logic, which is worth quoting at some length:

Any hearing for such phenomena [mediumship] is so hard to get from scientific readers that one who believes them worthy of careful study is in duty bound to resent such contemptuous public notice of them in high quarters as would still further encourage the fashion of their neglect.

I say hearing; I don't say fair hearing. Still less do I speak of fair treatment in the broad meaning of the term. The scientific mind is . . . painfully drilled to fairness and logic in discussing orthodox phenomena. But in such mere matters of superstition as a medium's trances it feels so confident of impunity and indulgence whatever it may say, provided it be only contemptuous enough, that it fairly revels in the untrained barbarians' arsenal of logical weapons, including all the various sophisms enumerated in the [logic] books.

Your own comments seem to me an excellent illustration of this fact. If one wishes to refute a man who asserts that some A's are B's, the ordinary rule of logic is that one must not show that some *other* A's are *not* B's—one must show him either that those first A's themselves are not B's, or else that no A possibly can be a B. Now Mr. Hodgson comes forward asserting that many of Mrs. Piper's trances show supernatural knowledge. You thereupon pick out from his report five instances from his report in which they showed nothing of the kind. You thereupon wittily remark, "We have piped unto you but ye have not danced," and you sign your name with an air of finality, as if nothing more in the way of refutation were needful and as if what earlier in the article you call "the trivial character of the evidence . . ." were now sufficiently displayed.

If, my dear sir, you were teaching Logic to a class of students, should you, or should you not, consider this a good instance by which to illustrate the style of reasoning termed "irrelevant conclusion," or *ignoratio elenchi*, in the chapter on fallacies? I myself think it an extraordinarily perfect instance.

And what name should you assign the fallacy by which you quote one of those five sitters as saying that he himself got nothing from the medium "but a few preposterous compliments," whilst you leave

unquoted the larger part of his report, relating the inexplicable knowledge which the medium showed of the family affairs of his wife . . . ? I am not sure that the logic books contain any technical name for the fallacy here, but in legal language it is sometimes called *suppressio veri*, sometimes something still less polite. . . .

I am sure that you have committed these fallacies with the best of scientific consciences. They are fallacies into which, of course, you would have been in no possible danger of falling in any other sort of matter than this. In our dealings with the insane the usual moral rules don't apply. Mediums are scientific outlaws, and their defendants are quasi-insane. Any stick is good enough to beat dogs of that stripe with. So in perfect innocence you permitted yourself the liberties I point out. (James, 1986/1869-1909, p.184)

James' criticisms are as appropriate today as they were one hundred years ago. In fact, the two kinds of logical errors that James identified are probably the ones most frequently used by the fundamentalists today. Yet James clearly indicated here that it is only with respect to the issue of empirical support for an afterlife that "the scientific mind . . . drilled to fairness and logic in discussing orthodox phenomena" abandons both fairness and logic, and instead "revels in the untrained barbarians' arsenal of logical weapons, including all the various sophisms enumerated in the books."

Why is this the case? Why is it the case that otherwise rational people, when it comes to discussing empirical evidence for dualism, cheerfully commit all sorts of logical errors—errors that they would never let their students or colleagues get away with. I think there are three interrelated factors, or causes, that converge to generate academia's collective irrationality with respect to this issue: (a) resistance to paradigm change, (b) intellectual arrogance, and (c) social taboo.

The first of these factors is resistance to paradigm change. Ever since the publication of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), the concept of a paradigm has been a familiar, useful, albeit sometimes controversial, tool. The concept of a paradigm helps us considerably in understanding scientific revolutions, when dramatic changes occur involving deep-rooted assumptions about how things are or how things must be. All academics matriculate within the context of a specific discipline that trains its practitioners to think in terms of the currently operating paradigm. Once the operating paradigm has been internalized in the mind of the individual, other, competing paradigms appear wrong and/or foolish. For example, I seem to remember, as a graduate student, spending a pleasant afternoon with other graduate students cheerfully ridiculing phenomenology, which is a different

way of approaching philosophy than the analytic paradigm dominant in America. None of us had read anything about phenomenology, or understood what it was about, yet to us it was meaningless gibberish, foolish French philosophy. Examples, historical and personal, could be multiplied without limit. Indeed, professional meetings, both in science and humanities, not infrequently degenerate into mere debunking sessions. It seems there is something very deep in us humans that causes us to dismiss and ridicule any way of thinking different from our own. There is a natural resistance to forms of thinking that differs from what was internalized during the educational process.

Academic philosophers matriculate within a paradigm that is largely atheistic, materialistic, and reductionistic. There is no God; only material objects and processes exist; and human experience and behavior are to be explicated mechanically in terms of brain states. Books with the terms "mind" or "consciousness" in their title, for example, tend to have as their primary goal the reduction of mental and conscious experience to neurophysiology. To one who has internalized this paradigm, this way of approaching things appears to be right, reasonable, objective, and sensible. The paradigm itself is rarely questioned; it is the very water in which the academic philosopher swims, which is why it is so difficult for one who is immersed in the paradigm to see it as a paradigm, rather than as the way things "must be." Someone operating out of a different paradigm appears to be out of touch with reality, irrational, and so forth. So, one of the forces that cause academics to ignore, dismiss, and ridicule the evidence for an afterlife is the paradigm the individual academic has internalized. The force of a well-entrenched paradigm has, throughout history, always caused scientists and humanists actively to resist paradigms, theories and hypotheses different from their own, as well as information that runs counter to the general contours of their own paradigm. Indeed, I think the concept of a paradigm partly explains why philosophers are, as a whole, much more resistant to the concept of an afterlife than are scientists. (It is scientists, not philosophers, who are actively engaged in this research.) It is because atheism plays a much more central role in the contemporary philosopher's paradigm than it does in the scientist's.

The second factor is intellectual arrogance. In addition to the normal kind of resistance with which any paradigm defends itself against change, the atheist paradigm of academia generally, and of philosophy in particular, is especially threatened by the findings of paranormal research. This is because intellectuals like to regard themselves as the highest manifestation of intelligence on the planet, if not in the

universe. Embracing an evolutionary model according to which consciousness is correlated with brain development, intellectuals regard the human brain as the highest development of evolutionary forces, and an educated human brain as the highest of the high. Intellectuals like to feel that they are riding atop the crest of the evolutionary wave. This intellectual smugness is greatly threatened by paranormal research, especially the NDE, the results of which strongly suggest (I am tempted to say "clearly show" instead of "strongly suggest") that the human intellect is by no means the highest form of intelligence. The Being of Light is Itself often described as infinite intelligence and love; moreover, intermediate between the humans and God there appear to many forms of disembodied intelligence greatly superior to our own. And furthermore, NDErs report that they feel themselves to be more alive and intelligent while out of the body than when in the body. Near-death research seems to confirm Plato's view that the body acts as a damper on the soul's native intelligence, weighing it down, so to speak, such that the soul is not able to manifest its full intelligence as long as it is embodied in material form.

All this is deeply unsettling to us academics. When we were younger, we may have been poor at sports, we may have been frequently teased by other children for being "squares" or "nerds." But we were smart, and our whole sense of self-worth was tied up in being smart. We were praised by our teachers for getting A's, and we worked hard to achieve the highest possible academic honors and rewards. It is thus quite natural for us to desire theories that support and justify those qualities that are strongest in us. It is therefore very comforting, although blatantly self-serving, to embrace a paradigm according to which we intellectuals are the most highly evolved beings in the universe, or, at least, on the planet. So to ask us to take seriously current near-death research is to ask us to entertain not only the possibility that the atheist paradigm in terms of which we were raised and educated might be inadequate, but also that human intelligence, of which we academics are the supreme manifestation, is not the highest form of intelligence in Creation (and may very well be among the lowest). No wonder there is so much resistance!

The third factor is social and cultural taboo. This is the most serious and powerful source of resistance, because it involves not only the university system, but our whole culture, indeed, our whole way of life. Despite avowals to the contrary, we live in a completely atheistic and irreligious culture. To be sure, most people profess a belief in a Higher Power of some sort, and many people attend religious services regularly,

but religion, by which I mean religious values, plays no role in shaping the economic and political forces that structure and control our culture. Let me explain: the primary religious value, common to almost all of the world's religions, is love. The religions of the world largely agree that Divine Love is the force that creates and sustains our world, and that our primary purpose while embodied is to grow in our ability to understand and express this love. The world's religions generally advocate that we practice compassion and forgiveness towards others, that we treat people as ends in themselves, and that we not value material possessions. The "good life," according to most religions, consists not in the pursuit of wealth, reputation, or power, but rather in the pursuit of right relationship with the Divine. However, the values of our culture are diametrically opposed to the values of religion. Success in our culture is measured by wealth, reputation, and power; and the desires requisite for obtaining this success are greed and ambition. Religious values have been safely shunted off to one hour a week on Sunday morning, where they are completely ineffective in mitigating the forces of greed and ambition that drive our culture economically. The primary religious values of love and compassion play no role in shaping the economic and political life of our culture. Politicians and corporations seek only to win fame and fortune for themselves; they do not value kindness, they do not seek to share their wealth, and most importantly, they, like everyone else in our culture, measure their self worth according to their wealth, status, and reputation. No one gets rich by being kind to competitors; no one gains political office by being loving towards opponents. Religious values may be paid lip service, but they are inoperative in our culture. Indeed, they are fundamentally incompatible with the values that do, in fact, drive our culture. And by "culture" I mean not only the corporate and political culture, but popular culture as well. Consider, for example, the value of forgiveness, common to almost all religions. In what percent of our movies are the protagonists heroes because they have successfully applied this value and have forgiven their enemies? Compare this with the percentage of movies in which the protagonists are heroes because they successfully applied the opposite value of vengeance and destroyed their enemies.

The reader can probably already see where I am going with this. Research on the NDE has yielded the following unambiguous conclusion. NDErs confirm the basic values of the world's religions. The purpose of life, most NDErs agree, is divine knowledge and love. Studies on the transformative effect of the NDE show that the cultural values of wealth, status, and material possessions become much less important,

and the perennial religious values of love, caring for others, and acquiring knowledge about the divine ascend to greater importance. That is, the studies show that NDErs not only verbally profess the values of love and knowledge, but they tend to operate in accordance with these values, if not entirely, then at least more so than before. As long as religious values are presented as merely religious values, then it is easy for popular culture to ignore them or give them minimal lip service on Sunday mornings. But if these same religious values are presented as empirically verified scientific facts, then everything changes. If the belief in an afterlife were to be accepted, not on the basis of faith, nor on the basis of speculative theology, but as a well-confirmed scientific hypothesis, then this could not be ignored by our culture. In fact, it would mean the end of our culture in its present form. Consider the following scenario: Further near-death research confirms in great detail what has already been established, many more cases of verified veridical perceptions while "out of body" are collected and documented, advancing medical technology makes possible many more "smoking gun" cases of the type discussed above, longitudinal studies on NDErs confirm the already observed behavioral changes aligned with their newly acquired (or recently reinforced) spiritual values, and so forth. The studies are replicated in different cultures, with the same results. Eventually, the weight of evidence begins to set in, and scientists are ready to announce to the world, if not as fact, then at least as highly confirmed scientific hypotheses:

- (1) There is an afterlife.
- (2) Our real identity is not our body, but our mind or consciousness.
- (3) Although the details of the afterlife are not known, we are reasonably certain that everyone will experience a life review, in which individuals experience not only every event and every emotion of their lives, but also, the effects their behavior, positive or negative, has had on others. The usual defense mechanisms with which we hide from ourselves our sometimes cruel and less than compassionate behavior towards others seem not to operate during the life review.
- (4) The purpose of life is love and knowledge—to learn as much as possible about both this world and the transcendent world, and to grow in our ability to feel kindness and compassion towards all beings.
- (5) A consequence of the life review is that it appears to be a great disadvantage to oneself to harm another person, either physically

or psychologically, since whatever pain one inflicts on another is experienced as one's own in the life-review.

