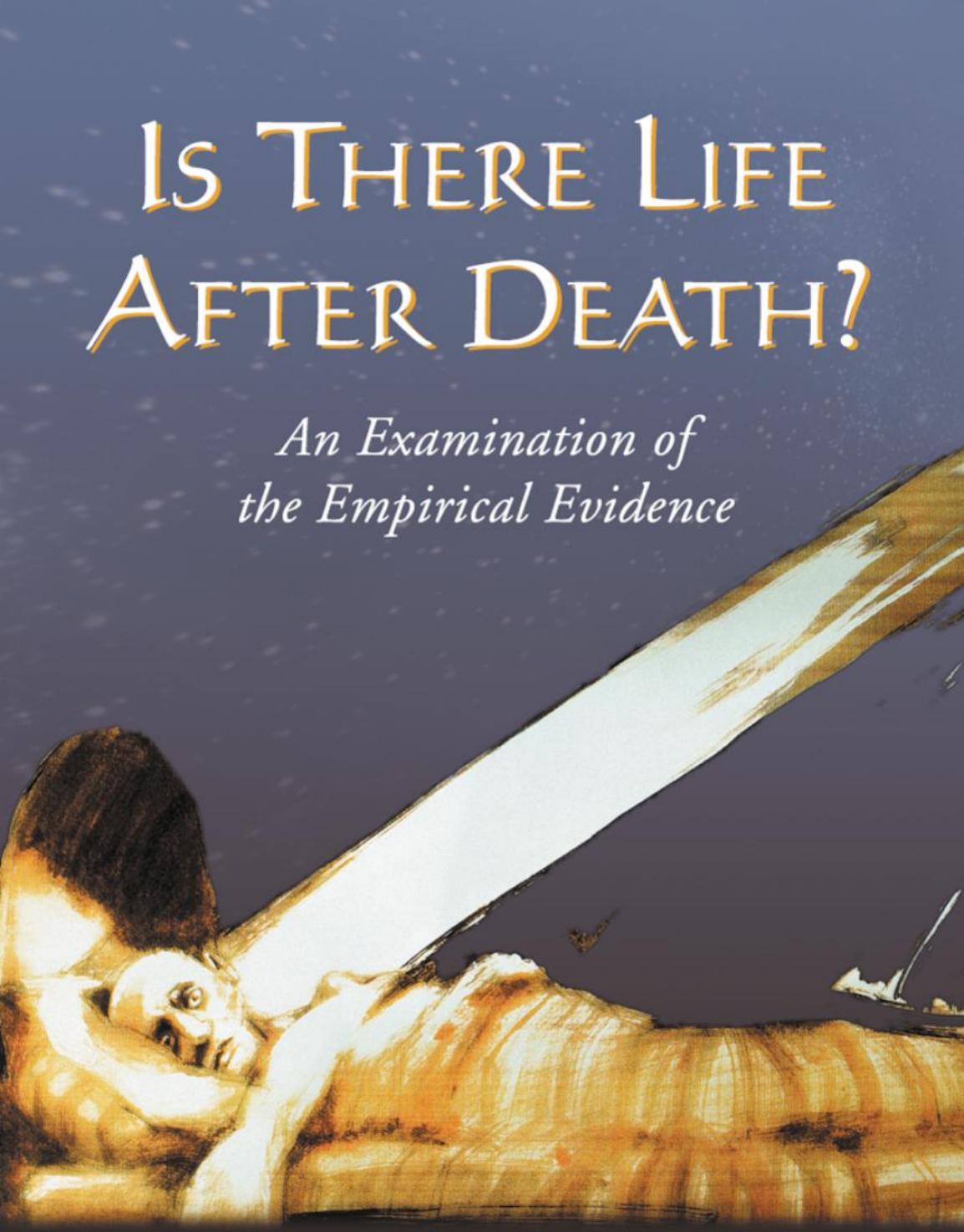
Is There Life After Death?

An Examination of the Empirical Evidence



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Preface

This book is about life after death. Does it really exist? And if it does exist, what is it like?

I have been carrying out research into death and writing about death for almost 40 years now. I have studied suicide and murder, and I plan to write books in the next few years on war and genocide. I have devised two scales to measure a person's fear of death, scales on which I obtain very low scores.

I have often wondered what led to my preoccupation with death, and then a few years ago I realized one of the sources of my interest. I was born in 1942 in London, England, and I spent the first three years of my life sleeping each night in an air raid shelter in the living room of our house. My mother told me that I was very anxious about the bombs and would anticipate the air raid sirens, announcing an impending raid before the sirens went off to warn us. So that little child has spent his adult life trying to obtain mastery over his fear of death by studying it. It was a pretty good tactic since intellectualization is an excellent defense mechanism.

My parents were of different religions, my mother Church of England and my father Jewish, and so they compromised by giving me no religious orientation. By the time I was a teenager, I was an atheist. I still am. But I am drawn to Zen Buddhism, and so I tell people that I am a lapsed Zen Buddhist.

As I grow older, I am developing some anxiety about that thorny issue of whether there is life after death. I do not believe that there is, but I do admit that it is inconceivable to me that my mind will stop functioning one day. I try to reassure myself by using the analogy of sleep. If we did not wake up, we would not know that we had fallen asleep. As I child, I used to try to be aware of the moment at which I fell asleep so that I would

know that I had done so. I always failed. I simply woke up the next morning with no awareness of having fallen asleep the night before. Death could be like a sleep from which we never awake, and so we will not know that we have died.

But is that the case?

I am a psychologist, and I am good at carrying out and critiquing research. This book explores what social science research has discovered that is relevant to the question of whether there is life after death. What do social scientists say about the issue of life after death? What research have they conducted? Have they produced any evidence for or against it?

We may not be able to answer definitively the question of the existence of life after death. However, there is a great deal of research on topics that are relevant to the question, research of which most people are not aware.

Many of the popular books on life after death assume that there is such an existence, and the books are written for believers. Such books do not, of course, convince the skeptics, including me. For example, Shirley MacLaine (1988) may be convinced that she has had previous lives, but she has not convinced me![1]

The proliferation of popular books on the topic of life after death is perhaps a reflection of our time. Grosso (1989) has argued that a new set of ideas and experiences have combined to form a new mythology of death. There are several components of this new mythology:

1. Thanatology has become a recognized discipline concerned with the study of death. This has opened up the topic of death to respectable scientific scrutiny.

2. Interest has grown in parapsychological phenomena such as extrasensory perception and psychokinesis. Although parapsychological phenomena are sometimes used to provide alternative explanations for the evidence that seems to suggest life after death, the interest in these phenomena has raised the possibility that some objects may not be sensed by the traditional five senses and that not all phenomena can be explained by traditional ("normal") scientific explanations.

3. Carl Jung's analytic psychology also raised the possibility that our conscious experience (and even our Freudian unconscious) may not comprise even the major part of our mind. Jung argued that our minds contains elements beyond our conscious apprehension and beyond the simple desires and thoughts that we had as children but which we have forgotten (or repressed). Jung proposed that we have a collective unconscious, filled with themes that we share with every other person, and that there is a synchrony, or connection, between all components of the universe.

4. The growth of spiritualism as a religion has had a major impact on this new mythology since it is based on the notion that there is a life after death. Many spiritualists try to communicate with the spirits of deceased people, and they believe that they succeed.

5. The recent interest in and research on near-death experiences has also presented the possibility of proving the existence of life after death.

6. This, in turn, led to an interest in general out-of-body experiences, not only those associated with death. If the mind can leave the body at any time, then perhaps it can leave the body at death (and possibly survive death).

7. There has been a growth of interest in the phenomenon of channeling, in which people of a "higher order" communicate to us through mediums. While spiritualism focuses on survival after death, channelers are concerned more with advising us while we are alive.

8. Apparitions of the Virgin Mary have become increasingly common, and several shrines have arisen to which Christians flock in the hopes of seeing an apparition.

9. The growth of interest in unidentified flying objects (UFOs) has raised the possibility that traditional science may be incorrect (in rejecting the supposed evidence for UFOs) and that the possibilities in our universe encompass more than we ever thought.

These modern trends indicate a dissatisfaction with the answers that modern science has given us and provoke us to search for a basis for the belief in life after death.

What Is the Evidence for Life After Death?

In this book we will review the research on many phenomena relevant to the existence of life after death, including:

- reincarnation
- near-death experiences
- death-bed visions of those who are still conscious
- cases of possession by dead spirits
- apparitions of the deceased

Kastenbaum (1979) briefly reviewed these sources of evidence for life after death. He noted first of all that people have believed in life after death

throughout human history and in all regions of the world. The universality of this belief is sometimes seen as evidence that life after death exists, for how can so many people be wrong? Of course, most people once believed that the earth was flat and that the sun revolved around the earth. The majority does not always decide correctly what is scientifically true.

Some people report having had encounters with the dead. For example, some people see ghosts, apparitions or phantasms, often of people who have died. Sometimes the identity of these apparitions is unknown, but occasionally they are familiar to the living person who sees them. Green and McCreery (1975) reported the results of a survey of 850 people who had seen apparitions, including apparitions of the dead, and who were able to give information about the characteristics of the apparitions. For example, 38 percent of the perceivers were lying down when they saw the apparition, 23 percent were sitting, 19 percent were standing still, and 18 percent were walking. Eighty-four percent of the apparitions were seen, 37 percent were heard, 15 percent touched the perceiver, and 8 percent were smelt. Only 14 percent of the apparitions spoke.

We will see that the difficulty in using these apparitions as proof that there is life after death is that it is hard to distinguish them from misperceptions and hallucinations and to show that they really are the spirits of deceased persons. One way of doing this would be to show that the spirit has information known to the dead person but not to the person who sees the spirit. If the spirit can communicate this information to the living person, and if this information is found to be true, then we have some evidence that the spirit may be that of the dead person.[2]

Unfortunately, most of these cases are from a long time ago, when researchers were not skilled in designing tests for the validity of the cases or in ruling out fraud. In general, in this book, I restrict the research and examples to the last 30 years. If the phenomena exist, there must be recent examples. If there are no recent examples, then I remain a skeptic.

Apparitions are more believable as evidence for survival if several people have the experience independently of one another and if the spirit has detailed characteristics unknown to the person seeing the spirit, but later found to be correct.

Two types of apparitions are commonly reported: apparitions that appear to those who are dying but fully conscious (commonly called deathbed visions), and apparitions of deceased loved ones who appear to the survivors (commonly called widow hallucinations, since they are most often reported by widows).

People also contact the dead through mediums. Occasionally, medi-

ums enter into trances and may even be possessed by the dead spirit (and talk as if they were the dead person or communicate the messages through automatic writing). More commonly, the medium remains fully conscious and simply passes on messages from the deceased people.

My mother once went to a medium in England, along with a small group of fellow believers. At one point the medium asked if the name Moore was familiar to anyone in the group. My mother told him that it was her maiden name. The medium said that he had her dead husband present, to which my mother replied that she was not aware that he had died. (She had been divorced from him for many years.) The medium then suggested that it was her brother. My mother replied that, although her brother had a weak heart, she was not aware that he had died. After talking to other members of the group, he finally returned to my mother and said that maybe it was her brother-in-law. My mother's brother-in-law was indeed dead, and so the medium and my mother accepted this identity for the spirit. The medium then talked to my mother while apparently possessed by her dead brother-in-law, but no specific information was passed on that could confirm the identity of the spirit. My mother was very satisfied with the experience, but it provided no evidence for survival after death that I could accept.

Reincarnation, the possibility that we have lived previous lives and will go on to live future lives, is another source of evidence for life after death. The evidence comes from those who remember previous lives. What is critical here is that investigators rule out the possibility that the person has learned this information during their present life and confirm that the person gives information about the previous existence that can be validated. This has proved to be difficult.

The near-death experiences of those who have had a "near-death event" (that is, have "almost died"), but who have been resuscitated, have also been used to confirm life after death, since these experiences appear to involve the existence of spirits and of the existence of a spiritual world aside from our earthly world.