This scenario is by no means far-fetched. I believe there is already sufficient evidence to present the above propositions as "probable," or "more likely than not," based on the evidence. Further studies will only increase the probability. When this happens, the fallout will be revolutionary. When these findings are announced by scientists, it will become impossible for our culture to do business as usual, either economically or politically, or in the universities. For our universities are institutions of our culture and, as such, manifest and perpetuate the values of our culture. It would be interesting to speculate what an economy or a university that tries to align itself with the above five empirical hypotheses might look like, but that is a project well beyond the scope of this paper. It is sufficient for our present purposes simply to note that acceptance of the findings of near-death researchers would mark the beginning of the end of a culture whose driving forces have been greed and ambition, and which measures success in terms of material possessions, wealth, reputation, and social status. The present culture, therefore, has an enormous vested interest in undermining near-death research, which it does through ignoring, debunking, and otherwise marginalizing the research. More subtly, our culture has created an atmosphere of "taboo," for want of a better name, around any serious discussions of spirituality. This is why we tend to feel uneasy and awkward in discussing these things with colleagues. We can discuss spirituality in the academy as something that other people believe, but not as something for which there could be empirical evidence and that might be empirically true. Even the former is difficult. I remember attending a conference on Baruch Spinoza some years ago. A member of the audience wanted to ask the speaker whether he thought Spinoza was a mystic. But the questioner could not bring himself to utter the word "mystic." He stuttered and stammered until someone else asked the question for him. The taboo against spirituality is so strong in academic philosophy, that we feel awkward and embarrassed even to say the word "mystic." And this is why I say that something like a taboo is operating here, something we have all internalized, which generates feelings of unease and anxiety whenever spirituality is discussed as something that might be true, rather than merely intellectually, as sociology, history, psychology, or literature.

To avoid these feelings of discomfort and anxiety generated by the taboo, academics try to protect themselves by employing the same

strategies that everyone uses to avoid anxiety. The first strategy is denial. By paying no attention to the research, by ignoring it and dismissing it *a priori*, the academic is spared the uncomfortable feelings that would arise from violating the taboo. The second strategy is to debunk, to explain away, and to otherwise marginalize the research, and sometimes even the researchers themselves.

I believe I have identified several of the major factors involved in academia's collective refusal to take seriously the results of research into the paranormal. Those disciplines that would be most affected by this research, such as philosophy and psychology, are the most resistant to the data, because the data call into question their most fundamental presuppositions of what a person is and of what life is all about. There is thus much for academics generally, and philosophers and psychologists especially, to fear in this research. I would urge those researchers who have become personally convinced, based on their own empirical studies, that materialism is false and that mind can and does exist independent of body, to assert their findings boldly as scientific, not merely as their own personal beliefs: science has shown that materialism is false and that the best hypothesis that fits their data is the hypothesis that mind exists independently of the body. Let us not play the fundamaterialist's game of confusing the concept of evidence with the concept of proof by hedging our findings with disclaimers. For the fundamaterialists and debunkers would have us believe that the burden of proof is on us to first disprove every alternative hypothesis they can imagine. To accept their unreasonable demands puts researchers in the same epistemological position that Charles Darwin would be in if he had accepted the Creationists' claim that the theory of evolution was not well established unless he first was able to prove that God did not create the world 5000 years ago, complete with fossils and dinosaur bones, in order to test our faith later on. We must accept Almeder's conclusion that, based on a detailed examination of Stevenson's cases of children who remember past lives, "from a philosophical (epistemological) point of view, the belief in reincarnation (and hence in a mind or soul which exists independent of the body) is certainly as well-established as, if not better than, say, the belief in the past existence of dinosaurs" (Almeder, 1992, p. 2, parentheses added).

I would like to close by telling a story I heard about C. D. Broad. Broad was a famous British philosopher in mid-20th century. He served as president of the British Society for Psychical Research, and was the last philosopher with an international reputation who believed there was something to psychical research. Towards the end of his life he

was asked how he would feel if he found himself still present after his body had died. He replied that he would feel more disappointed than surprised. Not surprised, because his investigations led him to conclude that an afterlife was more likely than not. But why disappointed? His reply was disarmingly honest. He said, in effect, that he had had a good life: he was comfortable materially, and he enjoyed admiration and respect from students and colleagues. There is no guarantee that his status, reputation, and comfort would carry over intact into the afterlife. The rules by which success is measured in the afterlife might be quite different from the rules according to which success is measured in this life. And indeed, near-death research suggests that Broad's fears were well founded, that "success" by afterlife standards is measured, not in terms of publications, grants, or reputation, but rather by acts of kindness and compassion to others. Perhaps those whose sense of self-worth arises primarily from their status within academia have, as Broad so eloquently expressed, something to fear from the findings of near-death research.

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Post Mortem Contact by Fatal Injury Victims with Emergency Service Workers at the Scenes of Their Death

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ABSTRACT: Ninety selected emergency service workers (68 police officers and 22 firefighter/emergency medical service personnel) were interviewed or completed questionnaires to determine if they had experienced a sense or feeling of "communication, presence, or attachment" from victims of fatal injury whom they had attended at death. Remarkably similar or related experiences were reported by 28 percent of the subjects. Reports ranged from simple affirmative responses to detailed descriptions. Partners corroborated two events, and several accounts described the location of the victim as above, over their shoulder, or looking down upon them, similar to accounts reported by survivors of near-death experiences. None of the subjects reported or displayed any symptoms of mental illness beyond usual posttraumatic event reactions, and all were experienced in their respective professions. I discuss the nature of these contacts and why similar reports of contact by deceased victims with attendees at their death have not appeared elsewhere; and I suggest studies with a more refined question protocol with other populations, such as hospital emergency room personnel, hospice care staff, chaplains, other clergy, and funeral home workers.

KEY WORDS: emergency service workers; traumatic injury; near-death experience.

Since all major religions, representing the beliefs of the vast majority of people in the world, allow for some form of continued or concurrent life separate from the physical, the possibility of discarnate interaction

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in general is credible and indeed is documented throughout religious and secular media. Narrowing the focus to the moments surrounding death, particularly one that is unexpected, one can postulate that the dead or dying individual might be confused, vulnerable, or frightened during the transition from physical life. Stephen Levine (1982, p. 279) remarked on this very question:

I now see that a sudden death may not be as fortunate as we have been conditioned to believe . . . Someone who is popped out of their body without much preparation, like a teenager in the fullness of life who has a fatal accident, may after the smoke clears wonder, "What the hell was that all about? What happened to my body? I can't be dead because this is still happening around me."

Near-death literature abounds with reports of individuals observing the scenes of their near-death experience (NDE), often from a position of "hovering above," and many confirm the Levine hypothesis of disbelief and confusion (Greenhouse, 1974; Greyson and Flynn, 1984; Moody, 1975; Rawlings, 1978; Ring, 1980; Sabom, 1982). Levine (1982, p. 280) cited an account of a friend who reported watching police and fire personnel during an NDE in the aftermath of a car crash and trying to decide whether or not to get in the ambulance with his body.

Many NDE accounts describe attempts by the dying or dead individual to contact people at the scene, nearly unanimously without success. The inability to make contact was first noted in Raymond Moody's work with individuals describing near-death experiences:

To complicate the fact that he is apparently inaudible to people around him, the person in a spiritual body soon finds that he is invisible to others. The medical personnel or others congregating around his physical body may look straight towards where he is, in his spiritual body, without giving the slightest sign of ever seeing him. (Moody, 1975, p.44)

Moody's subjects further related that they were unable to grasp or touch, and he cited an example of an individual who attempted to resuscitate himself unsuccessfully (1975, p. 53). This physical world impotence may also explain the limited number of reports of attempts by NDErs to interact with individuals at the scene, in that their early awareness of ineffectiveness may preclude such attempts. This lack of contact by NDErs is not due to lack of clarity of the scene, because experiencers have often provided vivid accounts of people, places, and things surrounding their NDE. In several instances they described in minute detail the medical procedures, setting, and conversations taking place around them (Sabom, 1982).

If we begin with the presumption that there exists some form of continued life after physical death, irrespective of duration or nomenclature, and we accept the concept that a traumatic death might engender more fear, panic, or confusion than a more expected or planned death, then we can look to the scenes of sudden deaths as a more likely venue for communication attempts by the dying or dead with those who are around them. However, a review of the literature in trauma, thanatology, and near-death studies found no references describing interaction between emergency service workers and the dead they had attended.

Preliminary Study

In a preliminary study of treatment following critical incidents by a major police department psychological services unit, six emergency service workers (four police officers and two paramedic firefighters) reported feelings of contact by deceased victims at the scenes of fatal injury in the form of sensing a presence, attachment, or plea for help (Kelly, 1992). These reports were collected over several years, and by the fourth account ultimately weighed against dismissal as anomaly and raised a question of frequency of this phenomenon.

The six reports described in my earlier study involved four separate events, two of which were described independently by partners. In all cases the emergency service workers were experienced in their work and had attended deaths previously. In all cases the emergency service workers were viewed to be psychologically intact as evidenced by years of physical and emotional health, absence of prior psychiatric history, and appropriate reactions to the traumatic events. In all cases the feelings described were reluctantly presented. Indeed, in both cases described by partners, there had been no discussion of their feelings of attachment, presence, or communication until counseling slowly and cautiously revealed them. In the two cases experienced by partners, a sense of the deceased was identified as hovering above them and watching, and in both cases the partners corroborated both the feelings and the perceived location.

In the first case, the emergency service workers felt the victim was "clinging" to them in some way that was difficult to describe. In the second case the emergency service workers felt the victim was watching them. In the third case the emergency service worker felt a bonding to the deceased immediately after eye contact, and later as if "he was on your back." In the fourth case eye contact was part of a continuing,

personal, and strong connection to a victim along with a nagging sense of unfinished business.

In all cases the feelings lingered, and in all cases the feelings were personal. That is, the emergency service workers were clear that their perceptions were connected to the victims, rather than to the event in general. A planned, conscious, reverent act was a key element to the release of the feelings reported for each event. The traumatic death scene is not conducive to the subtle and liminal sensations reported by the emergency service workers described above. The fact that these feelings were identified by these emergency service workers may speak to the strength of the attempt of the deceased, the sensitivity of the receiver, or the lack of common reporting of such experiences by emergency service workers and other populations.

I present in this paper a larger study of 90 emergency service workers (68 police officers and 22 firefighter/emergency medical service personnel) involving questionnaires and interviews regarding similar or related experiences in their careers.

Methods

Subjects were 90 emergency service workers, including 67 police officers and 23 firefighter/emergency medical technicians serving rural and urban central Massachusetts. They were predominantly male (88 percent), had an average age of 39.7 years and an average occupational seniority of 15.9 years.

Subjects were drawn from three sources. During training sessions on critical incident stress, colleagues distributed 130 written questionnaires to trainees, after providing a brief description of the project and answering questions about the study design. Respondents had the option of identifying themselves or answering anonymously. Sixty-two subjects responded to the written questionnaire, for a 48 percent response rate. Of those 62 respondents, 12 (20 percent) chose to identify themselves.

In addition, 28 subjects, including the original six, were drawn from a review of 2,548 case files of a police counseling unit and interviewed. To mirror the profile of the original four cases and minimize other variables of experience or distortion, selections were made according to the following criteria: The subject had to be an emergency service worker with a previously established confidential relationship with the researcher, and with no indication of mental illness or extraordinary distress, who

had been physically near the deceased; and the case had to involve a sudden or traumatic fatal event, and could not be the emergency service worker's first death experience.

As an additional control and data search, the five living original subjects were reinterviewed (the sixth had died of cancer).

Pertinent to this report, both questionnaire respondents and interviewees were asked the question: "Have you ever felt a 'presence,' 'communication' of some kind, or a feeling of 'attachment' from a deceased victim?"