Kastenbaum concluded his review of the evidence with one puzzling question. If there is life after death, then why are the relevant phenomena so rare? Why don't we see apparitions more often, and why don't all of us see them? Why don't we all remember previous lives, and why don't those of us who almost die all have near-death experiences? For example, my heart stopped several times a few years back, in 1995, for periods of more than 30 seconds (so that I was given a pacemaker), and I did not have a near-death experience. I experienced nothing, and I was very disappointed.

Evidence We Will Not Consider

There are several phenomena that appear to be related to the possibility of life after death, but which are not death-related. Rather, they provide evidence that perhaps the mind and body are not firmly glued together and that a spirit could exist without a body. For example, some have argued that out-of-body experiences that occur in other than life-threatening situations support the notion of life after death since they imply that the mind and body are separate and that the mind can exist without the body. Of course, proving the reality of these out-of-body experiences involves the same difficulties as proving the reality of the out-of-body experiences that occur in near-death experiences. The present book does not examine the evidence for the first kind, because of our focus on dying and death.

Similarly, there are a variety of phenomena, such as ghosts in general and haunted houses, which I will not explore in great detail. My wife, when she learned that I was writing this book, asked me whether I planned to include examples that she had seen on television of parapsychologists investigating haunted houses with instruments to measure "energy." My answer was no. First, the term "parapsychologist" has no formal meaning. Anyone can call himself or herself a parapsychologist. In contrast, psychologists are licensed by state boards, and only those so licensed can call themselves psychologists. I am not a psychologist; I am a professor (albeit of psychology).

Second, to explore whether houses with spirits have different "energies," the instrument used must be clearly described so that anyone could buy or construct one. I have no idea what the people in those televisions shows are using. Third, to show the presence of "energy," we would have to locate, say, 20 haunted houses and 20 normal houses. Then a person who did not know which house was of which type would have to visit each of the 40 houses with the same instrument (whatever it is) and make identical measurements in the same way in each house. Then, the readings would have to be compared using appropriate statistical methods. I have not found any report of such an experiment. This book will review and discuss only reports and discussions published in reputable scholarly journals (of which there are many as a perusal of the bibliography of this book will indicate) by expert scholars in the field.

Poltergeists are sometimes thought to be spirits, possibly from deceased persons, who move objects about in a house, often violently. Some investigators simply see this as the phenomenon of psychokinesis, in which a living person can move objects in his or her vicinity by means of their psychic powers (Roll, 1976). Although poltergeist phenomena

could be explained as the result of the actions of spirits, there has been no scientific research to test this explanation. Almost all reports on poltergeists (as well as most reports on apparitions and ghosts) have been concerned with convincing the reader that the phenomenon was real and not fraudulently produced (e.g., Gauld and Cornell, 1979; MacKenzie, 1971; Tyrrell, 1963), even those from reputable investigators in the field (e.g., Stevenson, 1972), and most have been old cases being discussed from a modern perspective. In virtually no cases have the poltergeists (or ghosts and apparitions) provided information that could be checked systematically against existing records for its accuracy (as is the case in the methodologically sound studies of reincarnation, which we will discuss later). But this phenomenon is discussed briefly in chapter 20.

How Common Are Death-Related Experiences?

Haraldsson (1985) surveyed residents in Iceland in 1974 and found that 31 percent believed in reincarnation and 28 percent believed that it was possible to contact the dead. Although 31 percent reported having experienced apparitions of deceased people (versus 11 percent having experienced apparitions of living people), only 2 percent remembered past lives. Haraldsson also reported comparative percentages from surveys in other nations. For example, the percentage of respondents reporting contact with the dead varied from 9 percent in Norway to 41 percent in Iceland, with a median of 16 percent (reported for Belgium, Ireland and Spain).

What Do We Mean by Life-After-Death?

Thouless (1979, 1984) noted that the issue of life after death involves at least two questions. The first is whether my stream of consciousness continues after I am physiologically dead; that is, whether my thoughts, feelings and perceptions survive my death. This may be called the *survival of consciousness*. The second question is whether David Lester as my friends know me will survive, and whether I will be able to communicate with my friends and they with me. This may be called the *survival of personality*. Notice that a yes to the second question implies a yes to the first. The reverse is not true. My consciousness could survive, but you and I might not be able to communicate. You would have no knowledge that my consciousness has survived.

Survival of consciousness could be an *indefinite continuation* (that is,

there would no end to the survival) with or without a quasi-material body. This appears to characterize the type of individual contacted by mediums. The survival could be in the form of *intermittent revivals* as in the case of reincarnation or *terminal revival* as in case of resurrection. This last possibility is very important. The Christian Bible is decidedly in favor of resurrection. In Christian resurrection, we die, and we are not resurrected until the end of time, whenever that may be. Thus, we should expect to endure a period of "no consciousness" until we are resurrected some hundreds or thousands of years hence, when time ends. Vicchio noted that modern Christian thought has tended to downplay this scenario in favor of an immortality that begins as soon as we die.

If There Is No Life After Death, How Can We Achieve Immortality?

One of the reasons people like to believe in life after death is that they cannot conceive of death and they want to live forever. If there were no life after death, then immortality would be impossible.

There are, however, ways of achieving limited immortality. Our children, grandchildren and later descendants are all determined in part by their chromosomal inheritance from us, and so we survive genetically.

We also live on in the memory of others and in the way we touch their lives. We may create lasting works of art, science, literature, music, philanthropy or social innovations that affect later generations.

And since the world at this instant is determined by all that has happened up to this point, we are part of this grand design (or pattern) and, were we not here, the present and therefore the future would not be quite the same.

In these ways, we affect the future and are part of the future. So even if there is no life after death, our impact on the universe will continue after our demise.

Part One

Views on Life After Death

1

Religious Views on Life After Death

One pole of the spectrum of belief is that human life begins at birth and ends at death. There is no survival in any form after death. This belief is a rational one based on observable information. People can see death but not beyond it, and so life after death does not exist. This belief sometimes leads to the feeling that life has no meaning.

At the other extreme is the belief that people are simply embodied spirits or souls. Humans are not, therefore, material beings but rather spiritual, immaterial, nonspatial and invisible. The essential spirit was never created and is immortal. It has always existed and always will. This belief leaves no room for human choice or deliberate action. If immortality is inevitable, then morality is irrelevant and God has no power. Perhaps people are divine sparks from the creator and will eventually be reunited with this creator; or perhaps the notion is an illusion, that individual selves exist and there is no individual soul.

The Beliefs of Primitive Peoples and Early Civilizations

Swanson (1964) took a sample of 50 primitive societies from around the world and found that 26 percent of them believed in reincarnation. Twelve of the societies believed that the dead can return in human form, and one society believed that they can also return in animal form.

Swanson suggested that when people live in small hamlets, compounds of extended families, small nomadic bands or scattered rural

neighborhoods, then the members of the small group rely on each other for reaching decisions because it is not easy to go outside of the small group for new resources. Thus, the particular potentialities of each group member are appreciated, and the effects that each person has on the group, such as technological inventiveness or storytelling ability, are felt after the person's death. In these groups, Swanson thought, a belief in reincarnation would be more likely since it seems to symbolize this persistence of a person's influence on the society. His analysis of the beliefs from the 50 societies supported his prediction.

Swanson found also that two-thirds of the primitive societies he studied believed that ancestral spirits exist and may, in some cases, have an active influence on the living. Swanson found that a belief that ancestral spirits have an active role in the affairs of the living was stronger in societies where the governing bodies of the society were based on kinship. Sumner and Kelly (1927), on the other hand, have suggested that people may believe in ancestral spirits because they see such spirits in their dreams.

The ancient Egyptians believed that the dead had the same needs as the living and the same involvement in day-to-day affairs (Zandee, 1960). The dead needed to be fed, clothed and made comfortable and to have their emotional needs taken care of. The Egyptians were also very concerned with the putrefaction of the body and decay. They believed that contact with excrement was very dangerous and would hasten putrefaction. As a result, they purged themselves once a month using enemas and emetics. Since they believed that the dead walked upside down on the underside of the world, they feared that excrement might end up in the dead person's mouth, and they composed spells for the dead to prevent this happening, spells which can be seen inscribed on the coffins. The practice of embalming was, in part, to prevent putrefaction in the deceased person.

Opoku (1989) and Wiredu (1989) have discussed the African view of life after death, focusing mainly on west African nations (such as Ghana and Nigeria). Death is regarded as a journey to a person's original home and not as an end or an annihilation. The dead do not lose their identity. They maintain their status and their social and familial roles, and they continue to have obligations toward the living. They keep watch over the affairs of the living and reward or punish the living accordingly.

Some of the funeral rituals are designed to help the dead person journey to his or her home. The body is washed and dressed appropriately for a journey, and personal belongings are placed in the coffin, such as toiletries, a drinking cup and money. Tools may be put in the coffin so that the deceased can continue his trade. Messages may be given to the deceased

to take to the other world. In olden days, servants and wives of the chief were killed so that they might accompany him, and many took their lives voluntarily.

The Akan of Ghana believe that each person has a divine spark (*okra*), which comes from and links people to the creator. The divine spark cannot be destroyed, but it can return to its source. Furthermore, the Akan believe that people are united with the world because the same divine force permeates the whole of nature. Human life is, therefore, a part of an ongoing reality, and death is simply the reassimilation of an individual into the reality of the world.

The Akan believe that those whose lives are cut short (as in the case of an accidental death) do not always gain immediate access to the land of the dead. They may wait in a kind of purgatory until they can be born again to live out their full lives. One form of reincarnation occurs when a mother loses a baby and conceives another soon afterwards. It is assumed that the new baby is the same person as the one who died.

Christian Beliefs About Life After Death

The American Heritage Dictionary defines *eschatology* as the branch of theology that is concerned with the ultimate or last things, such as death, judgment, heaven and hell. It pertains to Christian theology, and in a narrow sense it refers to the belief in the second coming of Christ, which will produce the divine completion of the world. However, theologians have broadened the word to cover all that is in the Scriptures about the future life.

Eschatology in the Old Testament is not well explored but the ideas are more fully developed in the Apocrypha and the Book of Revelation. The ideas became universal (applied to everyone), individual (so that God's judgment was directed toward individuals rather than nations), transcendental (the transition to the future life was a result of miraculous divine acts) and dogmatic (the vague predictions were systematized). The eschatology of the New Testament is focused on the hope of the righteous rather than the doom of the sinful, but it is not as systematized. In the last 2,000 years, the various sects of Christianity have each developed their own eschatology.

In a recent article, Van Biema (1997) noted that American religion seems almost allergic to mentioning, let alone discussing, heaven. Heaven is AWOL. Many Americans believe in heaven, but their concept of it has grown foggier over the years, and their ministers refer to it less often.

There are some traditional beliefs about life after death. It is interesting to note that some Christian groups believed in reincarnation until the Council of Nice banned such beliefs in 553 A.D. Therefore, it is clear that Christian beliefs in life after death have changed dramatically over the last 2,000 years.

There are many Christian sects, and their beliefs about life after death differ considerably (Johnson and McGee, 1991).

The Assemblies of God, a Pentecostal church, believe that the description of heaven in the Book of Revelation is to be taken literally. Since the spirit does not require a body, they permit cremation and organ donation, but they recommend embalming as a gesture of respect for the body. When resurrection occurs, God will provide whatever is necessary for the new immortal bodies. Life on earth is the only chance to meet the criteria for entering heaven; there is no second chance for salvation after death. Furthermore, only true Christians (of any sect) can enter Heaven. The final judgment and resurrection will also mean the end of the earth as people know it.

The Churches of Christ have a similar set of beliefs. Interestingly, at the beginning of this century, members of the Churches of Christ believed that people would not recognize one another in heaven, but they now believe that people will. Seventh Day Adventists too believe in a literal heaven where people will have perfect bodies. However, rather than going to hell, the wicked perish and their existences cease for ever.

Baptists believe in a heaven and hell (although they do not describe it as precisely as the Assemblies of God) and in a final judgment and resurrection. They differ from the Assemblies of God in believing in the existence of intermediate places. Lutherans in general reject speculations about the nature of life after death or heaven and hell. They do, however, believe that salvation is a gift from God and cannot be earned. Presbyterians also reject speculation about the nature of heaven and hell, but some groups of Presbyterians do believe in bodily resurrection and that people will be able to recognize one another. Presbyterian groups differ in whether they believe that the soul exists during the time between death and resurrection. Methodists are a diverse group, with some believing in a graphic and literal heaven and hell while others see the Biblical descriptions as metaphors.