Results

Of the 90 subjects, 30 (33 percent) answered positively, and 60 (66 percent) of the responses were negative, unable to be determined, or unanswered. Five of the positive responses, all from the anonymous questionnaire group, did not provide enough information to be sure that they met the criteria for acceptance. Further qualitative analysis of the 25 remaining positive responses showed 10 to be missing one or more of the criteria and were therefore classified as "related experiences." What remained were 15 respondents (17 percent) who reported having experienced feelings of presence, communication, or attachment by deceased victims. These 15 responses were strongly supported by the 10 others reporting "related experiences."

Viewing the data by number of occurrences, these 15 respondents described 23 specific events. Excluding the "related" cases, the 15 subjects fully meeting criteria accounted for the following: one subject described three experiences; three subjects reported feelings of presence at *all* death scenes; one subject identified 17 events; and two other respondents, due to their lengthy careers, estimated 100 experiences each. These responses combined equal 229 reports of presence.

The 15 subjects reporting presence that fully met the criteria showed no evidence of fabrication or mental illness. Those that addressed the issue were clear that the source of their feelings was not imagination or "internal voices." All offered their information freely and without coercion. They showed good psychological function before, during, and after the event; had prior experiences with death; noted the presence as unusual; were not extremely religious; and accepted a spiritual explanation of the presence as plausible.

Most of the dead were victims of traumatic death. Other experiences included contacts with deceased friends, coworkers, or relatives. The

contacts were described not as apparitions, visions, or heard voices, but rather as thoughts, ideas, images, or feelings. Sensory input was very limited, but the conviction of the contact was strong. These emergency service workers, who were familiar with death and well grounded in the physical world, were quite aware of the unusual character of these experiences, but were equally clear that they were real.

An interesting disclosure came from one particular subject identified from the case file search as a result of involvement in a fatal shooting of an assailant by the subject and his partner. During the interview for this study he reported that he never felt a "communication," but "always has feeling at fatal scenes that they're still there... always above, just above, like over the shoulder, hovering." He went on to say it was as if they were watching him. The feeling for him is stronger on a call when he is alone, and it is always strong enough to cause him to act respectful, as if they can hear him. When asked if there were any occasions where he did not feel their presence he answered, "Yeah, the guy in [the shooting]—nothing with him."

As noted above, the five living original subjects were reinterviewed. My account of the earlier reports was presented for verification of accuracy and supplementation. All four accounts were accepted as highly accurate as recalled from subject recollections that were still vivid and unchanged in depiction.

Discussion

Emergency service workers are experiencing contacts with the spirits of deceased victims around the time of their deaths from traumatic injury. From this group of 90 veteran emergency service workers, 25 described contact with deceased individuals in the form of a presence, communication, or feeling of attachment. All study subjects were experienced and psychologically intact. Not surprisingly, none had discussed their experiences with others.

Fifteen of the 90 reports met study criteria, with an additional 10 describing related experiences of contacts or awareness with deceased individuals. Some of the accounts were bare, but several offered detailed and clear accounts of their interactions.

As a matter of perspective, the total number of deaths associated with the sample group should be viewed. Combined, the 90 respondents report experience with more than 7,000 deaths in their cumulative 1,431 years of emergency service worker experience. In that context, the 229

reported episodes occurred in only 3 percent of the total deaths attended. However, it gains significance if seen that more than 200 reports of presence are generated from a group of 90 subjects, and even more strikingly from a subset of only 15 from that group.

Methodological Considerations

The method used here was systematic and compliant with current research norms. The subjects were, perhaps, as far as one might imagine from being a group prone to superstition or hysteria. On the other hand, the study had some limitations.

Each of the data collection means had weaknesses. The original six cases, which arose in the context of counseling in a police department psychological services unit, could have been influenced by the counselor. The additional 22 subjects identified by subsequent case file search might also be subject to this same bias. Subject suggestibility by the researcher was protected against, in part, by the predetermination of questions and the selection of subjects by preset criteria.

There were several compromises made in the design of the questionnaire, including brevity, in order to increase response rates, and lack of precision of terminology, to allow for more open-ended reports. Allowing for anonymity also led to abbreviated and cryptic data that could not be clarified. One response in particular illustrates this frustration: the respondent answered the question of presence with, "Yes—I would explain, but it would take too much time. I can only say that I feel a strong presence at the scene of a death. I have always thought that there must be some way to communicate with 'it,' but I have not been able to understand this feeling completely."

The three sources of cases acted as a balance to one another. The original six subjects provided in-depth, client-directed information, collected prior to hypothesis formation. The case file follow-up took advantage of a previously established trusted relationship between researcher and interviewee, and allowed for the clarifications that interviews can best provide. The questionnaire offered a nonthreatening vehicle for disclosure. The three methods acted as an internal validation, and similar cases of presence were reported from all three sources.

As an initial investigation of the prevalence and substance of interaction between emergency service workers and the spirits of deceased victims of traumatic injury, this work is sufficient. It is not, however, overwhelming in its scope, sample size, and randomness of subject selection. Refinements are needed in data collection to elicit

better descriptions of the experiences. Larger samples are needed with proper controls for random selection. Ideally, the scope of the inquiry should be extended to other groups with increased likelihood of similar contacts, such as hospital emergency room personnel, hospice care staff, chaplains, other clergy, and funeral home workers, with proper control group comparisons. Other studies examining variables related to who senses these feelings and under what conditions it occurs should follow a better understanding of prevalence.

Theoretical Implications

The implications of this study are significant. Twenty-eight percent of a sample of emergency service workers reporting these events is noteworthy. Although these cases may be similar in some ways to studied and anecdotal reports of near death experiences, they raise several points of interest. First, they focus attention on emergency service workers as a potentially important group in connection with the activities of the dying. They also suggest that attempts by NDErs and/or dying individuals to communicate with those around them may be more successful than previously thought. And they offer evidence from a highly credible group that such feelings are being sensed from the living, non-near-death receiver.

The extension of NDE accounts as a model for seeing these events from the victim's view is helpful. However, caution is suggested in that, by definition, NDE reports are from those who have returned to provide them, and we cannot necessarily assume that the experience of the dead is the same as that of the dying who survive.

The evidence showing an interaction with these emergency service workers at the scenes of fatal traumatic injury naturally draws us to speculate as to nature and cause. The limits of the data are reached at supporting prevalence, and do not supply definitive insight as to what is occurring between victim and rescuer. The victim mindset of fear, panic, and confusion suggested by Levine (1982) is plausible. The logic that such a mental state would be more often presented to emergency service workers is equally plausible. Added to these assumptions is the potentially salient notion that emergency service workers are generally benevolent in their occupational motivation, irrespective of their possibly calloused protective external presentations. And lastly, these emergency service workers are sufficiently experienced at their craft to allow them to be less overwhelmed by the events at scenes that might overload the senses of others. It may be that, for those spirits wrapped

in confusion, the emergency service worker is available, at least subliminally willing, and capable of sensing an attempt for communication from a "troubled soul."

Clinical Implications

This report does not address the impact, therapeutic response, and spiritual reaction by the emergency service workers to these events. They are in themselves significant. When emergency service workers and others are faced with contacts or feelings that are spiritual, then their best response may also be spiritual.

Keeping such information suppressed serves no purpose except to conform to common contemporary cultural norms to avoid discussion of all matters related to death and dying. To a lesser extent, these same societal restraints also prefer to relegate all things of spirit to superstition or hysteria.

One might ask, if contact by the deceased with emergency service workers is happening so often, why it has not been talked about before. The answer may be as simple as that no one has asked. There is a possible parallel with NDEs, where for centuries there were scattered references in religious and medical literature, but the more popularized and accepted notion of NDEs is more a product of the latter part of the 20th century. Or perhaps, these awarenesses are part of a larger, more gradual recapturing of respect and understanding of things liminal, sensory, intuitive, or spiritual.

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BOOK REVIEW

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Fingerprints of God: Evidences from Near-Death Studies, Scientific Research on Creation, and Mormon Theology, by Arvin S. Gibson. Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 1999, 320 pp., \$19.98, hb.

Fingerprints of God is the fifth book on near-death experiences (NDEs) that Arvin Gibson has written. Like this one, the previous four (Gibson, 1990, 1992, 1993, 1994) are works written from the viewpoint of Mormon theology. Unlike the previous four books, *Fingerprints of God* is not restricted to NDEs, nor is it written for the sole purpose of supporting Mormon theology. It is a book written to support a more significant idea. In Gibson's words, "This book, therefore, is my attempt to show what I have found to be true; namely, that near-death studies, scientific research on creation, and Mormon theology all serve as evidence for the existence of a living and loving God" (p. 25). What is unique about the book is how Gibson accomplishes his goal. He does not just present us with facts about science, studies on NDEs, or quotes from scriptures. Gibson accomplishes his goal by revealing his own personal struggle in finding a relationship with his God. He shares the difficulty he had as a scientist in keeping what was reasonable in science, yet accepting his experiences outside of the scientific world that support the existence of God.

He is honest in the beginning of his work to tell the reader he comes from a bias that Mormonism is true. However, *Fingerprints of God* is not just a book about a Mormon scientist who discovers God's fingerprints throughout the cosmos. It is really the story that parallels the epic hero in mythology. Like all mythic heroes, Gibson found three keys to the mystery of life in the form of a three-cornered puzzle. He then spent his

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life trying to discover what the three keys mean and how the puzzle fits together. It is the journey itself that is important, the analysis of the three keys and the discovery that when the puzzle is finished it points to one source: God. It is this point that I think Kenneth Ring makes, in the book's foreword. "Rather it is a book that leads us back to God by helping us to see God's hand in all the domains that Arvin's own life and unique talents have enabled him to explore so deeply and thus fashion him into the expert guide for any reader who would take this journey with him" (p.23). It is really this aspect of the book that carries it from being provincial to universal. Gibson's talent is in revealing that the search for truth is the same, whether it is an Albert Einstein wondering how it would feel to ride a light beam, or a Raymond Moody pondering the significance of near-death experiences, or a Joseph Smith praying to ask God what is true. The common thread is that we all are searching for truth.

Gibson introduces his book by describing how his education at the University of California in Berkeley and his World War II experiences drew him away from his Mormon roots. What turned him back again to religion was the NDE his father had in 1922: "By late 1989 my curiosity concerning my father's experience got the best of me and I decided to find out for myself what was going on in these kinds of experiences" (p.32). It was this inquiry that helped Gibson produce his first four books. Gibson ends his introduction by sharing the one key that convinced him that the stated conflict between science and religion does not exist. By confining his investigation to the science of creation, NDEs, and Mormonism, he began to see a pattern that pointed to God. He also "found . . . that the science of the physical world, and the theology of the religious-spiritual world, tended to be bridged by the developing science of near-death studies" (p.37).

The first three chapters of the book are dedicated to NDEs, the first key. These chapters do not break new ground in near-death studies, nor are they intended to. Gibson writes as if he were in conversation with a neophyte who is just being introduced to the field of near-death studies. The position he takes is appropriate in view of the overall appeal of the book. He is the traveler who is now guiding the novice through the mystery of life. It is done in a kind way by asking questions that he probably asked himself when beginning his own search into NDEs. By introducing three new unpublished NDEs, Gibson teaches us a new reality that NDEs reveal. The new reality is then supported by quotes from his previous books.

Gibson then validates the new reality by educating his readers on near-death research. He again follows his previous pattern by asking and answering questions. "What is the status of near-death research and is it in accord with science? . . . What impact is this work having on various branches of science—and on the religious community? . . . If the stories really do represent reality, what are the implications?" (p.84). Following a nice history lesson on near-death studies, he writes, "All of those [researchers] that I have become acquainted with agree that God is the author of much of what we find in the course of our research" (p.96). For him, the implication is huge because it is an example of how science and religion can be congruent.