Roman Catholics believe that the nature of people's life on earth determines whether people go to heaven or hell, but they see these as conditions rather than as places. They see resurrection as a metaphor for eternal life as a full and integrated person rather than as a resuscitation to a worldly life.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons) differs from all of the above groups, holding that people exist as spirits with God before their birth, but that all memories of this previous existence are blotted out at birth. This is not reincarnation, since each person remains the same individual before, during and after life. Marriage for Mormons is for all eternity (not "till death us do part"). The Mormons also believe in a heaven of three levels for different degrees of worthiness. The Mormons believe that people will have the same body in heaven as they had on earth, but that it will be perfect—free from all ailments and deformities.

Finally, the Unitarians have no firm credo and tend to be agnostic about the issue of life after death.

Jewish Concepts of Life After Death

Judaism focuses more on heaven than on hell, for would a caring God really create a hell? Heaven is thought to involve being with God and one's family and reaching an understanding of the mysteries of life. Heaven is open to all people, not merely Jews. Resurrection is accepted, although for Reform Jews it involves only a resurrection only of the soul.

The Concept of Life After Death in Islam

The Islamic view of life after death is quite similar to some of the Christian beliefs (Muwahidi, 1989). The Qur'an (or Koran) asserts that God will recreate people after death and give them an everlasting existence commensurate with their bodily acts, psychological states and spiritual achievements. The nature of people's life after death is dependent upon their deeds on this earthly life.

After death, people are instantly recreated and dwell in an interim world (*Barzakh*) in a similar body and with similar memories and psychological characteristics. Two angels (*Nakir* and *Munkar*) question each person about his or her life on earth, and those who are judged to have failed are sent to be tormented until the final judgment. Some of those who pass the test go immediately to the day of judgment while others enjoy a blissful life until that day comes.

After the end of the world as people know it, all human beings will gathered together for the final judgment, and God will decide who will go to heaven and who will go to hell. The Qur'an presents a concrete picture of both heaven and hell, which some believe to be literally true and oth-

ers believe to be a metaphor. Heaven is perhaps best conceived of as a place where the human body, mind, and soul are harmoniously integrated and can give full expression of sublime feelings for God, while enjoying the gifts that God can provide. Life in hell is painful and full of frustration.

The Baha'i Concept of Life After Death

Those of the Baha'i faith acknowledge that knowledge of life after death can be only hazy. They believe that people retain their identities and their memories and that people will recognize one another. They do not view heaven and hell as physical places, nor as fixed conditions of the soul.

The Hindu and Buddhist Concepts of Life After Death

For Hinduism, birth and death refer only to the body. Five elements come together to form the body (earth, water, fire, air and ether), and these dissolve after death. But the soul, *atman*, is birthless and deathless. Death merely frees the *atman* from the body (Prasad, 1989).

Hindus believe that the *atman* goes for a time to the realm of the fathers, *Pitraloka*, after the body's death and then returns to the earth in another body, an embodied soul (*jivatman*). This reincarnation of the atman continues until it lives an earthly life of goodness and virtue, after which it goes to the realm of Lord Brahma, *Brahmaloka*. It is the goal of every atman to become free from the burden of rebirth and to attain salvation, *moksha*, from the cycle of life and rebirth, samsara.

The doctrine of karma asserts that people's deeds play an important role in this process. The atman is rewarded or punished for the deeds performed in previous lives, and one of the punishments entails rebirth. Many less educated Hindus believe, however, that funeral ceremonies can affect the outcome of this process.

Buddhism has many sects, each with different beliefs (Klein, 1991). In general, though, Buddhists see the world as having no beginning and no creator. Souls are born and die, only to be reborn. Since life entails suffering and since life always creates reasons for future rebirths, the only escape from this round is by changing the mind. The different Buddhist traditions prescribe different paths which a person must follow in order to achieve liberation from the continual cycle of birth and death (samsara).

The Mahayana schools believe that each person can attain freedom from samsara, becoming at least an Arhat (the first step — a liberated being) or perhaps attaining true Buddhahood (the final step — an enlightened being), never again being reborn. Bodhisattvas are enlightened souls who postpone Nirvana and continue to be reincarnated in order to help others toward enlightenment.

The Tibetan Buddhist leaders are reincarnations of semidivine beings. For example, the Dalai Lama is the reincarnation of Avalokites, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, and the Panchen Lama is the reincarnation of Amitabha, the Bodhisattva of Unlimited Light. Ever since the death of the first Dalai Lama in 1475, after a Lama dies, monks have set out to find the child who is the recently deceased Lama's reincarnation, using dreams and visions and, eventually, tests to see if the child has knowledge of the previous Lama.

2

Who Believes in Life After Death?

Gallup and Proctor (1982) surveyed Americans and found that 67 percent believed in a life after death. This belief was more common in women than in men (72 percent versus 61 percent), in whites than in nonwhites (69 percent versus 54 percent), in Protestants than in Catholics (74 percent versus 64 percent), in the college-educated, in the South, and in rural areas, but it did not vary consistently with age or income.

The most common expectations for life after death were to have no more problems or troubles, a good or even better life, peacefulness, no sickness or pain, and happiness. Fewer people believed in hell than believed in heaven (53 percent versus 71 percent). Of those who believed in heaven, 20 percent felt that their chances of going to heaven were excellent, 44 percent that their chances were good, 29 percent fair, 4 percent poor and 4 percent had no opinion.

Only 23 percent believed in reincarnation, but belief in reincarnation was stronger in women, the West, those who did not go to college, the young (under 30 years of age), those with lower incomes, Catholics, and those living in towns.[1] In contrast, 46 percent believed that life exists on other planets, 24 percent believed that contact with the dead is possible, and 20 percent believed that science will prove that life after death exists.[2]

Greeley and Hout (1999) documented that more Americans believe in life after death these days than in earlier days, primarily because the grandchildren of the immigrants who came to America in the early part of the twentieth century believe in life after death more than did their parents and grandparents. This was especially true of both the Roman Catholics and the Jews. For the Roman Catholics, Greeley and Hout

believed that this was due to the influence of the Irish Catholic immigrants in the early part of the twentieth century who organized Catholic institutions and dominated the American Catholic hierarchy for many years. Greeley and Hout could not account for the increase in the belief in life after death among Jews.

Kalish and Reynolds (1976) surveyed residents of Los Angeles and found that whites were more likely to believe in life after death than African Americans (68 percent versus 59 percent), who in turn were more likely to believe in life after death than Japanese Americans (47 percent) and Mexican Americans (40 percent). Whites were also more likely to wish that there was a life after death (83 percent) than African Americans (80 percent), Mexican Americans (69 percent) and Japanese Americans (51 percent).

Fox (1992) examined data from a nationwide sample of Americans and found that 36 percent reported contact with the dead. Women reported contact with the dead more than men did, but age, race, income, marital status and religious affiliation were not associated with the experience.[3]

Palmer (1979) surveyed community residents in Virginia and found that 17 percent had experienced apparitions, 8 percent had experienced communication with the dead, 8 percent recalled events from previous lives (the majority in dreams), while 68 percent had experienced déjà vu. The majority of the apparitions were auditory rather than visual, as were the communications with the dead. Just over 30 percent felt that survival was a certainty, with 40 percent believing that it was possible or probable. Only 2 percent believed that reincarnation was certain, while 8 percent believed it probable and about 30 percent possible.

Irwin (1985) found that 12 percent of college students had had reincarnation experiences, but those who had were not more likely to have experienced other phenomena such as ESP, out-of-body experiences or déjà vu.

Scientists and Doctors

Gallup and Proctor (1982) surveyed famous scientists and doctors and found that far fewer believed in life after death than a random sample of American adults; only 16 percent of the scientists and 32 percent of the physicians believed in life after death compared to 67 percent of the general public. Only 4 percent of the scientists and 15 percent of the physicians believed in hell compared to 53 percent of the general public. The pattern continued. Only 8 percent of the scientists and 24 percent of the physicians believed

in heaven, only 8 percent of the scientists and 9 percent of the physicians believed in reincarnation, and only 5 percent of the scientists and 9 percent of the physicians believed that it is possible to contact the dead.

Fewer of these groups had had near-death experiences (only 9 percent versus 15 percent of the general public), and the majority of those did not believe that their experiences supported the existence of life after death. They tended, instead, to give physiological explanations for their near-death experience.

Children

McIntire et al. (1972) found that belief in the continuation of the spirit after death and in reincarnation peaked in children and adolescents 13 to 14 years of age. This belief decreased after the age of 14 in Protestant and Jewish adolescents, but not in Catholic adolescents. Catholic adolescents more often believed in spiritual continuation than did Protestant adolescents, with Jewish adolescents believing least often.

Americans Versus Other Nationalities

In a survey conducted by Gallup and Proctor (1982), Americans appeared to believe much more often in hell and in the devil than people in other nations:

	Hell	**The Devil**
USA	65%	60%
Greece	62%	67%
Norway	36%	38%
Finland	29%	26%
The Netherlands	28%	29%
Austria	26%	23%
Switzerland	25%	25%
West Germany	25%	25%
Great Britain	23%	21%
France	22%	17%
Sweden	17%	21%

Residents of the United States and Greece appeared to be very different from other Europeans in the strength of their beliefs in hell and the devil. The differences in these scores do not seem to be related to whether the nation is predominantly Roman Catholic or Protestant. Unfortunately, Gallup and Proctor did not report on nations with other belief systems.

Haraldsson (1985) reviewed surveys of experiences of psychic phenomena in different nations and found that the percentage reporting having contact with the dead ranged from 9 percent in Norway to 41 percent in Iceland.

Associations Between Beliefs

Randall and Desrosiers (1980) found that belief that some people to contact the dead was associated with belief in fortunetelling. Tobacyk and Milford (1983) found that belief in reincarnation and communication with the dead was associated with belief in other paranormal phenomena including ESP, witchcraft, superstitions, precognition (as in dreams predicting the future), and extraordinary life forms (such as Big Foot). Thalbourne, Dunbar and Delin (1995) found that belief in life after death was associated with belief in all types of paranormal phenomena. Lester (1993) surveyed undergraduates and found that belief in life after death (found in 76 percent of the students) was associated with belief in astrology, mediums, and ghosts, but not with belief in God, heaven, hell, UFOs, faith healing, ESP, or life on other planets.

It seems, therefore, that those who believe in life after death and related phenomena (such as the possibility of contacting the dead) also tend to believe in many other (but not necessarily all) paranormal and odd phenomena.

Correlates of Belief in Life After Death

What personality traits and experiences are associated with the belief in a life after death? There have been many studies of this question, but most have included all kinds of beliefs in their survey and not focused solely on belief in life after death.

First of all, having death-related experiences is sometimes found to be associated with believing in life after death. For example, Greeley (1975) found that belief in life after death in a nationwide sample of Americans was stronger in those who reported having some kind of contact with the dead and in those who reported having mystical experiences. However, Berman (1974) found that belief in life after death was not associated with having had a life-threatening experience in the past year.

Research on the death anxiety of believers has produced conflicting results. Thalbourne (1996a) found that believers had less death anxiety, while Berman and Hays (1973) reported that they had more death anxi-

ety. On the other hand, Dolnick (1987) found that belief in life after death was not associated with the fear of death, although believers did accept death more and deny death less than nonbelievers, a finding replicated by Shadinger et al. (1999). Rose and O'Sullivan (2002) found that death anxiety was not associated with either a belief in life after death in general, nor the type of life after death believed in. Brink (1978) found that belief in reincarnation was not associated with crude measures of anxiety, such as the fear of death or having recurring, frightening dreams.