The last chapter of this section answers some of the more common questions asked about NDEs. Do those who have an NDE always tell the truth? What is the motivation for telling about an NDE? Which people have NDEs? Why such varied experiences? What about the bizarre happenings in some NDE? Are all NDEs pleasant? Are they proof of life after death? What about repentance and judgment? Are angels a part of the NDE? What about encounters with deity? Again he guides us through the answers by using NDEs and telling of his own research. The first section on NDEs has 66 references, with about one-third of those coming from Gibson's previous works.

To address secular explanations of NDEs, Gibson includes Appendix A, "Other Attempts to Explain the NDE" (pp.222–229). Appendix A is well documented with 57 references. He explains several "failed explanations" of NDEs. After explaining why reincarnation is so appealing to near-death researchers he then discounts both reincarnation and hypnotic regression therapy by revealing several cases of claimed reincarnation as inauthentic. He also reminds us of the hazards of hypnosis for retrieving historical facts.

The second key of Gibson's three-cornered puzzle is science, specifically the creation and the probability of life. This section is the most difficult to read and Gibson is astute enough to know it. He therefore gives the reader the choice to read his condensed version, which includes chapters four and five, or his more complete version, which includes Appendices B, C, and D. Those who have explained science for the general public know how difficult it is to relay their message without losing the reader in mathematics or obtuse ideas. Gibson's idea to split his discussion into simple and difficult versions helps to solve this problem.

How Gibson presents his case that God is the creator of the cosmos is to show that the science of creation is compatible with the religious view of the creation. He therefore begins his science section by quoting the first five verses of Genesis, and then discusses how difficult it must have been for Moses to put in words what he saw in vision. To illustrate the difficulty, Gibson makes the point dramatically by writing the same five verses of Genesis as if a modern physicist were assigned by God to write them. The result is overwhelming. One would have to have a degree in physics to know what is being said, just as one would have to have a degree in ancient languages to know what the Hebrew in Genesis is saying. What is important is to see that both accounts are correct.

Gibson relies heavily on the writings of Gerald Schroeder (1990, 1998) who, after receiving his Ph.D. in physics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, studied Biblical research in Israel. Schroeder's writings are unique and easy to read and they support Gibson's idea that science and religion are not in conflict. Gibson writes of Schroeder that "his conclusion is that the events of the billions of years that cosmologists say followed the big bang and those of the first six days described in Genesis are, in fact, one and the same—identical realities described in vastly different terms" (p.121).

Gibson describes the fine tuning of the universe and presents it as evidence supporting a life-oriented universe. The fine tuning includes the age, correct speed of expansion, and density of stars that allow night not to be overwhelmed by star light. It also includes the correct balance of the basic four forces of the universe allowing life to proceed. A reader who does not understand such terms as *weak nuclear force*, *strong nuclear force*, *electromagnetism*, *gravity*, *fusion*, *proton*, *neutron*, *deuteron*, *quark*, and *antimatter* might have to refer to the excellent glossary in the back.

There is then a section on scientists' view of the creation, which is a chronology from the big bang to the present, 15 billion years later. This is a nice summary but requires a knowledge of scientific notation. Gibson does supply readers with a discussion on large and small numbers, but it is at the end of the introduction some 90 pages before they need it.

The next question Gibson asks is "who or what arranged this mighty cauldron and triggered the release of such prodigious amounts of energy?" (p.127). He turns again to NDEs to support that it was the power of God that created the universe and he supplements his idea with scripture.

This is a difficult chapter and Gibson wisely summarizes where he has been and what we should have learned. Scientists write in their

own language of mathematics, premises, and conclusions on how the universe was birthed. Their language is beautiful and correct from their perspective. But prophets and those who have had NDEs write in a different language, which is also beautiful, describing what they saw of the same event. The fact that the two groups speak in different languages does not mean they are incompatible, or that one supports a God and the other one does not.

Appendix B, which correlates with the chapter on creation, does define the fundamental forces of the universe. It also describes various scientific theories of how the universe began without the hand of God. It teaches us how stars are born and die, and how the age of the earth and the universe is determined. Appendix B is a very good supplement to the chapter on creation, written well and clearly. Gibson adds Appendix D, discussing the nature of matter, relativity, and scientists' current concept of the cosmos, for "completeness." This is an excellent summary of what cosmology is all about and, I thought, the best section on science. If one is not familiar with quantum physics or the science of matter and relativity, reading this section would be helpful before reading the general science section in the book.

The second chapter on science, Chapter 8, "The Probability of Life," addresses the question, "What is the probability of the spontaneous creation of life?" This chapter is written to support the previous chapter on the creation, but expands the discussion to include the creation of life. The reader needs again to know about scientific notation, but Gibson does tell us the significance of the numbers he quotes. His argument begins with the chance of a happenstance universe, goes to the miracle of life that includes carbon and DNA, and ends with the problem of evolution, the conditions necessary for life, fossil evidence of early life, and the probabilities of different life forms developing. This section is well documented and then supplemented in Appendix C, which goes deeper into the mathematics of probabilities and into other possibilities for the origin of life.

The final key to the three-piece puzzle of the existence of God is Mormonism. Gibson treats Mormonism like the previous two sections on NDEs and science: here is the history and the evidence, and here are NDEs that which support the doctrine. Gibson sees common threads between the history of Mormons and NDEs:

One cannot read [Mormon] Church history without seeing parallels between what is recorded there and what in recent years has been recorded in accounts of near-death experiences. The parallels and the frequency of their occurrence are so obvious that comparisons become

inevitable. Moreover, these parallels are not restricted to early Mormon Church leaders. Such experiences were and are ubiquitous among the members. (p. 150)

Readers are referred to a more detailed account of historic Mormon NDEs in the work of Duane Crowther (1997).

Gibson relates a very nice but short history of the Mormon church's beginning, centered on the life, visions, and death of Joseph Smith, the church's founding prophet. Relaying the epiphanies of Joseph Smith is important not only because Gibson draws on them to support his point that Joseph's visions are similar to near-death experiences, but also because the questions and answers are also similar. The chapter on the history of Mormonism ends with a lengthy quote from the nonMormon humanities professor Harold Bloom, who wrote, "I also do not find it possible to doubt that Joseph Smith was an authentic prophet" (p. 165).

The final chapter on Mormonism is centered on comparing NDEs to Mormon doctrine. This is an area in which Gibson has excelled, having written four books on the subject. In fact most of the NDE accounts are taken from his previous works. Near-death experiences are intertwined with Mormon doctrine on God's light and glory, the plan of salvation, premortal life, agency, families, knowledge, and the life review. Keeping with the spirit of the book, Gibson ends this chapter by writing, "These case studies have been presented to allow the reader to draw their own conclusions about the evidence presented. Admittedly, the evidence is incomplete, but it should provide a picture where similarities and parallels between [Mormon] doctrine and NDE events can be considered" (p. 191).

The last chapter of the book is a summary of what Gibson has presented. It is the best part of the book, and would have made a wonderful introduction. Gibson goes through several "fingerprints" of God that support His existence and His role in creating the universe and life, and writes:

God! His fingerprints are everywhere we look. Yet many of us stumble through life blindly groping for some meaning in what we see. And when the evidence displays itself and cries for our recognition the scales on our eyes further blind us to the truth. We ask again, Pilate's question of Christ, "What is Truth?" And since our anchors for truth have long since been discarded in the name of "Science," we drift aimlessly through a morass of ever changing relativism. (p.192)

Near-death studies are generally centered on listening to hundreds of accounts and then hunting for patterns that tie those accounts together,

supporting their authenticity. The leaders in any field of study are those who have the insight to see the common motifs that connect all the data. Using that insight, Gibson transcends the one discipline of near-death studies, using it as a stepping stone to find common patterns relating science to religion, which then support the existence of God.

Gibson shares his path and his discoveries. He did not rely on one key to solve his puzzle. Gibson teaches us that difficult puzzles must be solved by discovering patterns that flow through all their pieces. Hopefully, those who read *Fingerprints of God* will use Gibson's mythic journey to move themselves onto their individualized paths to find their own puzzles and the keys that will complete their journeys.

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BOOK REVIEW

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Mindsight: Near-Death and Out-of-Body Experiences in the Blind, by Kenneth Ring and Sharon Cooper. Palo Alto, CA: William James Center for Consciousness Studies/Institute of Transpersonal Psychology, 1999, 217 pp. + xix, \$12.95, pb.

I approached *Mindsight: Near-Death and Out-of-Body Experiences in the Blind* with my usual anticipation in reading work done by Kenneth Ring, who is known to me personally and through his scholarly writing over many years of research into near-death experiences (NDEs). Together with his co-author, Sharon Cooper, he has produced another fascinating book reflecting research into apparent "mindsight" of people who have either been blind from birth, became blind at a later date, or have severely impaired vision. It is interesting to note that the publisher of this book, the William James Center for Consciousness Studies, in the tradition of its famed namesake, is reflected so well in the very careful introspective/phenomenological approach of the authors. Our current obsession with scientism is encapsulated in the introduction to this book by Charles Tart, and made me realize that the lost art of making scientific data interesting is being revived by Ring. While one cannot conclude with certainty any of the many questions about the capacity of blind people to see during NDEs, the authors have done a marvelous job of careful introspective phenomenological dissection of the reports. This study represents an excellent piece of qualitative research in a tradition spawned in the field of anthropology and gaining increasing popularity.

Ring and Cooper's style is to address the reader as a skeptical but openminded person, with the arguments for and against each

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proposition carefully described and considered, along with a review of other research information, including literature. This is a style popular in scientific writing of the 19th century, perhaps best demonstrated in the writings of Sigmund Freud. I am personally very responsive to that style because it allows me to see how the authors have developed their ideas, as well as what those ideas are.

There are seven chapters in *Mindsight*, which is marred only by an unfortunate case of a probably spurious NDE that was included in the appendix. Ring and Cooper are to be congratulated for admitting that the data already in print were unreliable. Ring's interest in NDEs and out-of-body experiences (OBEs) is also counterbalanced with his interest in the longstanding debate within parapsychology over whether the OBE is an extrasomatic state, valid in its own right, in which the mind exists separate from the brain, or only a retrospective reconstruction based on sensory cues, as proposed primarily by the prominent English psychologist, Susan Blackmore (1993). Work with people congenitally blind due to rubella cataracts has shown that when they regain sight following surgery, they need to be taught how to see again, a rather long and complex process. So examining people blind from birth, with partial sight, or who have become blind later in life serves as a fascinating crucible for a look at the interesting question of whether one sees with the eyes or with the eyes of the mind, as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe proposed.

Mindsight addresses three questions: Do blind people have NDEs and, if so, are they similar to or different from those of sighted persons? If blind people do report NDEs, are they visual in nature? And are such claims of vision in blind people corroborated by other witnesses, who can confirm the veridicality of the blind NDEr's testimony?

The sample was a convenience one, consisting of volunteers interested in being research subjects drawn from organizations for the blind and from readers of the newsletter of the International Association for Near-Death Studies. Individuals were subjected to a screening interview and then a formal interview, together with follow-up calls as needed. Conversations were audiotaped and transcribed. Thirty-one qualified individuals were interviewed. The majority of subjects were women, and the age range was from 22 to 70. They were all Caucasian and mainly Christian, with a wide variation in educational attainment. Twenty-one had had NDEs, 16 of them reporting at least one OBE in addition to their NDE; the remaining 10 reported only OBEs. Approximately half the sample had been blind from birth and the other half had lost their sight after 5 years of age. Six had minimal vision.

Ring and Cooper concluded that the blind have familiar, rather typical, beatific NDEs similar to those described by Raymond Moody (1975), and that a number of subjects, including some blind from birth, described clearly visual perceptions. That is, in some way they knew how to see, perhaps the most unusual finding of the study. Ring and Cooper were careful to make sure that they did not suggest this to the subjects. One chapter addressed corroborative evidence which established that these experiences did occur as described. Although this is the weakest section of the book, in at least one case the evidence seems to be quite strong. Unfortunately, the idiosyncratic nature of these experiences does not often allow corroboration with any degree of certainty.