As regards personality traits, Berman and Hays (1973) found that belief in life after death was not associated with belief in an internal locus of control (that is, accepting responsibility for your behavior versus blaming the consequences on others or on luck and fate) or with gender. Berman (1974) found that the more religious subjects had a stronger belief in life after death, and Roman Catholics had a stronger belief than Protestants, who had a stronger belief than those with other or no religious beliefs. Hillstrom and Strachan (2000) found that Protestant believers were less likely to believe that contact with the dead was possible, or in ghosts and other paranormal phenomena, compared to nominal believers and nonbelievers. Tobacyk and Milford (1983) found that believing in reincarnation and in communication with the dead was less common in those with religious beliefs, but they found no gender differences.

Hynson (1978–1979) found that belief in life after death was associated with having a positive view of human nature (such as believing that others can be trusted). Lester (1993; Lester and Willging, 1997) found that those who believed in life after death did not differ in the degree of psychological disturbance from those who did not believe in life after death. (Those who believed in a life after death were more extraverted.) However, Thalbourne et al. (1995) found that believers were more neurotic than nonbelievers. Houran and Williams (1998) found that those who more tolerant of ambiguity were more likely to believe in and to have experienced paranormal phenomena, endorsing such statements as "I have lived before" and "I have seen ghosts."

Thalbourne et al. (1995) found that believers had higher scores on a test of magical thinking, while Thalbourne and Haraldsson (1984) found that believers were more conventional, group-oriented and subdued and less radical, self-sufficient and independent. They did not differ in believing in an internal locus of control.

After reviewing all the research (including the studies reviewed briefly here and those not mentioned), Thalbourne (1989) concluded that a belief in life after death was more common in women, older people, those with a religious affiliation (with the exception of Jews), those who were more

religious, those who were socially and politically conservative, and those who were happy.

The Concept of Life After Death

Thalbourne (1996b, 1998–1999) asked people about their beliefs in life after death and found that two clear dimensions emerged: a belief in immortality and a belief in reincarnation. He described four types of believers: pure reincarnationists (belief in reincarnation but not immortality), extinctionists (who believe in neither), immortalists (who believe in immortality but not reincarnation), and eclectics (who believe in both).[4]

Thalbourne found that his four groups differed considerably. Extinctionists tended to be more liberal, less inclined to interpret their dreams, less easily hypnotized, less religious and less often believers in the paranormal. Immortalists were the most religious, more conservative and idealistic, moderately hypnotizable and moderate in their belief in the paranormal. Reincarnationists and eclectics were more liberal, more hypnotizable, moderately religious, and more inclined to interpret their dreams. These latter two groups also scored higher on a measure of schizotypal personality, a set of traits that are milder versions of those shown by schizophrenics. Reincarnationists and eclectics also scored higher on a scale to measure *transliminality*, the belief in the ability of the mind to sense stimuli from other modalities, such as subliminal and supraliminal stimuli.

Flynn and Kunkel (1987) examined data from a nationwide sample of Americans and found that a belief in life after death was not stronger in those who were worse off—of a lower social class or dissatisfied with their financial status—or with experience of recent traumas, including the death of a spouse. These people were more likely to view life after death as a "paradise of pleasure and delight."

They analyzed the conceptions that the people had of life after death and found three clusters of beliefs:

1. Otherworldy rewards:
    - a life of peace and tranquility
    - a paradise of pleasure and delight
    - a place of loving intellectual communication
    - union with God
    - reunion with loved ones
2. Worldly rewards:
    - a life of intense action

- like here on earth, only better
- a paradise of pleasure and delight

3. No rewards:
   - life without many earthly joys
   - a pale, shadowy form of life
   - spiritual life involving the mind, not the body

Lester and his colleagues (2001–2002) asked undergraduate students about 41 different aspects of life after death. They found that those who believed in a life after death (89 percent of the sample) most often expected to be reunited with family and friends (95 percent), that the afterlife would be comforting (93 percent), that there is a heaven (90 percent) and that the transition to death would be peaceful (90 percent). Only 59 percent expected a day of judgment, 45 percent to have sexual desire in the afterlife, 19 percent to have hunger and thirst in the afterlife, and 12 percent to experience pain. The view of the afterlife was more positive in those who believed that one's life was owned by God (rather than by the state or by oneself), those who had an internal locus of control, and by Roman Catholics (as compared to Protestants).

Do Beliefs Change in the Face of Threat?

Osarchuk and Tatz (1973) compared how students with strong and weak beliefs in life after death responded to threats. Faced with a stimulus that might arouse death anxiety (viewing death scenes), those with a strong belief in life after death showed an increase in the strength of this belief. Those with a weak belief did not change their attitude, nor did those faced with the prospect of pain (electric shock) or those who did not face any fear-arousing stimuli.

Discussion

The research reviewed here suggests that those who believe in life after death tend to have open minds about other strange phenomena such as ESP and astrology. Believers are not more psychologically disturbed than nonbelievers, nor do the two groups differ consistently in their fear of death. The personalities of believers may differ a little from those of nonbelievers, but not in any remarkable way. Believers and nonbelievers alike are mostly just ordinary folk.

Part Two

Near-Death Experiences

3

Near-Death Experiences: Descriptions, Frequency and Types

Some people, when they come close to death, perhaps as a result of illness, during surgery or in an accident, have an experience that seems to be remarkably uniform. Most of those who have the experience report well-documented features, such as moving through a tunnel. Some of these features seem to anticipate the possibility of a real existence after death.

Although those who report near-death experiences did not die, but instead recovered and were able to tell researchers about the experience, some think it is possible that, had they not recovered, their near-death experience would have been the beginning of their life after death. Could this be true?

The next few chapters will describe the near-death experience, look at the research that has been conducted on the experience, discuss the theories that have been proposed both to explain and to "explain away" this experience, and see whether the experience does provide evidence for the existence of life after death.

The Near-Death Experience: A Description[1]

Although people have described near-death experiences in previous centuries, the first formal description of what people experience as they approach death was provided by Moody (1976) based on descriptions given to him by people whom he interviewed. It consisted of 14 elements:

1. The experience is characterized as inexpressible, that is, it cannot be put into words.

2. The person hears doctors or bystanders pronounce him or her dead.

3. There is a pleasant feeling of peace and quiet.

4. Unusual auditory sensations are experienced which may be unpleasant, such as a buzzing, ringing, or tinkling of bells.

5. There is the sensation of being pulled through a dark tunnel.

6. There is an out-of-body experience in which the mind seems to float out of the body and looks down upon it.

7. People often encounter spiritual beings who are there to ease the transition to death or to tell them that they must return to their bodies.

8. The people encounter a very bright light, which is experienced as a "being."

9. There is a review of life's experiences.

10. They may approach a border or a limit such as a body of water, a mist, a door or a fence.

11. The people experience coming back to their bodies.

12. There is a reluctance to tell others about their experience after they have recovered and are back among the living.

13. The experience has a profound effect on their lives, usually positive.

14. The experience changes people's attitudes toward death, typically making them less fearful of death.

In a second book on the topic, Moody (1977) added four new elements:

15. A moment of enlightenment or vision of knowledge, a realm of existence in which all knowledge coexists.

16. A city of light.

17. A realm of bewildered spirits, often trapped in an unfortunate existence.

18. Supernatural residues, in which the person was saved from physical death by some spiritual being or agent.

A composite account sounds like the following:

> A man is dying and, as he reaches the point of greatest physical distress, he hears himself pronounced dead by his doctor. He begins to hear an uncomfortable noise, a loud ringing or buzzing, and at the same time feels himself moving very rapidly through a long dark tunnel. After this, he sud-

> denly finds himself outside of his own physical body, but still in the immediate physical environment, and he sees his own body from a distance, as though he is a spectator. He watches the resuscitation attempt from this unusual vantage point and is in a state of emotional upheaval.
>
> After a while, he collects himself and becomes more accustomed to his odd condition. He notices that he still has a "body," but one of a very different nature and with very different powers from the physical body he has left behind. Soon other things begin to happen. Others come to meet and to help him. He glimpses the spirits of relatives and friends who have already died, and a loving, warm spirit of a kind he has never encountered before — a being of light — appears before him. This being asks him a question, nonverbally, to make him evaluate his life and helps him along by showing him a panoramic, instantaneous playback of the major events of his life. At some point he finds himself approaching some sort of barrier or border, apparently representing the limit between earthly life and the next life. Yet he finds that he must go back to the earth, that the time for his death has not yet come. At this point he resists, for by now he is taken up with his experiences in the afterlife and does not want to return. He is overwhelmed by intense feelings of joy, love, and peace. Despite his attitude, though, he somehow reunites with his physical body and lives.
>
> Later he tries to tell others, but he has trouble doing so. In the first place, he can find no human words adequate to describe these unearthly episodes. He also finds that others scoff, so he stops telling other people. Still, the experience affects his life profoundly, especially his views about death and its relationship to life [Moody, 1977, 5–6].

Moody raised several interesting hypotheses in his books. For example, he claimed to find no differences in the experiences of those who were religious and those who were not, or between the experiences of those whose almost-death had different causes; however, he carried out no research to test his hypotheses.

Ring (1980) described the near-death experience as having five stages:

1. peace, experienced by 60 percent of those in his sample of people who had a near-death incident,
2. separation from the body, experienced by 37 percent,
3. entering the darkness, experienced by 23 percent,
4. seeing the light, experienced by 16 percent, and
5. entering the light, experienced by 10 percent.

Ring devised a scale to measure the depth of this core experience. The different elements are weighted, and scores can range from zero to 29. A score greater then ten represents a deep experience, six to nine a moderate experience, and zero to five a nonexperience.

Widdison and Lundahl (1993) provided a description of the physical

environment "seen" during the near-death experience based on a variety of published reports. They noted that there are sometimes landscape elements (such as parks and lakes), plants (such as grass, vines and pine forests), animals (such as birds, cattle and sheep), and architecture (such as gates, buildings and houses). Serdahely (1990) found that pets occasionally appeared in the near-death experiences of children and adolescents.

Lundahl (1992b) wondered whether angels ever appeared in the near-death experiences, and he suggested that the beings of light and persons not previously known to the subject could be angels. These persons typically serve as guides, messengers and escorts.

Other Features of the Near-Death Experience

Other elements in near-death experiences have occasionally been reported. For example, Ring (1988) noted that a small percentage of near-death accounts have apparent perceptions of the future. These may be personal (flash-forwards) or global (prophetic visions), and they are usually found in those who have a full near-death experience. For example, Walker et al. (1991) reported cases in which the people saw relatives grieving over their death. In one of his own studies, Ring's subjects seemed to agree that 1988 would be a year of disaster. This did not turn out to be the case, indicating that these perceptions of the future may not be accurate. Ring suggested that these are not really prophecies, but rather are reflections of the "psyche of the time" in which the people are living; that is, they symbolize the tenor of the times.

Lundahl (1992a) reported cases in which the subjects saw their future children. Interestingly, in these reports the subjects saw children, as opposed to infants or adults, and it curious that they appeared at one particular age rather than at other ages. In addition, Lundahl found one case in which the person saw herself as an unborn child.

Gibbs (1997) noted that recollections of the near-death experience are often accompanied by the emotion of surprise; Gibbs felt this lends an air of authenticity to the account. The feeling of surprise also indicates that the experience is a violation the people's usual assumptions and anticipations, and that the experience may involve the discovery of profound, new knowledge. An example was given by Greyson (1993, 393):

> I was watching this bevy of nurses and doctors rushing madly around the room, all very much intent on bringing that poor young girl back to life…. And then suddenly, I … realized with utter shock and amazement that that thin, pallid, bloody body was indeed my body.

Serdahely (1995) noted that near-death experiences may be accompanied by distress (see the next section), stages may be skipped, the tunnel element may be odd (it may, for example, by experienced as a fog or as a clockwise spinning vortex), the person may perceive friends who are still alive, and the life review may appear as a series of discrete still images.

Are There Unpleasant Near-Death Experiences?

Although most research into near-death experiences has focused on the pleasant experiences, some people do have unpleasant experiences. For example, Gallup and Proctor (1982) found that many people had experiences that included:

1. featureless, sometimes forbidding faces,
2. beings who are present but not at all comforting,
3. a sense of discomfort, especially emotional or mental unrest,
4. feelings of confusion about the experience,
5. a sense of being tricked or duped into ultimate destruction, and
6. fear about what the finality of death may involve.

Although Gallup and Proctor did not report the frequency of these negative near-death, they did say that only about 30 percent of those who have a close brush with death report anything positive about the experience. The rest described neutral or negative experiences. Irwin and Bramwell (1988) reported a near-death experience that was mixed, with both pleasant and unpleasant components.

What about Judgment Day and hell? Moody (1977) reported that many individuals who have a near-death experience report a sense of judgment that comes from within, an awareness of what they should have done and should not have done during their lives. Moody had never talked to someone who experienced anything like the Biblical hell.

However, other writers have documented cases which seem more like hell. For example:

> …Then I saw that I was getting out of my body. The next thing I remember was entering this gloomy room where I saw in one of the windows this huge giant with a grotesque face that was watching me. Running around the windowsill were little imps or elves that seemed to be with the giant. The giant beckoned me to come with him. I didn't want to go, but I had to. Outside was darkness but I could hear people moaning all around me. I

> could feel things moving about my feet. As we moved on through this tunnel or cave, things were getting worse. I remember I was crying. Then, for some reason the giant turned me loose and sent me back [Rawlings, 1978, 106].

Bonenfant (2001) reported the case of a six-year-old boy who reported meeting the Devil immediately after being hit by a car in near-fatal accident.

Rawlings suggested that these negative experiences tend to be reported immediately after the near-death incident, unlike the more positive reports, which are often reported to investigators months and years later.

Greyson and Bush (1992) collected 50 accounts of distressing near-death experiences and found that there were three types:

1. the typical near-death experience, which is reacted to with distress (that is, the person does not enjoy the experience at all),
2. experiences of nonexistence or eternal void, and
3. experiences with hellish imagery.

Bush (2002) found that people took one of three approaches to coping with these frightening near-death experiences. They saw them as wake-up calls to change their lives, disavowed them and saw them as mere concomitants of physiological changes in the brain, or saw no acceptable meaning in them and remained scared and confused.

Atwater (1992) described four types of near-death experiences: minimal, unpleasant or hellish, pleasant or heavenly, and transcendental. She noted that the same elements occurred in pleasant and unpleasant near-death experiences and usually in the same sequence. The interpretation and reaction to the content differed among the subjects, however. For example:

Pleasant Experiences	Unpleasant Experiences
• friendly beings	• lifeless or threatening apparitions
• beautiful environment	• barren or ugly expanses
• conversations or dialogues	• threats, screams or silence
• total acceptance and overwhelming sense of love	• danger and possibility of violence or torture
• feelings of warmth or a sense of heaven	• a feeling of cold and a sense of hell

Ring (1994) suggested that there were three major types of frightening near-death experiences: (1) regular near-dear death experiences but

with unpleasant emotions, (2) hellish near-death experiences, and (3) meaningless voids, which Ring hypothesized might be found only in those who had the near-death experience while on anesthetics. He hypothesized that the meaningless void might be the result of not being given an adequate amount of anesthetic, but this has not yet been tested. Ring (1996) suggested that nitrous oxide, in particular, might result in frightening near-death experiences, and he reported experiences on nitrous oxide that he thought resembled near-death experiences. However, the reports are very different from near-death experiences. A 32-year-old woman who was given nitrous oxide during a cesarian section birth, reported that "unknown people in a pop band repeatedly played the same sequence with continuously increasing volume. Suddenly, the noise stopped, and the patient felt frightened and sensed the destruction of both herself and the child" (Bergstrom and Bernstein, 1968, 541). Another described "a dreadful dream in which she was a cog in a slowly rotating cogwheel of the universe, ruled over by a derisive executioner.... Each time her cog gripped she felt an insufferable pain and heard a crashing sound. The universe was blown up in a chaos of pain" (Bergstrom and Bernstein, 1968, 542).

In addition, some people have reported very different experiences, although not necessarily negative. For example, Wren-Lewis reports that he simply dissolved "into an apparently spaceless and timeless void which was total no-thinkingness yet at the same time the most intense, blissful aliveness I have ever known" (1985, 4).

Are Near-Death Experiences Mystical Experiences?

Pennachio (1986) listed nine criteria for an experience to qualify as being a mystical experience, including a feeling of unity with the cosmos, transcendence of time and space, a deep positive mood, and a sense of sacredness and transiency. He felt that near-death experiences met these criteria. However, he did not carry out a statistical study of what proportion of near-death experiences (and other possibly mystical experiences) met these criteria.

The Frequency of Near-Death Experiences

One of the first questions to ask about near-death experiences is how many people have had them. In a national survey, Gallup and Proctor

(1982) found that 15 percent of Americans had been "on the verge of death or had a close call which involved any unusual experience at that time." This was more common in men than in women (17 percent versus 13 percent), in nonwhites, in those not going on to high school, in the West, in those over 50 years of age, in the poor, and in Protestants.

Of these 15 percent, the most common experiences were an overwhelming sense of peace and painlessness (11 percent), a fast review or reexamination of the individual's life (11 percent), a special sensation or feeling, such as the impression of being in an entirely different world (11 percent), an out-of-body sensation (9 percent), an acute visual perception of surroundings and events (8 percent), a feeling that special beings were present (8 percent), the presence of a blindingly bright light or series of lights (5 percent), the perception of a tunnel (3 percent), premonitions of some future event or events (2 percent), and a sense of hell and torment (1 percent). The results of several studies on the frequency of the various elements of the near-death experience are shown in the accompanying table.

Table 1— Frequency of Elements in Near-Death Experiences

	Normals[2]	Normals[3]	Normals[4]	Attempted Suicides[5]
Feeling of peace				100%
Out-of-body experience	65%	75%	93%	41%
Entering into darkness				53%
White or golden light	38%	48%		24%
Encountering a presence		49%		24%
Life review				24%
Deciding or being directed to return				35%
Another world				24%
Spirits of loved ones	25%		48%	24%
Beautiful music				12%
A tunnel	30%	31%		
Time distortion		79%		
ESP			45%	
Transcendental environment			40%	

Knoblauch (2001) conducted a random survey of Germans and found that 4 percent had had a near-death experience. The experience was on the average 13 years earlier and the average age of the people was presently 36. Only about half had actually been in a life-threatening situation at the time of the near-death experience.

Pacciolla (1996) sent a questionnaire to 125 patients in Italy who had

been resuscitated at his hospital. Thirty-two had died, but 64 responded to his letter. Of these, 24 had had a near-death experience that met Greyson's criteria for being a full near-death experience (a score of seven or more on his scale, discussed later in this chapter.

Walker and Russell (1989) surveyed psychologists in Illinois; 7 percent reported near-death experiences. Locke and Shontz (1983) found that 19 college students out of some 1,000 surveyed had been in life-threatening situations. Of these, nine had had near-death experiences.

In a survey of 145 senior citizens, Olson and Dulaney (1993) found that 46 had had near-death incidents, but only nine of these had had near-death experiences (five had a relatively full experience, and four had a relatively weak experience). (Three others said they had, but they had misunderstood the question. A further three said they had but were not able to be interviewed.)

Sabom and Kreutziger (1977) interviewed roughly 50 patients who had been in near-death events, mainly cardiac arrest with resuscitation, and found that three had had an out-of-the body experience (which Sabom and Kreutziger called autoscopy), seven traveled to another region or dimension (which Sabom and Kreutziger called transcendence), while one patient experienced both.[6]

In a later report, Sabom. (1982) gave details of the near-death experiences of 71 people, indicating which of ten elements were in each experience. This permits a statistical analysis of the experience. Lester (2000) found that the elements formed four factors (clusters): the first contained elements concerned with a transcendental environment and encountering other people; the second contained elements concerned with the life review and seeing a light; the third contained elements concerned with a subjective sense of being dead and being in a dark region or void; and the fourth contained the element of a sense of bodily separation. These four clusters were relatively independent of one another, and this means that they could be determined (or affected) by different factors. Sabom (1998) himself described four types of experience (but without presenting any statistical analysis): cognitive (where thoughts were predominant), affective (where pleasant emotions were predominant), paranormal (emphasizing out-of-body and ESP elements), and transcendental.

Knoblauch et al. (2001), in their survey of Germans, identified several types of near-death experiences: being in a transcendent reality, strong emotions, contrasts between light and dark, out-of-body experiences, panoramic memory and scenic experiences.

Schnaper and Panitz (1990) questioned 68 patients who had been unconscious. Forty-three had amnesia, while 25 reported some experi-

ence. All of the reports were unpleasant and involved three themes: being held prisoner, wrongdoings that would justify imprisonment, and death. No typical near-death experiences were reported.

Parnia et al. (2001) interviewed 63 consecutive patients with cardiac arrest soon after the problem. They found experiences reported by only seven of the patients, and only four of these were reasonably full near-death experiences.

Schwaninger et al. (2002) followed up 174 cardiac arrest patients, of whom 55 survived and 30 were able to be interviewed. Of these 30 patients, seven (23 percent) reported having a near-death experience when interviewed soon after the recovery. The most common features of the experience were peace and an out-of-body experience, followed by a brilliant light, a mystical presence, and deceased spirits or religious figures.

Must Near-Death Experiences Be Tied to the Dying Process?

Ring (1984) noted that many accounts have been recorded of experiences like near-death experiences but that did not occur during a near-death incident or dying process. He reported the case of a woman who had such an experience while delivering a eulogy for a friend at a funeral service. Ring concluded that the experience in a near-death experience has nothing to do with death or with the transition into death. It is simply one type of ultraconscious experience, to use a term coined by Dean (1975).

Rogo (1990b) reported inducing a near-death experience while in the hypnagogic state immediately prior to falling asleep, and Sutherland (1990b) reported a near-death experience that occurred in a murderer sitting in his prison cell, induced by the murderer putting himself in his victim's position. Howarth and Kellehear (2001) described cases in which the dying person and a healthy significant other by the bedside had similar, simultaneous near-death experiences.

It should be noted that some of the components of the near-death experience can occur in other situations. For example, Bennet (1983) studied individuals in extremely stressful situations, some of whom occasionally reported out-of-body experiences. Frank Smythe, climbing Mount Everest in 1933, felt his mind operating in two parts, one external to him, somewhere over his left shoulder.

The out-of-body experience is common in situations other than near-death situations. Blackmore reviewed the literature on this experience, which she defined as "an experience in which one seems to perceive the

world from a location outside the physical body" (1992, 9). She rejected theories of the experience that involved something actually leaving the body, or parapsychological explanations. She felt that out-of-body experiences were cognitive distortions in people who have a vivid and detailed imagination, low reality testing so that memories and images appear to be real, and reduced sensory input from the body or a tendency to ignore such sensory input, together with the retention of awareness and logical thinking.

This raises two interesting research issues. First, how common are such experiences during the process of ordinary living versus the process of dying? Second, how similar are the two type of experiences? Just because Ring (1984) thinks that they are the same does not make them the same. What is required is the collection of samples of both types of experience, followed by a systematic examination and comparison of the elements.

Gabbard and Twemlow (1984) compared the out-of-body experiences of those who were actually near death and those who were not in near-death incidents. Those near death more often heard noises, traveled through a tunnel, were aware of other beings in a nonphysical form and deceased loved ones, saw a brilliant light, felt that there was purpose to the experience, and had their lives changed by the experience. In short, those who had an out-of-body experience but who were not near death were less likely to have a typical near-death experience.

Measuring Near-Death Experiences

Greyson (1983a) constructed a scale to measure 16 aspects of the near-death experience (the NDES Scale). Scores on the scale were strongly associated with scores on Ring's scale (see earlier in this chapter). The scores were not associated with the age or gender of the person, the cause of the near-death experience, or the time elapsed since the experience.

Using his NDES Scale, Greyson (1985) scored a group of people who had had near-death experiences and performed a cluster analysis of the respondents. He found that most could be classified as having had either a transcendental experience, an affective (emotional) experience or a cognitive experience. The three groups of respondents did not differ in age or gender. However, if the near-death experience had been anticipated (for example, by people who had known that they were about to have surgery), then the cognitive score was lower.

Alvarado and Zingrone (1997-1998; Lester, 2003) found that the depth of the near-death experience in a sample of 51 accounts was not associ-

ated with the age at occurrence, age at the time of the interview, time between the occurrence and the interview, sex of the person or circumstances of the near-death incident.