The final chapter attempts various explanations assuming that the blind in fact can see in a way rather similar to visual perception. Ring and Cooper consider traditional explanations like the dream hypothesis; retrospective reconstruction; blindsight, a term that refers to apparent vision by cortically blind individuals; skin-based vision, a term derived from experiments that suggest qualities in the skin allow light perception; and transcendent awareness or eyeless vision. The final section reflects the authors' views in a theory of transcendent awareness, encompassing Jenny Wade's (1996, 1998) holonomic approach to nonlocal consciousness. This approach hypothesizes that there is a physically transcendent source of awareness that predates life and survives bodily death.

This carefully written book would be of interest not only to those fascinated by NDEs and parapsychology, but also to those interested in the philosophy of knowledge, particularly how one answers questions and how one asks answerable questions. Fascinating as all this material is, Ring and Cooper—and Tart—seem to commit an error common to scientism and dualism, while criticizing it as a methodology. Instead they invoke dualistic theories and expect that the nature of their data will transcend the limitations of logical positivism. Since the publication of Tart's groundbreaking article on states of consciousness in *Science* (1972), the most prestigious scientific journal on this continent, the subsequent three decades have hinted at new scientific paradigms. I have felt for a long time that we truly need a new paradigm in science: Glen Gabbard and I wrote a book many years ago (1984) in which we tried to bring our ideas together in a nonreductionistic way in a chapter called "The Mind/Body Trap." Ring and Cooper's findings in this carefully written and stimulating book may provide additional hints as to what a new scientific paradigm must accommodate.

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BOOK REVIEW

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Where God Lives: The Science of the Paranormal and How Our Brains are Linked to the Universe, by Melvin Morse and Paul Perry. New York, NY: Cliff Street Books, 2000, 256 pp., \$22.00, hb.

Pediatrician Melvin Morse's newest book, *Where God Lives*, is a wide-ranging look at the new frontiers of science. By integrating vistas of plausibility from Mind/Body Medicine, the New Biology and the New Physics, Morse and co-author Paul Perry suggest that science is on the verge of coining a new version of reality, one that is decidedly more spiritual and belief-oriented. In their view, the history of science is closely linked to what society is capable of believing. As scientific beliefs about what is possible *in principle* evolved, scientists made discoveries that anchored humankind's augmented sense of what could be.

With this as their launching point, the authors attempt to convey what the New Science now suspects is possible. And we need look no further than the title to see where they are going. With their use of *paranormal* in the title, which refers to that which science cannot explain and generally refers to the supernatural and, by extension, the occult, they have already set the stage. What uninitiated readers are about to learn however, is that Morse and Perry use the word ironically—their hope being that, by the time they finish discussing the latest discoveries about our reality, it will hard to say just what paranormal is. Clearly, the more science probes the deepest reaches of reality with leading edge technology, the less it seems to know about nature's underpinnings. As a result, what we are capable of believing takes on an ever larger role in what undergirds our reality. And with this, the authors lead us right to the edge of faith-based science.

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The first chapter begins with a picnic given by Morse to follow up on the lives of children and former patients who have had NDEs. These children seem far less surprised than adults generally are by the "paranormal" reality they encountered. It is as if their limited experience with the world, their wide-eyed innocence, gives them a heightened ability to see reality more clearly than the adults who study it for a living.

Morse draws upon this unjaded sense as he discusses with attendees some of the ideas and insights explored later in the book. Foremost is memory. If one's consciousness can seemingly expand beyond the body's bounds and remember exactly what it observed, the question becomes: How was that memory preserved? If experiencers were in fact outside their body, then memory cannot be exclusive to the brain. This leads to a discussion of consciousness itself and how the scientific view is evolving due to the inability of current mechanistic models to answer the bell.

But just before launch, Morse veers off to give us a rare personal glimpse into his own struggles. He relates how his life was out of control, with high blood pressure, compulsive eating, and bouts with acute anxiety. My first thought was that this has absolutely nothing to do with the track he just set up in the previous chapter, and furthermore casts doubt on the courage, strength, and hope that is supposed to stem from direct contact with the revelations brought back to us by those who have had near-death experiences.

Perhaps what Morse shows us with a frank discussion of his state of mind is this: If one of the world's leading experts on the near-death experience, one who has heard as many compelling stories as anyone else on earth, can lose it, then we, who are less closely aligned with this mystical experience cannot hope to find salvation, that release from the human dilemma, by immersing ourselves in such knowledge. For me, this is the untold lesson of the book. Writers like Betty Eadie with her *Embraced by the Light* (Eadie and Curtis, 1992) have sold millions of books to seekers longing to assuage their fears of death and find new hope for living. And yet if someone at the very heart of the effort to chronicle this experience, one familiar with all the powerful anecdotes, can feel bereft of hope and happiness, how much can these anecdotes, however compelling, help the rest of us?

Perhaps the authors are tacitly illustrating the difference between what we can believe and what we should believe. That is, if all the secular knowledge we can muster about becoming one with the Light, and all the scientific facts and anecdotes at our disposal about the beyond,

cannot relieve the *angst* inherent in the human condition, what can? In the end, the most we can hope to get from these anecdotes is an undergirding of our determination to pursue those things that do put us right with our reality. At best, by verifying that we *will* in fact confront an afterlife and face our Maker when our body finally fails us, they confirm deeper views.

For Morse, the way out of his mess was to embrace what he terms the Ten Secrets of Happiness: (1) exercise, (2) pay attention to life patterns, (3) focus on family and relationships, (4) trust your inner vision, (5) do service to others, (6) do financial planning to reduce debt, (7) begin a healthy diet, (8) talk to God, (9) learn to love, and (10) become spiritually-minded. As I read Morse's basic principles of happiness, they sounded at first like the Ten Cliches found in every self-help book ever published. But as I explored them further, I realized that with these basic laws of human nature, Morse shows us how his work with children has molded his ability to garner poignant insights from the innocent minds he serves with such dedication.

Morse then returns for another glimpse at Where God Lives by discussing Rupert Sheldrake's ideas about universal memory, though without ever mentioning Sheldrake. He tells us how these ideas, if proven, could explain the apparent evidence supporting reincarnation, past-life regression, ghostly energy patterns, and a host of similar supernatural phenomena.

Such connections highlight how closely linked the human mind is with past, present, and future occurrences. Coupled with this, the authors cover Larry Dossey's work on the power of prayer. With the growing number of double-blind scientific studies being done to determine the efficacy of prayer, we can now say with some certainty that the mind does have an undetected, nonlocal link with whatever healing agent permeates our reality.

Yet their discussion fostered for me a laundry list of unanswered questions. For example: Is it the mind acting directly upon another mind in a quantum way, or are our prayers inducing an intercessory agent to act? Obviously, this has yet to be answered and may never in fact be answered by science. Certainly, Morse could have asked this: What does it say scientifically about the very existence of God that more than 250 studies have been done in a laboratory setting demonstrating the efficacy of prayer by having subjects pray to God for another's healing and having their prayers answered?

Is God's existence a given? Clearly, according to the title, there is no doubt. But while Morse and many readers of this Journal may have

no doubt, it certainly is not a given within the scientific community at large. Should the science-minded consider these test results direct evidence of God's existence? After all, if subjects can sit in a laboratory and pray to God for another's healing, and those prayers are answered, does it not imply: (1) that there is in fact a God, (2) that He hears us and answers our prayers, and (3) that He is not an impersonal force, but cares so much about each of us that He is willing to reroute the current course of the universe just to help a human in need? Obviously it does. And to Morse's credit, although he did not ask it, he could have.

With the ensuing two chapters, Morse and Perry continue to discuss questions taken up in the first chapter regarding memory, the big question being: Is memory stored in the brain, as modern science supposes? Or, is it stored in some type of holographic field overlaying the body that connects the mind with the fabric of space? As the discussion unfolds, they present powerful evidence that the latter may in fact be the case, the first of which is work being done with laboratory rats. With 90 percent of their brains removed, rats can still remember the correct path through the maze. By remembering the path without their brains, these rats provide ostensible evidence that memories are not necessarily stored in the brain.

Another line of evidence is the work of noted neurosurgeon Wilder Penfield in direct brain stimulation. Using electric probes during brain surgery, he elicited powerful memories from patients. They were reported to be so vivid that patients felt they were actually reliving the experience. But he could not induce the same memory by stimulating the same place twice. This suggests to the authors that it is not the memory itself that resides there, but only its retrieval mechanism. It could also mean that memories float in fields superimposed upon the body and that Penfield's probe randomly tapped into it.

In reading this, I immediately thought of Paul Pearsall's book *The Heart's Code* (1998) and his recent article in this Journal (Pearsall, Schwartz, and Russek, 2002), wherein he discussed startling findings in this regard. Apparently, the medical community is increasingly becoming aware of the fact that transplant recipients find themselves with some of their donors' memories after the surgery. This would reinforce the authors' contention that memory is stored in fields permeating the entire body.

What is fascinating about this growing realization is the long-term implication it has for our health. If memories are stored in fields surrounding vital organs, then it is possible that our organs could be

impacted by the quality of stored memories. Constantly rehashing bad memories could actually be damaging our organs, precipitating disease. If so, this augers well for the notion that it is healthy to let go and move on, choosing instead to dwell on happy, joyous memories that renew us.

With this idea of memories in fields surrounding the body now broached, the authors attempt to explain reincarnation memories. Drawing upon Ian Stevenson's famous work, they present possibilities that explain the phenomenon without an actual reincarnation event taking place. The authors believe the sense of having been reincarnated would be possible if memories were actually imprinted permanently upon the fabric of space, becoming a part of our collective consciousness. If this were so, and minds somehow had the ability to access these "memory fields," then people could conceivably "collide" with memories implanted by another during a previous time. In this way, the person could actually have another's memory and yet genuinely believe it to be his or hers. And since it was from a former time and in a remote place, it would be only natural to believe it was acquired from a former life, when in fact nothing could be further from the truth.

The authors also covered *cryptomnesia*, the unconscious gathering of material from reading and experience. An example would be a person at the tender age of one watching a television show that graphically depicts some event or location and having it vividly implanted in his or her mind, only to be recalled later as a real memory. This has been shown to happen and could explain a great deal. In the end, the authors make no judgment about the veracity of the reincarnation event. They simply leave readers with evidence for reincarnation and provide reasonable alternatives that adequately explain the phenomenon.

Once through all this, the book finally begins to address the ideas behind the title, *Where God Lives*. Morse and Perry start with the often-discussed idea that the right temporal lobe is the "God spot" within our brain, that this part of the brain is like a crystal radio set that tunes in various energy patterns and interprets them for us. But instead of the physiological evidence that I had anticipated for this claim, we are presented with a study of ghosts: *The History of Ghosts, Consistent Stories [of ghosts], Past Life Ghosts, and the Modern Ghost*. The idea is that we see these recurrent localized apparitions because our temporal lobe tunes into the energy pattern they represent.

After this discussion of where God lives, the authors seek bigger game. With Chapter Six ambitiously entitled "Unraveling The Fabric of The Universe," I expected something Einsteinian. But what the authors

had in mind is not that complicated. Beginning with a brief discussion of synchronicity, we are led to holograms, remote viewing, the paranormal, the universal mind, hedging our bets, energy in action, and predicting the future. I did not notice any fabric actually unravel.

And it is understandable why this is so. For although the fabric of space is a threadbare cliché, nobody as of yet has any idea what it is. First discussed as part of Einstein's General Theory, it would seem to be the consummate antimaterialist stuff. Presently, it is undetectable. Yet it possesses the ability to warp and stretch, and more importantly, it undergirds the action of all the matter in the cosmos. It could be the most plentiful nonstuff in the universe if we could only find it. But alas, we cannot. However, this fabric nevertheless appears to hold the key to all the authors' questions. They believe it to be a root factor in parapsychology, the flow of time, light, energy, and our mind/body connection to the beyond.