Feng and Liu (1992) surveyed 81 survivors of an earthquake in China some 11 years after the trauma and found that 40 percent reported a near-death experience (that is, had a score greater than six on Greyson's scale).

Schoenbeck and Hocutt (1991) questioned 11 patients who had received cardiopulmonary resuscitation and found that six received a score of zero of Greyson's scale, while only one had a score sufficiently high to warrant labeling the experience as a near-death experience.

Does the Near-Death Experience Have Any Function?

Are there uses for the near-death experience or, to put the question another way, do near-death experiences have any function? Punzak (1989) described the treatment given to one patient who was "possessed" by a spirit. The patient was hypnotized and then the spirit was talked through a near-death experience — going through a tunnel, meeting the spirits of significant others, and going off with them to the "other world." This appeared to help the patient. Near-death experiences may, therefore, have use for the individual. What about the society?

Greyson (1983c) noted that near-death experiences occur in the absence of proximity to death. Furthermore, the association between close calls and near-death experiences does not prove that they occur during the potentially fatal states; rather, it could mean that potentially fatal states promote the subsequent impression that you have had a near-death experience. Thus, Greyson suggested that near-death experiences may occur before the close brush with death with the function of preparing you for an impending near-death event, or they may occur after recovery from a near-death event to help you adapt to the psychological consequences of the close call.

Conclusions

Grosso (1981) claimed that near-death experiences are consistent and universal, and insisted that any theory of near-death experiences must explain these two characteristics of the phenomenon. In this chapter, the near-death experience has been described, and the fact has been uncov-

ered that near-death experiences are not consistent. First, not every near-death experience contains all of the elements, and any theory of the near-death experience has to account for this.

Second, some researchers find people who report only the typical near-death experience while other researchers manage to find people who report deviant experiences and, in particular, unpleasant experiences. This raises the possibility that each researcher may be selecting and interviewing nonrepresentative groups of people. Moody, for example, who is famous for his books on near-death experiences, may attract only those who have experiences similar to those he writes about. Those who have hellish experiences may not care to tell them to Moody but, if they were to encounter Rawlings or Atwater, might be more willing to admit such an experience.

This raises one problem with the research on near-death experiences. Much of the research is based on reports volunteered to the researchers, often by members of organizations devoted to the study of near-death experiences. Only Gallup and Proctor (1982) surveyed random samples of people. Good research uses such random samples in order to eliminate the bias introduced by volunteers.

This chapter has identified a number of areas in which it would be useful to have detailed data collected in a methodologically sound way. How frequent are near-death experiences, especially for those in near-death incidents? What is the frequency of the different elements of the near-death experience? In answering this question, researchers should take into account the unusual and unpleasant elements occasionally reported and which were cited above.

We need more studies of near-death experiences collected at the time of the experience, rather than those recalled many years later, like the studies by Parnia et al. and Schwaninger et al. reviewed above. Samples are also needed of near-death experiences collected from those who are in near-death incidents and from those in the process of ordinary living, so that the experiences can be compared to see how closely they resemble each other. If they are similar, then the experiences will be less relevant to the subject of life after death. On the other hand, if they differ, then the near-death experiences may be considered to be relevant to the dying process.

The next chapter will examine the kinds of research conducted on near-death experiences and explore the implications of the results.

4

Critical Research on Near-Death Experiences

There has been much research on near-death experiences, some of which is critical to answering the question of whether these experiences provide evidence of life after death, and some of which is interesting but not relevant to such a question. This chapter will examine the research that is critical.

Children

Research on near-death experiences in children is critical because the reports of such experiences from adults can easily be affected by what they have read or heard about near-death experiences during their lives. Children have been less influenced (but by no means uninfluenced) by such reports.

Cases have been reported of children reporting near-death experiences when near death (Serdahely, 1989–1990) and also during episodes of severe physical and sexual abuse (Serdahely, 1987–1988). Serdahely and Walker (1990b) reported the case of a 23-year-old woman who remembered through dreams having a near-death experience *during her birth* when her umbilical cord became wrapped around her neck.

Morse, et al. (1986) found that seven of 11 children who were in near-death incidents reported having near-death experiences, whereas none of 20 children in less life-threatening circumstances reported such experiences.[1] Morse felt that the experiences reported by children were similar to those of adults and did not resemble descriptions of depersonalization.

Morse (1990) noted that the near-death experiences of children resemble those of adults in most ways, but rarely include a life review. Morse felt that this difference was reasonable since children have less life to review.

Bush (1983) reported on 17 near-death experiences in children, only two of which, however, were reported by the subjects when they were still children. The others were adults when they reported their memories of a childhood near-death experience. In general, Bush felt that the near-death experiences were similar to those in adults except that life review and meetings with deceased friends and relatives were rare in children. The two reports by children were both by four-year-olds to their mothers. Here is one of the reports from a boy when he was five years old, as told to his mother who reported it to Bush:

> When I drowned, I didn't want to come back. I saw something real pretty in the sky. I saw you and Josie and another lady working on me. I was sitting on the roof and I could see you.
>
> Then it got real dark and I walked down a tunnel. There was bright light at the end, and a man was standing there.
>
> I asked him, "Who was the man?"
>
> He said, "It was God." And I said I wanted to stay. But God said it wasn't my time yet and I had to come back. I put my hand out and God put his hand out and then God pulled his hand back. He didn't want me to stay.
>
> On the way back, I saw the devil. He said if I did what he wanted, I could have anything I want
>
> I said, "You know God is good and the devil is evil."
>
> He said, "The devil said I could have anything I wanted, but I didn't want him bossing me around."[Bush, 1983, 187].

In this child, however, the tremendous influence of the Christian religion in which he had been raised is apparent.

Herzog and Herrin (1974) reported the case of a six-month-old baby who had renal failure. Several months later, he showed extreme fear when in a store with a tunnel for children to crawl through. At age three-and-a-half, as his grandmother was dying, he asked whether she would have to go through a tunnel to see God. The authors felt that this suggested that he had experienced a vision of a tunnel during his medical crisis at six months of age.

Interestingly, Moody (1988) claimed that some children feel themselves to be adults in the near-death experience.

This research is quite poor. Most of the reports are from adults remembering near-death experiences that they had as children. Good research requires reports of near-death experiences from children immediately after they have had the experience. Memories of these experiences years later are subject to distortion and elaboration.

The Blind

Reports of near-death experiences from the blind, especially those who have been blind from birth and who have never had any visual experiences, are critical because those without vision would not be expected to report the same visual experiences as those who have sight.

Moody (1988) reports a case of a near-death experience in a blind woman who described in detail what was happening around her as doctors tried to resuscitate her. The case is mentioned briefly, and no exploration of the case in detail has ever appeared.

It is interesting that the case reflects a belief that, upon death and becoming a spirit, people lose all of their physical disabilities. Moody's blind woman could see "after death." The ancient Greeks, on the other hand, believed that people enter the spirit world as they are at death. Thus, Oedipus after blinding himself believed that he would be blind in the spirit world, which is indeed partly why he blinded himself — so that he would never have to see his father, whom he had murdered, and his mother, whom he had married.

Serdahely and Walker (1990a) reported a near-death experience from a nonverbal subject with congenital quadriplegia, whose near-death experience at the age of two was typical, but noteworthy in that he was quite mobile in the experience.[2]

Recently, Ring and Cooper (1997) studied 21 people who had had near-death experiences, ten of whom had been blind from birth. One of these, Vicki had two near-death experiences. The second, at the age of 22 during a car crash which involved a skull fracture and concussion, included out-of-body experiences at the crash scene and at the hospital. She saw herself in the hospital from the ceiling of the room: "I recognized at first that it was a body, but I didn't even know that it was mine initially. Then I perceived that I was up on the ceiling" (1997, 110). Vicki reported being sucked into a tube headfirst, moving toward light, and ending up on some grass, surrounded by trees, flowers and people. She met five specific people from her life, including the grandmother who had raised her. She was overcome by a sense of total knowledge, met a Christlike figure who told her that she must go back, and had a life review before returning to her body.

Ring and Cooper did not present a statistical description of these experiences, but they claimed that they are identical to those reported by people who are not blind, and indeed the reports do resemble the traditional near-death experiences closely.

Ring and Cooper noted that the subjects reported having sight in

these experiences. They reported fine-grained details with sharp acuity. They also said that they did not see in their dreams and that the near-death experiences were very different from their dreams. Vicki saw color in her near-death experience, but had never seen color in her dreams.

Ring and Cooper considered the possibility that the blind might be able to recognize the position of objects even though they are blind (a phenomenon called blindsight by the psychologist Weiskrantz [1986]) or by means of skin-based "vision" (Bach-y-Rita, 1972). They dismissed these possibilities because the reports from the people in studies of blindsight and skin-based vision do not resemble the vision that the blind subjects reported for their near-death experiences.

Ring and Cooper interviewed their blind subjects in detail, and they concluded that they could not be sure that their subjects had actually had visual experiences. The subjects were used to using the words associated with vision — Vicki talked of "watching" television and used expressions such as "Look at this." Ring and Cooper felt that the experiences of these blind people should not be taken to indicate vision as sighted people understand it. Ring and Cooper preferred to talk of transcendental awareness or synesthetic perception (a phenomenon in which the stimulation of one sense evokes sensations in other modalities, such as when hearing a sound evokes a sensation of color).

There has been some doubt cast on the validity of some cases reported by Ring and Cooper (Parker, 2001). For example, one case may actually have been compiled from several reports. Despite these caveats, the occurrence of near-death experiences in the blind is an important area of study for determining whether near-death experiences are evidence of survival after death.

NDErs and UFOers

Ring (1992) studied people who claimed to have encountered aliens (UFOers) and those who claimed to have had near-death experiences (NDEers),[3] together with comparison subjects[4] who had an interest in these phenomena but who had not experienced them. The UFOers and NDEers differed from the comparison subjects in having more psychic experiences as children (such as predicting the future) and being more sensitive to alternative realities (such as seeing fairies), but did not differ in the tendency to be prone to fantasy as children (such as having a vivid imagination). Both groups also had more experience of childhood abuse and trauma than the comparison subjects, including physical mistreat-

ment, psychological abuse, sexual abuse, neglect and a negative home atmosphere. This finding is important because such childhood experiences have been found to be associated with later psychiatric symptoms such as dissociative symptoms (e.g., amnesia) and conversion symptoms (e.g., sensory loss or hypersensitivity). In line with this, both NDEers and UFOers had higher scores on a measure of dissociative tendencies than did the comparison subjects.

After the experience, both groups of experiencers showed increased physical sensitivities (e.g., to light and hearing), physiological changes (e.g., decreases in metabolic rate and blood pressure), changes in energy (e.g., a decrease in the time spent asleep), emotional changes (e.g., more mood swings), expanded mental awareness and an increase in psychic abilities.[5] They were also more likely to become electrically sensitive, that is, to cause electrical and electronic malfunctions. Those who had these experiences also showed a greater appreciation for life, self-acceptance, concern for others and spirituality. These changes seemed to persist for long periods after the experience.[6] Ring concluded that both of these experiences seem to produce radical physiological and psychological changes in both groups.

Ring suggested that a common neurological mechanism may underlie both experiences, perhaps greater sensitivity in the temporal lobe of the cortex. Ring also remarked that this neurological sensitivity was not necessarily a cause of the experiences, but rather facilitated the receipt of the experience and its transmission. Perhaps the people who have these experiences he speculated, are sensitive to a different realm of experience than others, and the experiences are a prophetic revelation of the state of this present civilization.

With regard to the electrical sensitivity of some near-death experiencers, Knittweis (1997) carried out a very interesting pilot study. He compared seven NDEers with nonexperiencers. Four of the NDEers (and none of the nonexperiencers) were electrically sensitive. Knittweis used a thermometer to measure the heat generated between the subjects' fingers and an electron microscope to measure electron flow from the fingers. The NDEers differed from the nonexperiencers, but not enough for the difference to be significant. However, the samples were very small, and more research along these lines would be valuable.