They then take us off in completely a new direction: healing. While still in search of *Where God Lives*, the authors lead us on an exploration of the mind's heroic feats on the health front. No one can doubt that what they say here is completely true because their examples have been used so many times, in so many books, they are now "givens." Yet in their repetition, they serve great purpose. As an entry-level book for those interested in some of the more startling occurrences within the New Science paradigm, this book delivers.

With the connection between belief and healing apparently no longer in doubt, the authors bring on the last two chapters of the book: "Becoming Your Own Healer" and "Trusting Your Feelings." The idea of self-healing is quite old and has been long sought by the ill. But Morse and Perry go deeper. They see the mind as the ultimate healing agent because it would appear to have no bounds. And while we have no idea how it happens, a growing sense is in fact sweeping medicine that the penultimate answer does lie within the mind.

The problem for us is that such mental feats, while amply documented, are inconsistently demonstrated. As the authors tell us, we do not get an owner's manual for our brain. So we struggle with the controls. Consequently, until we find *Where God Lives*, and learn to tap into the power He is purported to make available, we are almost forced to continue supplementing our self-healing efforts with medical practitioners, as I am sure Morse would agree.

Fortunately, however, the authors do offer a way to begin training the mind to improve its ability to heal. They present Paul Pearsall's *Six Laws of Healing*: (1) develop oneness, by realizing that we all share a

piece of the energy governing the cosmos; (2) develop our perceptions of the many sense-realms in which we coexist; (3) grasp our simultaneity of the past, present, and future happening as one; (4) forceful fields, the morphic fields that shape our lives; (5) divine dynamics, the constantly changing flow of infinite energy that recreates order; (6) and miracle makers love chaos, that is, chaos is ultimately healthy because it leads to new order.

From these, the authors deduce their Ten Rules To Live By: (1) have friends and connect to a social network; (2) turn off the verbal mind for a while; (3) use patterns and habits to influence your life; (4) have absolute faith in a belief system; (5) stress is not a health risk; (6) anger kills and love heals; (7) do regular hugs and touches; (8) don't learn to be ill, but teach yourself and your children to be well; (9) learn to meditate or pray regularly; and (10) practice optimism.

In Morse and Perry's defense against the accusation that these are simplistic answers, sometimes the simplest truths can be the most profound. In our sophisticated, high-tech world it is often hard to believe that the secrets to life could be so simple. We search far and wide, strive to penetrate the mysteries of the universe, and hope finally to discover the secrets locked away in some secret enclave known only to the ancients, when in reality God gave us the secret "In the beginning..." The problem is that we too often take it for granted. Tragically, we have become inured through constant repetition.

The final chapter treats us to Morse's suppositions about all the things the right temporal lobe of the brain, where God lives, can do. Intuition is considered by the authors to be one of the lobe's chief functions. How do we know that? Perhaps by intuition itself, since the authors did not present evidence for these suppositions.

But Morse and Perry go one step further: They provide an outstanding bibliography for those interested in a continued pursuit of the ideas touched upon in the book. I have read most of them myself and can say from first-hand experience that there are some real gems on the list.

Interestingly, however, the first time I read this book I often had thought, while running across important, yet unattributed ideas in the text: "I wonder if he's familiar with Sheldrake's (or some other author's) work?" And this points out, to my mind, the single greatest weakness of the book. Morse and Perry take the ideas from authors in the bibliography and write about them without mentioning who is actually responsible for them. Those readers already familiar with many of the books in the bibliography would be better served to pursue those authors directly.

But for all that, the book does have its strengths. And the diversity of great ideas is a big one. As an entry level book, it is engaging and easy to read. A regular reader can get through it in a few hours and when finished will feel like he or she has seen the leading edge. Although I did not feel that the authors made the case for the right temporal lobe as the place Where God Lives in the human body, they do put forth some interesting conjecture.

Yet in the final analysis, perhaps the chief strength of the book is that my wife really liked it—and she passed it along to their friends, and they liked it. Having just finished writing my own book on a similar topic, I have great familiarity with the material to which the authors refer. However, when my wife (a mainstream reader) read my manuscript she found it taxing with “way too much science.” So it is clear to me that if Morse wrote this book for mainstream audiences interested in the New Paradigm, he knows his audience. *Where God Lives* will hold their interest and fascinate them.

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BOOK REVIEW

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Searching for Eternity: A Scientist's Spiritual Journey to Overcome Death Anxiety, by Don Morse. Memphis, TN: Eagle Wing Books, 2000, 428 pp., \$19.95, pb.

Don Morse is a retired professor who has studied everything from dentistry to clinical hypnosis to stress management. As he entered his 60's, the deaths of numerous relatives and friends stirred in Morse a sense of his own impending mortality. In order to alleviate his growing death anxiety, he undertook a lengthy and scholarly research program that attempted to answer three of the biggest questions one can ask in this life: (1) Does some essential part of the person (the *soul*) survive bodily death? (2) Will the afterlife be positive? (3) Is there a God who in some sense guarantees the basic rightness of the cosmos, including an afterlife? In *Searching For Eternity*, Morse invites the reader, in a personal "come along with me" style, to join him on a spiritual and intellectual journey to discover what the available evidence reveals about these three questions, and about a host of related issues like reincarnation, the existence of heaven and hell, and judgment.

After a preliminary chapter explaining the nature of death anxiety and the various means to attempt to cope with it, Morse begins his/our spiritual quest by recounting his own near-death experience (NDE), brought on by an illness in 1983. Many of the usual features, such as the brilliant light and the life review, are present, plus an unusual one: at the end of the life review, Morse "saw" his own funeral and even his obituary in the newspaper!

The next four chapters integrate much of the empirical evidence for the survival of bodily death. Morse thoroughly covers NDEs, out-of-body

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experiences, after-death communications, bilocation, apparitions, waking visions, dream visions, mediumistic accounts, reincarnation, and past-life regression studies. The chapter on NDEs is particularly illuminating, especially the section in which Morse rebuts more than a dozen alternative explanations to the survival hypothesis. Having all these arguments in one place is a valuable contribution to the near-death literature. At other times, Morse seems somewhat less organized and comprehensive in his presentation. Still, after more than a hundred pages of evidence, the open-minded reader is likely to conclude that the chances for survival and possibly even reincarnation are quite good.

After a brief chapter in which he professes skepticism about the possibility of some sort of physical, as opposed to spiritual, immortality, Morse tackles the age-old problem of proving the existence of God. After a review of the Biblical portrait of the Deity, the sort most of us were brought up with, Morse turns to science. There are logical, philosophical, and moral arguments that have also been presented to try to prove the existence of God, but Morse, the inquiring scientist, prefers to look at the physical evidence through the lens of science.

Essentially, Morse uses recent astronomical and biological theories to buttress a form of the theological *argument from design*. The so-called *anthropic principle*, for example, argues that the chances that certain physical factors and constants in the universe happened randomly are so infinitesimally small that one can only conclude that some divinely intelligent plan/planner was necessary. For instance, if the energy of the big bang had differed by one part in 10 to the 120th, there would be no life in the universe! Morse also presents similar arguments about the extreme unlikelihood of complex life evolving by itself. While undoubtedly not proving the existence of God to the satisfaction of many philosophers and scientists, Morse's presentation felt quite convincing to me.

Two rather long chapters follow, covering the view of the afterlife in ancient, Eastern, and Western religions. In this sort of encyclopedic book, there is always some trade-off between parsimony and comprehensiveness, but given the similarity of many of the views, a more condensed presentation, especially of Judaism, would have made this section more readable. The two equally long chapters that follow constitute a *tour-de-force*, a detailed examination of a host of recent concepts of the afterlife. Some of the organizations, groups, and individuals Morse discusses include Seventh Day Adventists, Unitarians, Rosicrucianism, Freemasonry, Theosophy, Eckankar, Emanuel Swedenborg, William Blake, Edgar Cayce, Bruce Moen, Fred Alan Wolf, Greg Little, Peter Novak, and Kaballist Simcha Paull Raphael. Many of the views

presented, such as Urantia, I had never come across before; while others, like Scientology, seem to me to be so dubious as to question their inclusion.

More serious perhaps is the omission of some important recent views. Why include the controversial L. Ron Hubbard or the Seth books and omit Rudolf Steiner, one of the leading and most highly respected visionaries of the 20th century? It is also unfortunate that Morse made no mention of Rodney Collin's unique but sadly neglected book, *The Theory of Eternal Life* (1984). Collin, a student of mathematician and mystic Piotr Demianovich Ouspensky, had a strange, mathematical scheme of the cosmos and survival that defies easy synopsis. A more selective approach on Morse's part would have lent these two otherwise stunning chapters greater integrity.

Finally, Morse presents his own personal concept of the afterlife, which he is by now thoroughly convinced does indeed exist. First, there are several moral lessons Morse wishes to pass on to the reader: that the life we lead on Earth is a major determinant of the afterlife experience; that hateful and angry people will not have a pleasant afterlife; and that suicides are definitely treated differently in the afterlife. These are basically consistent with the "lessons from the light" discussed by Kenneth Ring (Ring and Valarino, 1998) and others.

Morse's depiction of the actual course of life after death, by way of several hypothetical scenarios, is intriguing, and for the most part conforms to portrayals familiar to students of the paranormal. Those who are knowledgeable only about the near-death literature will find that Morse's proposed nine-stage process goes well beyond the preliminary experiences reported by NDErs. Keeping in mind that neither Morse nor I nor anybody knows what happens for certain, I felt that two aspects of Morse's scenarios were less than convincing, or at least theoretically troublesome.

First, Morse relies somewhat on Peter Novak's controversial notion of the separation at death of *spirit* (consciousness) from *soul* (the unconscious) (Novak, 2002). Aside from the idiosyncratic use of these terms, I see no compelling reason to accept this presumed division, nor does Morse provide much of a rationale beyond his liking for the theory.

Second, Morse's hypothetical characters either do not reincarnate at all before finding some sort of lasting peace with God or, in the case of an evil person, they reincarnate a mere three or four times. This account *may* be true, but it does not jibe with the vast majority of reincarnation theories, which emphasize that it takes many lifetimes to evolve to the point where reincarnation is no longer necessary. Merely being a

very good person is not enough, although Morse appears to believe it does. In fact, he begs the question in his stories. In his one unpleasant scenario, a description of the life of a criminal who winds up executed, Morse admits that it was not all the criminal's fault, as he had atheistic, alcoholic parents. Given his environmental handicaps, does it seem fair that this person needs to reincarnate several times, while the characters in his pleasant scenarios, who have all the advantages, do not? The possibility that one's birth environment itself is a result of prior karmic influence seems to elude Morse. Of course, that possibility would imply that all the characters in his scenarios most likely have lived before, thus refuting the concept that for many people reincarnation is not necessary.

Throughout *Searching For Eternity*, Morse alternates between an academic, critical stance and a more personal tone, replete with interviews, anecdotes, parables, cartoons, and drawings. This makes the book more varied and readable, but it may weaken its academic credibility for some readers. Despite its minor flaws, Morse's account of his spiritual journey makes for a fascinating, comprehensive, and illuminating book. It marshals an impressive amount of evidence with which to confront the basic ontological questions mentioned above. If readers wish to convince their friends—or themselves—that there is far more to reality than the material world and that life continues after physical death, then Morse's *magnum opus* is highly recommended.

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Letters to the Editor

Different Kinds of NDE

To the Editor:

As psychiatrist, leader of the German section of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS), and author of 14 scientific publications on near-death experiences (NDEs), I have analyzed more than 200 NDEs and hold a lot of workshops on NDEs in international psychiatric and neurological congresses. In 1999 I wrote a chapter on the neurological and psychiatric interpretation of NDEs in a German book edited by Hubert Knoblauch and Hans-Georg Soeffner (Schroeter-Kunhardt, 1999). In this book, Knoblauch and his colleagues published the first German poll concerning NDEs (Schmied, Knoblauch, and Schnettler, 1999), showing that there are 3 million Germans who have NDEs, which thereby are three times more common than the psychiatric disease schizophrenia, but yet completely ignored by psychiatrists.

After publication of this book, disturbed by Knoblauch's interpretations of his sociological NDE data, I wrote him a critique in the form of a three-page letter and later published my critique in a parapsychological journal (Schroeter-Kunhardt, 2000), neither of which Knoblauch answered. Instead, Knoblauch has continued to repeat his dubious theses nationwide in interviews and newspapers.

Because Knoblauch and his colleagues have now published a short form of his theses in English in this Journal (Knoblauch, Schmied, and Schnettler, 2001), I have to repeat my critique of Knoblauch's conclusions, referring to his article in this Journal and to the detailed version of his theses in his book. Both are full of contradictions. Scientists who have studied NDEs much longer than Knoblauch, who has gathered only 82 NDEs, are not so premature in their conclusions and consequently came to quite different results.

First, Knoblauch and his colleagues postulated that there is no causal connection between the clinical death and the occurrence of NDEs. Furthermore, Knoblauch and his coauthors presented the well known fact that NDEs also occur when death is only expected, that is, in psychologically (and not biologically) near-death situations, as their own new

discovery. In fact it is well known that NDEs mainly occur in situations of imminent biological death, in the anticipation of one's own imminent death, or in direct contact with death in different forms, such as accompanying dying people. Exceptions such as the occurrence of NDE-like elements during meditation or under the influence of hallucinatory drugs show only that NDEs are neurobiologically based and can be triggered by altered states of consciousness.

Actually, 46 of Knoblauch's NDEs happened during life-threatening situations. Furthermore, 18 other NDEs that he classified as not happening in near-death-situations occurred in life-threatening situations and so imply near-death situations. For example, 9 of them happened during automobile accidents and electric shock, 4 during heart attacks, 4 during surgical complications, and so on. Contradicting their assertion, Knoblauch and his colleagues later in their book admitted that NDEs correlate with near-death situations, and that two-thirds of their own NDEs were in life-threatening circumstances.

Elsewhere in their book, Knoblauch and his colleagues postulated that the physical crises were not related to organic facts that lead to physical death. Not being medical doctors and not having consulted any medical advisor, Knoblauch and his colleagues simply cannot decide this; furthermore, the authors did not investigate this relationship in their NDEs.

Second, Knoblauch and his colleagues postulated that previous knowledge of NDEs leads to the experience of NDEs, and represented the contradictory findings of other researchers as wrong. Two pages before, Knoblauch and his colleagues nevertheless admitted that they could not say whether the higher percentage of knowledge of NDEs among NDEs existed before their NDE, or whether it was a consequence of their NDE, because they had not examined this interrelation. Furthermore, they admitted that in some cases they could exclude previous knowledge of NDEs, and that this previous knowledge did not influence the incidence of NDEs.

Third, their oft-repeated statement that there is no universal or standard NDE pattern depends on a capital mistake: Knoblauch and his colleagues confounded NDEs with *oneiroids*, complex dreams with a certain degree of lucidity, concerning the theme and situation of death. NDEs long ago have been clearly defined psychiatrically, and so differentiated from individual dreams, as archetypical models of *oneiroids* (Schmidt-Degenhard, 1992; Schroeter-Kunhardt, 1993). In fact there are clear phenomenological differences between both forms: *oneiroids* are individual, idiosyncratic dreams without the universal elements

found in NDEs. Furthermore NDEs are experienced in more dangerous situations that are clearly more near death (Schroeter-Kunhardt, 1993).

Actually, in my analysis, 27 of 100 NDEs contained individual dream-like or *oneiroidal* elements. This demonstrates that there is a continuous transition from complex individual dreams concerning the theme of death to NDEs (Schmidt-Degenhard, 1992), which can easily be differentiated from *oneiroids* by their transcultural similar elements, including the out-of-body experience, the tunnel, the light, the life review, transcendental landscapes, and contact with deceased persons.

If we actually look at the statistics of Knoblauch and his colleagues, they contradicted their own statements that there is no universal NDE pattern. In fact all 82 of their NDErs described nearly all typical NDE elements, in frequencies ranging from 11 to 65 percent (see Table II in Knoblauch, Schmied, and Schnettler, 2001, p. 25). The claimed differences between East and West German NDEs never reached statistical significance. Only the negative affect accompanying the East German NDEs differentiated them significantly from West German NDEs. Knoblauch and his colleagues themselves admitted that the small number of NDEs did not allow them to differentiate different NDE types because of nonsignificance of these differences.

The cultural differences between East and West German NDEs are in fact quite often only different interpretations of the universal NDE elements. The negative affect of East German NDEs may be only a reflection of the conflict of nonreligious people suddenly being confronted with completely unexpected, highly religious experiences, an explanation Knoblauch and his colleagues never offered or recognized. Also, Knoblauch's statement that in China out-of-body experiences and tunnel experiences do not exist is incorrect. Already in 1992 a study of 81 NDErs, victims of the worldwide biggest earthquake, revealed that 43 percent of the Maoist NDErs had out-of-body experiences and 16 percent reported tunnel experiences (Zhi-ying and Jian-xun, 1992). Altogether, NDEs in different cultures do not show the enormous differences that Knoblauch and his colleagues repeatedly claimed; these differences can be claimed only for idiosyncratic dreams with the theme of death. On the contrary, NDEs consist worldwide of the same elements, with differences only in the shaping and interpretation of these elements.

This astonishingly small influence of culture on the basic elements of NDEs is also confirmed by the fact that children without any relevant cultural education about life after death experience the same universal NDE elements. The same applies to nonreligious people who experience

NDEs that contradict their own convictions and afterwards show conversions to an religious life.

Fourth, that some NDEs consist only of single elements and do not always repeat the same succession of these elements has been well known since Raymond Moody's first description of the phenomenon (1975). This does not contradict the universality of NDEs. These single NDE elements are simply a partial experience or recall of a biologically implemented sequence of archetypical NDE elements.

Fifth, the NDE elements cannot be reduced to structures produced by social narrative, as Knoblauch and his colleagues postulated. They claimed that the uniformity of NDE elements can only be understood as products of narrative motifs and legend forms, and therefore they are narrative reconstructions, sometimes completely constructed by the NDEr.

In fact the NDE-specific hypermnesia implies that NDE reminiscence does not rely substantially on narrative motifs that existed before the NDE. NDEs are rather primary, archetypical experiences that were a source of religious ideas about life after death, and therefore were occurring long before any narrative religious model or religious tradition existed. Indeed, Knoblauch and his colleagues admitted that the religious and ideological differences between East and West Germany surprisingly did not affect the occurrence of NDEs.

Futhermore, studies have shown that there is no relevant difference between the repeated NDE narrations over many years after the NDE (van Lommel, van Wees, Meyers, and Elffereich, 2001) or between NDE narrations reported either a short or a long time after the NDE, which Knoblauch and his colleagues themselves admitted. Despite Knoblauch's sociological bias, the fact that the dominant affect in most NDEs is strongly positive also shows the cultural independence of the NDE elements and their neurobiological origin.

Last but not least, the theory of a narrative reconstruction of inner experiences applies equally to *all* inner experiences; and yet it never has any relevant consequence, for example, on the interpretation of the inner experiences of people with schizophrenia or reactions to trauma. Knoblauch and his colleagues themselves stated that NDErs themselves are quite confident that their descriptions of their experiences are identical with their experiences. Altogether there is no relevant difference between the near-death experience and its narration. I find the claims of Knoblauch and his colleagues inconsistent and unscientific.

In this connection, the statement that NDErs intentionally shape their NDEs so that they confirm the standard American form is nothing

else than another bias of Knoblauch and his colleagues. At best, from my own manifold experiences with the production of NDE documentaries, it can be said that the mass media prefer cases that imply the standard elements. Altogether, the claims of Knoblauch and his colleagues again are inconsistent and unscientific.

Sixth, the statements that NDEs "have little consequences for the manner of living" (Schmied, Knoblauch, and Schnettler, 1999, pp. 212–213) and that NDEs have no moral consequences or directly "undermine religious belief" (Knoblauch, Schmied, and Schnettler, 2001, pp. 27–28) again are contradicted in the study itself. The data show that 58 to 70 percent of their sample of NDErs lived more consciously and had greater appreciation for life and their fellow creatures; the belief in God grew in 28 percent and 40 percent had less fear of death. Knoblauch and his colleagues also admitted that all NDErs, including those with sad lots, were quite optimistic and in a positive mood after their NDE; that the NDErs interpreted the NDE in a religious sense and as basis for their belief in life after death; and that their NDEs have long-lasting biographic relevance.

Given my objection to their interpretation of the data, does the study by Knoblauch and his colleagues have any benefit? It has; it provides good data about the frequency of NDEs in Germany: more than 4 percent of the population, that is, about 3 million Germans, have had NDEs. Especially astonishing was the high frequency of paranormal effects around the death of human beings: 14 percent had premonitions of someone's death that proved true; 3 percent reported psychokinetic effects at the moment of someone's death; and 4 percent of Germans have had deathbed visions. These results of their study suggest the possibility that at death we transcend space and time and that there is life after death; but the above-mentioned conclusions reached by Knoblauch and his colleagues do not follow from their data.

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Response to Schroeter-Kunhardt

To the Editor:

Thank you for the opportunity to reply to Michael Schroeter-Kunhardt's critique of our research. His comments combine wrong assertions about our study with misunderstanding of our methodology. This may sound harsh, so let me shortly refute his arguments.

As we mentioned in our article in this Journal (Knoblauch, Schmied, and Schnettler, 2001) as well as widely in our German publications, we have conducted *two* waves of interviews, each with more than 2,000 subjects. Schroeter-Kunhardt seemed unaware of the fact that we dealt with many more subjects than those in the first wave. As we also stress explicitly (in fact, we have written an essay on this in the edited volume Schroeter-Kunhardt cited), we have collected a large number of qualitative interviews, so that the number of cases amounts to more than 200.

Methodologically, these cases cannot be lumped together. Qualitative and quantitative interviews have to be distinguished, and the second wave cannot be added to the first one. Instead, it constitutes a confirmatory test of the first wave—and, as we mentioned, a surprisingly convincing test that corroborated the first wave's results.

The question as to the "death" of the patients is essentially *not* subject to interpretation. The questionnaire, which was printed in our edited book (Knoblauch and Soeffner, 1999), as well as in my monograph (Knoblauch, 1999), included two clear-cut yes/no answers as to both the subjective and the medical evidence of the subjects' physical situation. Any additional "medical" information on the situation by the subjects was, as we noted, qualitatively too diverse and too unreliable to be interpreted on its own. It is these answers, which include items such as "had an accident" or "injured," that Schroeter-Kunhardt seems to be "interpreting."

Nowhere in our book did we claim, or intend to claim, that "physical crises were not related to organic fact." I suspect that Schroeter-Kunhardt was confusing that with "psychical crises."

Schroeter-Kunhardt was wrong in his assertion that we did not know if our subjects had knowledge about NDEs before their own NDE. In fact, this was a question in the questionnaire, and the answer was stated in the very essay he cited (Schmied, Knoblauch, and Schnettler 1999, p. 232).

Schmidt-Degenhard's notion of *oneiroids* is interesting, but it did not seem useful to us. However, if one does use it, one should be aware that Schmidt-Degenhard took NDEs to be one type of *oneiroid*, so that the distinction between NDEs and *oneiroids*, as Schroeter-Kunhardt suggested, does not work logically.

Schroeter-Kunhardt referred to his own research on NDEs, but he has not, to our knowledge, published anything about his empirical work. As to the differences between East and West German NDEs, we stated the statistical significance explicitly (Schmied, Knoblauch, and Schnettler, 1999, p. 234), and indicated that most differences were *tendencies*.