As was noted above, Ring found that symptoms of dissociation were common in those who had had near-death experiences. Serdahely (1992) compared the experiences of those with multiple personality disorder[7] and those of NDEers and found many similarities. Both groups report out-of-body experiences with relief of pain, a transcendental environment of light,

floating, helping spirits, hell, and a return to the body. Both groups commonly report child abuse, and both may have temporal lobe involvement. However, Serdahely did not collect these reports himself, and so the two groups were not interviewed in the same way. Furthermore, Serdahely did not report any statistical analysis of the responses of large samples of both types of individuals. Thus, his suggestion that the two types of experience are similar remains speculative.

On the other hand, Irwin (1993) compared college students who reported having a near-death experience with those who did not and found no differences on a measure of dissociative experiences. The near-death experiencers, however, did report more childhood trauma from assault, loss of friends, and sexual abuse from people who were not family members. (They did not differ on eight other types of childhood trauma.)

Out-of-Body Experiences

One element of the near-death experience, the out-of-body experience, is especially important, for it could provide better evidence for life after death. If, during the out-of-body experience, a person was able to accurately perceive stimuli that he could not possibly see from where his physical body was, then it would appear possible that his spirit or consciousness had left his body.

Holden (1988) questioned 63 people who reported an out-of-body experience during their near-death experiences. The majority reported that their vision during the experience was free of distortion, involved a full color spectrum and a complete field of vision, involved a complete and accurate memory of the physical environment, and included both moving and stationary objects and the ability to read.

Color perception was reported as better and the field of vision more complete if the location of the person while out-of-body was near the ceiling and if there was no anesthesia in use. Memory of the event was more accurate if the person was near the ceiling and if the experience was recalled soon after its occurrence. Attention to extraneous detail was better in subjects under the age of 60 and those with no anesthesia in use. The ability to read during the experience was better in those aged 34 to 59, whose experiences were more than 20 years past, who had longer experiences, and in those with no anesthesia in use. These variables were not associated with clarity of vision or freedom from distortion.

Tiberi (1993) compared the accounts of the out-of-body experience in those who were healthy at the time and those who were near death. The

near-death subjects reported having had fewer out-of-body experiences in their lifetimes, felt more often that they were in a different world during the experience, experienced fear and anxiety less often and peace and tranquility more often, saw new colors, heard extraordinary music and felt cessation of pain more often, and more often gained new and deep insights after the experience and felt wiser and more mature. The two groups did not differ, however, in a number of aspects, including the vividness of images, meeting people, clear versus hazy thinking, seeing their own body, drives (sexual, hunger or thirst), or changes in beliefs and religion after the experience.

Alvarado (2001) also compared reports of out-of-body experiences of those near death and those not near death. Those near death more often saw their own physical body and saw lights. They did not differ in experiencing a tunnel, hearing sounds or seeing beings. (They also did not differ in sex, age or religiosity.)

Krishnan (1985) raised a puzzling issue. If the spirit can leave the body and observe the body from a distance, why in near-death experiences does it always rise up and look down on the body. Why would the spirit not sometimes move to the side or, if a person was falling, from underneath?

Testing the Out-of-Body Experience

Holden and Joesten (1990) tried to set up an experiment in a hospital room in which certain visual symbols would be visible only to a "spirit" which had floated up to the ceiling. Ensuring that no one else in the hospital knew what the symbols were was quite difficult and, having set up the experiment, no patient had a near-death experience in the room in a six month period. Parnia et al. (2001) set up a similar test but, of 63 consecutive patients with cardiac arrest, none reported an out-of-body experience and so none could report what was on boards suspended from the ceiling with symbols on the top side.

Sabom (1982) interviewed 32 people who reported having witnessed their resuscitation during "out of their body" experiences along with 25 comparison subjects who were in a coronary care unit but who had never had a near-death experience. The comparison subjects were asked to imagine they were witnessing their resuscitation and to report what they imagined. Twenty of the controls made major errors in their descriptions, that is, described events that would never have happened in a hospital setting, such as mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Three gave reasonably accurate descriptions.

Twenty-six of the 32 out-of-body descriptions were too general to be verified. However, none made major errors in what they said about the resuscitation. Six people, however, gave specific details that were accurate and matched the records of their case. Sabom concluded that the details reported were not likely to have been mentioned to the patients after recovery, nor were they the kind of reports which might be based on prior general knowledge. The information was not of the kind discernible to the patients in a semiconscious state during resuscitation, since some details were outside of the patients' visual field. Furthermore, one patient reported being given a shot in the groin, whereas the staff had removed blood from an artery there. Had he merely overheard the staff talking, he would not have made this mistake.[8]

Ring and Lawrence (1993) reported two cases of patients who saw objects outside of the hospital (a shoe on the roof and a shoe on a ledge) that were found where indicated and that were not visible from the patients' beds. Ring and Lawrence urged researchers to keep working on the possibility that those who have out-of-body experiences may in fact report accurately on objects not visible to them in the hospital. More recently, Morris and Knafl (2003) reported the case of a patient who reported the existence of a penny on top of one of the cabinets in the room where she had a near-death experience that proved to be there but that could not be seen by people standing in the room.

Source of Knowledge About Near-Death Experiences

Knoblauch et al. (2001) found in a random survey that Germans who had had near-death experiences differed in their source of knowledge about such experiences from those who had not had these experiences. Those who had had a near-death experience were more likely to have learned about the experiences from other near-death experiencers, from books and seminars and, less often, from radio and television. This difference suggests the role of suggestion in shaping the experience.

The Effect of Culture

If near-death experiences are evidence of life after death, then there should be few differences in the reports of those experiences from people in different cultures. Life after death would not be expected to be different for Americans than for Africans or Indians, and so the near-death experiences of the three groups should not differ.

The impact of culture can be seen in the report by Knoblauch et al. (2001), based on a random survey of Germans, in which it was found that East and West Germans differed in their reports of near-death experiences. East Germans more often reported tunnels and less often seeing a bright light. Knoblauch also found sex differences (for example, women more often entered another realm but less often had a life review) and church membership (for example, church members less often saw a tunnel).

The impact of culture on the near-death experience is evident in such phenomena as the tendency of Christians to sometimes interpret the bright light as God or Jesus (Gibbs, 1988). Lundahl has provided reports of Mormons of their near-death experiences at the end of the nineteenth century, and they differ greatly from the current prototypical experience. One relates, "The people I met there, I did not think of as spirits, but men and women, self-thinking and self-acting individuals going about important business in a most orderly manner. There was perfect order there and everybody had something to do and seemed to be about their business. All worthy men and women were appointed to special and regular service under a well organized plan of action" (1981–1982, 323).

Irwin (1987) noted that the notion of social conditioning leads to the prediction that near-death experiences in the Christian world should resemble the depictions given in the Bible of heaven and hell. Since the near-death experiences do not resemble these depictions, it is argued that social conditioning does not play a role in near-death experiences.

Irwin surveyed about 100 Australian students on their conceptions of life after death. He found that the most commonly checked items were:

1. Heaven appears (A) to comprise a natural, pastoral setting, with lush green hills, trees, flowers and streams, (B) to be a place illuminated by a soft, diffuse light with no apparent source and (C) to entail a cosmic existence, where in a sense I am both everywhere in the universe and nowhere at all;
2. In heaven I could encounter (A) deceased relatives or friends of mine and (B) spirits who show no signs of disease, handicaps or old age;
3. In heaven I can get from one place to another by (A) floating or gliding over the environment and (B) simply thinking about my desired destination and instantly finding myself at that place; and
4. In heaven I can hear (A) other natural sounds such as the babbling of streams and the rustling of leaves and (B) not sounds as such, for I possess a cosmic awareness rather than sensory faculties.

Irwin concluded that there were several different conceptions of heaven, and the view espoused by the Book of Revelation was not widely

endorsed. The pastoral and cosmic conceptions reported by his sample seemed to Irwin quite similar to those reported in near-death experiences. Thus, Irwin concluded that social conditioning could not be ruled out.

Morse (1992) reported the results of a study of near-death experiences in Zambia by Nsama Mumbwe. Morse considered the experiences similar to those reported in America. For example, "I was unconscious for a day. I believed that I had died. I went to a place where I found a lot of people dressed in white robes—children and adults. I couldn't make out their races. These people seemed to be very happy. But then when I appeared they stopped singing and someone said, 'We were not expecting you. Sorry!' I hurried 'round and left. I could hear them start singing after I had walked a good distance from them" (Morse, 1992, 121).

In fact, this account has very few of the elements of the near-death experience listed by Moody, and the other accounts reported by Morse from this Zambian sample also have few similarities.

Pasricha and Stevenson (1986) reported 16 cases of near-death experiences from India. These reports are also very different from the typical American near-death experience.

> Four black messengers came and held me. I asked, "Where are you taking me?" They took me and seated me near the god. My body had become very small. There was an old lady sitting there. She had a pen in her hand, and the clerks had a heap of books in front of them. I was summoned.... One of the clerks said, "We don't need Chhajju Bania (trader). We had asked for Chhajji Kumhar (potter). Push him back and bring the other man. He [meaning Chhajju Bania] has some life remaining." I asked the clerks to give me some work to do, but not to send me back. Yanraj was there sitting on a high chair with a white beard and wearing yellow clothes. He asked me, "What do you want?" I told him that I wanted to stay there. He asked me to extend my hand. I don't remember whether he gave me something or not. Then I was pushed down [and revived] [1986, 167].

The Indian accounts of near-death experiences resembled American accounts in that deceased acquaintances and beings of light or religious figures were often seen. However, only the Indian accounts had messengers to take the person to the other realm and to bring him back, had men with books, and involved the person not being scheduled to die or being the wrong person. There were no instances in these Indian experiences of seeing one's own body, experiencing a life review or being sent back by loved ones.

Pasricha (1992, 1993) confirmed these differences in reports of 16 and 13 cases, respectively, of near-death experiences in India.[9] Pasricha found that the cases were characterized by the person being taken to the other realm by a messenger, seeing deceased relatives and friends, seeing a man

with a book and hearing that his presence was a mistake (someone else was expected instead), and being brought back by the messenger. Upon return, the subjects had marks on their bodies. Pasricha noted that these elements are rarely mentioned in American reports of near-death experiences. In addition, Pasricha noted that the reports from the southern parts of India differ from those from the northern parts, again indicating the importance of culture in determining the content of the reports. (The reports from those in southern India did not include being in the other realm because of a mistake on the part of the messenger.) Unlike American reports, none of the Indian experiences included a life review, and none of the reports from northern India included seeing the physical body during an out-of-body experience.

Singh et al. (1988) interviewed 19 patients who had been acutely ill or who had had a life-threatening illness, and none reported a traditional near-death experience. Three patients reported "darkness" and three others "total silence." Bright lights, receding into the background, a vision of Christ and a vision of Yama Deva were each reported by one patient.

Blackmore (1993) reported on eight near-death experiences in India and claimed that they were similar to Western accounts. Her report is poor, for she presented few statistical data on her sample and no data from comparison groups in the West. Kellehear and his colleagues (1994) criticized her report for having too few cases and for asking her respondents leading questions. However, this is a criticism of almost all research on near-death experiences; that is, that the researchers phrase their interviews of the people in such a way as to lead the witness or bias their responses. The only way to avoid this is to prepare unbiased questionnaires, which the people complete without interference from the researchers. The researchers can, of course, always interview the subjects after they have completed the questionnaires in order to obtain information to supplement their reports.

Counts (1983) reported near-death experiences from three Melanesians (in the South Pacific). The experiences did not involve out-of-body experiences, floating, buzzing or ringing noises, moving through a tunnel or feelings of exultation, love or peace. Here are extracts from one of the reports:

> When I died everything was dark, but I went through a field of flowers and when I came out everything was clear. I walked on along the road and came to a fork where there were two men standing, one on either road. Each of them told me to come that way. I didn't have time to think about it, so I followed one of them…. The man took my hand and we entered a village. There we found a long ladder that led up to a house. We climbed the ladder but when we got to the top I heard a voice saying, "It isn't time for you to come. Stay there. I'll send a group of people to take you back."