The cultural interpretation of these differences is, in fact, subject to further discussion, and we offered our interpretation as part of our discussion. Yet, Schroeter-Kunhardt's claim that I said anywhere that in China there existed no out-of-body-experiences is plainly false. In my book (Knoblauch, 1999) I wrote that one finds in China "motifs like out-of-body experiences, tunnel, etc." (p. 86), and in the corresponding footnote, I did refer to Feng Zhi-ying and Liu Jian-xun's study (p. 214).

Schroeter-Kunhardt argued that the fact that some NDEs consist only of single elements does not contradict the universality of NDEs. The point is not that NDEs may consist of one single element, but that these elements may differ from anything mentioned in the standard experience as described, for example, by Raymond Moody.

We did not "reduce the NDE to a social narrative," as Schroeter-Kunhardt asserted. To the contrary, as one may see in the conclusion of our book (Knoblauch and Soeffner 1999), we tried to offer an anthropological explanation that integrates "culturalist" and biological approaches.

Finally, Schroeter-Kunhardt seemed unaware of the "consequential" dimension in the psychology of religious experience. In this respect, one typically distinguishes changes in NDErs' manner of living from changes in attitude and belief.

In sum, Schroeter-Kunhardt's letter contains a number of assertions that are not only wrong, but belie what we have written. Let me conclude with a personal comment: When starting our work (which was finished more than three years ago), we had hoped to initiate a real scientific discussion on NDEs in the German speaking countries across disciplines. Our edited volume (Knoblauch and Soeffner, 1999) was one of the fruits of this hope. As Schroeter-Kunhardt's untenable assertions show, the discussion has still to be developed in a more serious and unbiased fashion.

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Perplexing Questions About Novak's "Binary Soul Doctrine"

To the Editor:

The Journal recently carried a fascinating and lengthy paper by Peter Novak (2002) entitled "Division of the Self: Life After Death and the Binary Soul Doctrine." Novak submitted compelling evidence from

throughout history to support the theory that we are indeed two-part creatures, comprised of a conscious mind and an unconscious mind. He went on to show how dreams, trances, and mystical experiences seem to indicate, with an almost uncanny reliability, that at death there is a split between the two minds: the conscious mind engaged in the initial experience (darkness or tunnel), then phasing out, perhaps to take on some type of residence in a "netherworld"; with the unconscious mind comprising the second phase of experience (lights, landscapes, spirit beings), seeming to ascend into higher orders beyond earthly life. And he especially connected his theory to research done on near-death experiences.

To say that Novak's research is impressive in the way he correlated stories, myths, and legends about death and the afterlife to a symbolic representation of left- and right-brain hemisphere functions would be an understatement. I think he is onto something worthy of further investigation. However, I would suggest caution in drawing any conclusions to his theory. The reason I say this is that there are too many missing pieces and contradictory elements to his data. Allow me to point out a few.

On page 164, Novak described the second stage of death (or near-death) as being devoid of conscious thought and reason, with the individual accepting as truth whatever is presented. And he emphasized this assertion throughout his paper. In my book, *Beyond the Light* (1994), which he cited in his article, I included the story of Jeanie Dicus (pp. 57-61). The Dicus case refutes this assertion because, throughout her entire episode, she challenged the Jesus figure who appeared. She argued, questioned, disbelieved, and countered almost everything told to her. I was only able to include a fraction of her story; had I included the whole episode, the full extent of her demanding questions would have required an entire chapter. Just because an experiencer seems to be in a state of direct and certain knowing, does not mean everything given is accepted. In my own three near-death experiences, presented in brief in Chapter Two of *Coming Back to Life* (Atwater, 1988, pages 24-61), I reported how, in all three of my episodes, I often questioned, analyzed, reasoned, countered, explored, and investigated what was happening to me, as it occurred.

If I were to look back over the 23 years I have been involved in near-death research and estimate, based on my own case studies, how many experiencers accepted versus questioned what they encountered, I would offer this: child experiencers of near-death states frequently challenge greeters in the first phase of their experience. To an angelic

figure they ask things like, "Is that what you really look like?" Yet they seldom argue with content in the second phase. With adult experiencers I have found the reaction to be quite the opposite: seldom do adults question greeters in the first phase, but quite often they will counter, challenge, or question the content and beings present in the content of the second phase. To give an idea of percentages from my research with those adult experiencers who in some way challenged or questioned the main content of their near-death episode, I would say one-third accepted *verbatim* everything presented to them, while the remaining two-thirds actively used their analytical abilities, some more than others.

Another assertion of Novak, and one quite common with many researchers, is that phase one consists of darkness or a tunnel and that those who do not report such a thing must have forgotten the occurrence. This is erroneous and does not hold up in broad-based research. The nationwide Gallup Poll on the subject of near-death experiences (Gallup and Proctor, 1982) found that only 9 percent reported a tunnel or any form of darkness. It was not until much later, after the media sensationalized the tunnel component, that more and more experiencers reported having experienced one during their episode. In my research on 3,000 adult experiencers and 277 child experiencers, hardly one-third claimed any such thing. Because of this, I no longer consider tunnels a signature feature of near-death states, but, rather, one of many elements associated with near-death states. In the majority of my cases, the first phase consisted either of an out-of-body experience or immersion into a brilliant light. I must admit, however, that with child experiencers, I did encounter quite a number of them who, in phase one, were met by "the living dark"—not darkness as we think darkness to be, but, rather, a warm and friendly intelligence some called "The Darkness That Knows."

On page 175, Novak wrote, "On its own, the unconscious could never choose to change its behavior patterns; it could never even grasp the fact that these behaviors were no longer capable of leading to fulfillment." If this is the state of mind that Novak characterizes for the second phase of a near-death experience, then I cannot imagine on what research he based that inference. It is typical, for both child and adult experiencers during their episode, to face misdeeds or any type of behavior that was less than satisfactory to them, and decide, right there and then, to make corrections. This is the reason many give for why they chose to return to life: to change their thinking and their actions.

His statement on page 176 about the contradiction in testimony from experiencers about time is really not a contradiction. Certainly,

experiencers report, almost to a person, that in reality there is no such thing as time or space, that neither exists on "The Other Side." But in "getting there," in going through the stages leading to arrival, one does go through "timing" in the sense of sequences of events, one after another. What is actually reported by experiencers, at least the vast majority in my research base, is a scenario closer to a shift in dominance that appears to take place between soul and ego, than to anything akin to a splitting off of left-brain and right-brain functions. It is as if the ego personality dissolves into the fullness of the soul, the real self: the two become one. And this distinction is emphasized in vivid and compelling language. Because this distinction is such a strong one, I find myself uncomfortable with Novak's conclusions about the left brain comprising the totality of phase one and the right brain comprising phase two. I can appreciate why Novak would draw this conclusion based on the material he detailed, and it is an interesting concept. But his argument did not encompass all the evidence from near-death research, nor is it in line with the majority of experiencer accounts. Additionally, in the 1960s and early 1970s when I was actively involved in dehaunting houses, and on occasion since, I had many different encounters with ghosts, apparitions, and lost souls. Certainly, there were those who were little more than psychic residue, leftover energy imprinting from individuals long gone. Sometimes this residue could be traced to a living person who had simply moved away; sometimes it was connected to a death, as if strong emotions could hang in the air or permeate fabric and wood once expressed. On other occasions, the apparitions appeared and disappeared with a kind of rhythm, as if they were a recording stuck on replay. And with some there was no response, no change, nothing to indicate the presence of a soul. With others, however, there was response once engaged, and interactions followed—usually "rescue work" in the sense of helping the individual to realize he or she was dead and it was time to move on. A particular "release" of this nature that I did, which was written up in a local newspaper (Culbertson, 1989), centered around a Confederate soldier at Selma Mansion. The bulk of my cases were with fully responsive souls who, for differing reasons, refused to leave the earth plane. One encounter I had was with a 6-year-old boy standing at a freshly dug grave. The boy appeared to be a living child. I asked him what he was doing there. His audible answer was: "My Mommy and Daddy told me never to go anywhere without their permission." On further questioning, I learned that he had been hit by a car on the way to school and that it was his body in the grave. I looked at the headstone and discovered that what the youngster had told me

was true. I was rather startled at first, then saddened. Try as I may, I could not convince him it was all right to move on into the light realms. He stubbornly refused to budge without his parents' permission. I went home and held a prayer service for him, affirming and knowing that what was needed to help him would occur. The next day I went back to the cemetery and the boy was gone. This "ghost" was hardly a mindless apparition.

Yes, many ghosts are indeed zombie-like thought forms or psychic residue. But others are living souls who could use a little extra help. To wield the same brush stroke while painting them all into the same picture is unwise.

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Response to Atwater

To the Editor:

First, I must thank you for publishing my work in the Journal. My paper presented a fairly unique and controversial argument, and was bound to kick up a dust storm that the Journal could have just as easily sidestepped altogether. But you did not, for which I am very grateful, as that paper represents 14 years of my life's work.

And I thank P. M. H. Atwater for commenting on it. I have great respect for her; and to have her describe my work as "fascinating" and "impressive," admitting that it is supported by "compelling evidence"

and is "worthy of further investigation" was almost more than I could have hoped for. To bicker over mere details after such high praise seems almost petty.

However, there is one thing I should try to clarify. My work does not suggest, at least to me, that the division between the conscious and unconscious usually reaches a state of complete and total separation during near-death experiences (NDEs). The evidence suggests to me instead that the process of division often begins, but rarely if ever reaches totality, in the NDEr him- or her-self. Granted, we do see many parallel streams of evidence that seem to indicate that this process of division does begin in many NDEs, and would, perhaps, reach totality if the NDEr was never revived. However, if, as I have suggested, the division is never more than partial in most NDEs, one would not expect a complete absence of right-brain thought processes during the first phase, nor a complete absence of left-brain thought processes during the second phase, but only a noticeable reduction of same—for which my paper provided substantial evidence.

Moreover, I am also convinced that sometimes, probably only rarely, the division does not occur at all. Numerous streams of evidence suggest that the more spiritually evolved or psychologically integrated one is during life, the less likely one is to find one's mind splitting into separate conscious and unconscious elements after death.

Atwater cited her own study indicating that only about one-third of NDErs recall encountering the darkness or tunnel in the first phase of their NDEs. But a conscientious observer would have to point out that other studies have suggested this number may be higher. Peter and Elizabeth Fenwick (1995) reported that the majority of NDErs in their study did find themselves in a tunnel, and fully two-thirds of their interview group reported experiencing the darkness (pp. 49–51).

Also, Atwater suggested that some of the ghosts she has worked with do not fit into the divided-soul scenario delineated by the Binary Soul Doctrine. But, curiously, she then went on to cite, as evidence for this contention, an encounter that did seem, at least to me, to follow the Binary Soul Doctrine pattern quite well. She describes a ghostly entity that not only had been unable to determine logically from the available evidence that it was dead, indicating a loss of logical reasoning ability, but also showed an unyielding predisposition to adhere to its previous mental programming and thought patterns, indicating a loss of creativity and autonomous free will: "Try as I may, I could not convince him it was all right to move on into the light realms. He stubbornly refused to budge without his parents' permission." My own research has taught me

that many other "ghostbusters" report essentially the same thing: that even on those rare occasions when they *are* able to interact with ghosts, they find all too often that these ghosts are frozen in fixed opinions and behavior patterns that resist all efforts at modification—exactly the sort of behavior the Binary Soul Doctrine would seem to predict.

In the final analysis, however, I feel Atwater and I are on the same page, both agreeing that this hypothesis is worth further research.

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INSTRUCTIONS TO AUTHORS

JOURNAL OF NEAR-DEATH STUDIES encourages submission of articles in the following categories: research reports; theoretical or conceptual statements; papers expressing a particular scientific, philosophic, religious, or historical perspective on the study of near-death experiences; cross-cultural studies; individual case histories with instructive unusual features; and personal accounts of near-death experiences or related phenomena.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS: Logical organization is essential. While headings help to structure the content, titles and headings within the manuscript should be as short as possible. Do not use the generic masculine pronoun or other sexist terminology.


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