> … [The house] was not on posts. It was just hanging there in the air, turning around as if were on an axle…. There were all kinds of things inside this house, and I wanted to see them all. There were some men working with steel, and some men building ships, and another group of men building cars…. I was to come back, but there was no road for me to follow, so the voice said, "Let him go down." Then there was a beam of light and I walked along it…. I came back to my house and reentered my body and was alive again [Counts, 1983, 119–120].

Feng and Liu (1992) felt that the content of near-death experiences reported by people in China differed somewhat from those reported in the West. For example, some elements commonly mentioned by Americans, such as the feeling of being a different person, was reported by only 6 percent of the Chinese respondents. The element mentioned most often by the Chinese respondents was feeling estranged from the body. Cognitive and transcendental types of near-death experience were most common, with the affective type extremely rare.

Feng and Liu found that age, sex, marital status, education, occupational level, degree of introversion or extraversion, experience of brain trauma, prior knowledge of near-death experiences and belief in spirits or God did not affect the nature of the near-death experience in this sample of Chinese experiencers—all of whom were earthquake survivors. The length of time for which the person was unconscious was associated with the feeling of having been dead, and those who were paraplegic after the earthquake reported strange bodily sensations during the near-death experience.

Murphy (2001) reported near-death experiences from Thailand (although he admitted that he had not collected them from subjects himself but rather from published accounts), and they differed greatly from the American near-death experience. Thai near-death experiences involved messengers from the Lord of the Dead (Yama) taking the person on a tour of hell, meeting Yama or his assistants, being told that the subject was the wrong person, and being ordered back. Tunnels and panoramic life reviews were absent.

Summarizing this research, Kellehear (1993) noted that too few cultures had been studied for a really good appraisal of the role of culture in determining near-death experiences. He concluded, however, that the Chinese near-death experiences appeared to have a low incidence of tunnel and out-of-body elements; reports of Indian near-death experiences also revealed a low incidence of the tunnel element. Kellehear concluded that near-death experiences from both cultures appeared to contain frequent mention of life review, other beings and another world, but this conclusion does not seem to be supported by the evidence presented.

The Type of Near-Death Incident

It would be difficult to accept near-death experiences as evidence for life after death if the reports vary depending on the near-death event that precipitated the experience.

Greyson (1993) classified the components of the near-death experience into cognitive, affective (that is, emotional), paranormal and transcendental components. Those who had the near-death-experience after a sudden incident (such as an accident) had a stronger cognitive component, suggesting to Greyson that the unexpectedness rather than proximity to death led to such features as time distortion, thought acceleration and life review. Those who surrendered to the experience (rather than resisting it) had a fuller experience and a stronger affective component, suggesting that relinquishing control of the mind by the ego permits the experience to unfold. Those who had cardiac arrest had a fuller experience, with stronger affective, paranormal and transcendental components, suggesting that proximity to death leads to more profound experiences.

Noyes and Slyman (1978–1979) found different frequencies of the elements of the near-death experience depending on whether the experience occurred during a fall, drowning, automobile accident, or illness. Noyes and Slyman did not ask about all of the elements in the prototypical near-death experience—for example, they did not inquire about tunnel experiences. But, those who had their experience during an illness more often experienced a feeling of joy, a loss of emotion and being controlled by an outside force than those in different near-death incidents. Noyes and Slyman identified (by means of statistical analysis) three components of the experience: mystical consciousness, depersonalization and hyperalertness. The frequency of the elements was affected by whether the subjects believed themselves about to die (those who did more often experienced a revival of memories), loss of consciousness (those who did lose consciousness more often felt detached from their bodies), and their age at the time of the experience (those under the age of 21 more often saw sharp and vivid images).

In one of the few good studies on near-death experiences, Greyson (2003a) interviewed 1,595 consecutive patients in a cardiac care unit. Overall, 2 percent reported near-death experiences, but 10 percent of those who had a cardiac arrest reported these experiences. Those who had a near-death experience were matched with those who did not for age, sex and diagnosis, and those with the experience had more often lost consciousness, reported themselves as closer to death (although objective measures did not confirm this), had greater acceptance of death and had more prior paranormal experiences and altered states of consciousness.

Audain (1999) reviewed 12 previous studies of near-death experiences and found that those reporting them had more often been in traumatic death incidents rather than in prolonged illnesses (58 percent versus 42 percent). Those reporting the experiences were as likely to be men as women.

Research on the Elements of Near-Death Experiences

Greyson and Stevenson (1980) reported that the impression of passing through a tunnel was more common in those of higher social class and in women, which Greyson and Stevenson saw as suggesting the influence of cultural factors. Meeting other spirits was associated with the near-death experience occurring outdoors or at home rather than in a hospital, which Greyson and Stevenson saw as resulting from social isolation. Unusual visual phenomena were more often reported in nighttime experiences, which Greyson and Stevenson saw as suggesting the role of reduced sensory input, while the slowing of time was more often reported in those under the influence of drugs or alcohol and those who were more religious. The longer the experience lasted, the less likely the individuals were to believe that they were dying and the more positive the experience was, suggesting to Greyson and Stevenson that the temporal slowing is a psychological defense mechanism. Prior knowledge about near-death experiences was not associated with the content of the experience.

The Tunnel Experience

Drab (1981) examined 71 accounts of near-death experiences in which the person experienced a tunnel. The most common description used the word "tunnel" and described it as long and dark or black. Typically, the person was moving through the tunnel. The tunnel element was more common in those suffering cardiopulmonary arrest than in those with other near-death events.

The Life Review

Noyes and Kletti (1977b) surveyed 205 people who had life-threatening encounters. About 29 percent reported a panoramic memory episode (a life review). The percentage was slightly higher in women, in the younger subjects (under the age of 20), in those who drowned or were in

an car accident than in those who fell, and if the subjects believed that they were about to die.

Stevenson and Cook (1995) found that of 417 people who reported an "unusual experience" during an illness or accident, 54 (13 percent) reported a life review. These 54 people were compared with a random sample of those who did not report a life review. The remainder of the experience did not differ significantly for the two groups, except that those experiencing a life review did more often experience being judged, either by themselves or by others. Those experiencing a life review were more often in accidents rather than suffering from an illness.

The life review varied considerably. In four of the 54 cases, the life review was the only element of the near-death experience; the remaining 50 experienced other elements. The most common time sequence for the life review was from birth to death (43 percent), but some had the experience in reverse order, from the present time back to their birth (11 percent) while others had the experience "all at once" or panoramically (27 percent). Some experienced the review as a "reliving" while a small minority experienced the review with a sense of detachment. Eight-four percent reported the experience as being vivid. A few reported that their sense of time was altered, some faster (20 percent), others slower (7 percent), while others experienced timelessness (71 percent). Twenty percent experienced long-forgotten memories, and some of the memories dated back to birth. Almost half (48 percent) experienced some form of judgment, two-thirds of these reporting that it was self-judgment and one-third judgment by others (a being of light or God). Some of the people reported that the life review was the most important element in the near-death experience in changing their later behavior.

Stevenson and Cook remarked that the life review was not simply a series of harmless memory pictures, as some have claimed (Noyes and Kletti, 1977b). The experience was often accompanied by judgment and experienced as unpleasant, and it had a profound effect on the people. They also noted that the life review indicates that mental functioning is more intense at these times of near-death than the physiological functioning of the person might predict. Perhaps mental and physiological functioning are not as closely allied as some scholars have thought.

Odd Occurrences

Holden (1989) found two odd occurrences in her study of near-death experiences. First, eight percent of her respondents estimated the length

of time of the near-death out-of-body experience to be hours, days and in one case months.

Second, 22 percent of the respondents did not recall the near-death out-of-body experience immediately, but rather after weeks, months or years. Those who did not recall the experience soon afterwards, however, had less complete and accurate memories for the environment.

The Effect of the Researcher's Questions

One methodological issue is whether the form of the interviewer's questions affects the report of the near-death experience. It is important that the form of questioning not affect the report of the experience if near-death experiences are to be valid evidence for life after death.

Norton and Sahlman (1995) argued that the belief systems of the near-death experiencers clearly affects how they remember and report the experience to others. Furthermore, the questions asked by the researcher can affect the coding of the experience. For example, one near-death experiencer saw her aunt (172):

Q. What is the meaning of it?

A. I think she was trying to tell me to go back to my roots.

Q. Was that her intent?

A. Yes!

The questioner requests that the person find a meaning for the element in the near-death experience and, once the person suggests a meaning, the invented meaning becomes part of the experience.

Conclusions

This research is clearly quite poor. Good research would demand that one investigator (or a team of investigators) interview in the same way large samples (50 to 100) of near-death experiencers and compare the elements reported using sound statistical techniques. The near-death experiences should be collected soon after the experience, within a day at most. The investigators should take care not to bias their data collection by asking leading questions. It would be best to collect samples of near-death experiences from, say, two groups, have researchers classify the elements of the near-death experience in each group independently, devise a checklist that would include both sets of elements, and then have the members of the two samples indicate which elements were present in their near-death experience.

Such research has not yet appeared.

The six accounts from Sabom of patients reporting details of the procedures used on them in the hospital are of critical importance. Sabom was able to compare the patients' reports with their medical records and by talking to those present. It would have been preferable had the researcher been present during the procedures. Furthermore, preparation of a checklist of procedures prior to the investigation which each patient could then go through in order to check which procedures had been used in his case would have permitted each patient to be scored for accuracy. These scores would be of great importance in determining whether the patient's account did indeed match the exact procedures used on him.

However, two roadblocks in the way of viewing near-death experiences as evidence for life after death have already been identified. First, the experience does vary from culture to culture. It is unlikely that life after death is different for people from different cultures. The supposed invariance of the near-death experience is a powerful argument for it providing proof of life after death, but the research reviewed here, poor though it is, clearly demonstrates the cultural variability of the near-death experience.

Second, there is evidence that the type of near-death incident and other features of the medical illness may have an impact on the type of near-death experience. More research of this type will be examined in Chapter 8, where theories of the near-death experience are explored.

5

Other Research on Near-Death Experiences

There has been research on near-death experiences exploring such as issues as whether the people who have these experiences differ in personality from those who do not have them. Although this is of interest, it is not critical to the issue of whether near-death experiences provide evidence for life after death. This research will be reviewed in the present chapter.

The Near-Death Experiences of Suicides

Moody (1977) noted that people who have near-death experiences as a result of suicidal attempts typically say that they would never consider attempting suicide again. They appear to develop an attachment to life. They also report that their suicidal death solved nothing, and that their problems seemed to remain with them on the other side. Moody (1988) also claimed that having suicidal people read about near-death experiences led to them becoming less suicidal.

Ring and Franklin (1981–1982) found that 47 percent of their sample of attempted suicides reported near-death experiences. All of these reported a feeling of peace or well-being, and about half reported entering into a darkness or haze and having an out-of-the-body experience. Those who had a near-death experience, however, said that they would no longer ever consider suicide, despite the experience being a pleasant one.

Greyson (1986, 1991) interviewed 61 attempted suicides and found that 26 percent reported near-death experiences. The incidence of near-death experiences was not associated with age, gender or race, nor with

the time between the suicide attempt and the interview with Greyson. Furthermore, having a near-death experience was not associated with indices of psychiatric disturbance (prior psychiatric care, suicidal behavior, or a family history of suicidal behavior), prior knowledge of near-death experiences, expectations for the afterlife, or religiosity in childhood or at the present time. However, those who were Christian at the time of the suicide attempt were more likely to report a near-death experience.

In contrast, Rosen (1976), who located seven people who survived suicidal jumps from the Golden Gate Bridge and the Bay Bridge in California — jumps which it is unusual to survive — found that none reported a near-death experience.

Greyson (1992–1993) surveyed members of the International Association for Near-Death Studies and compared those who had had near-death experiences with those who had not, even though they had been close to death. Greyson devised a checklist of 36 antisuicide attitudes, such as a feeling of unity with something greater than oneself and a belief that problems will not end with death. Those respondents who had a near-death experience checked significantly more of the 36 antisuicide attitudes than those who did not have a near-death experience (an average of 21.0 versus 11.5). For those who had a near-death experience, the more complete the experience (measured on Ring's objective scale), the greater the number of antisuicide attitudes endorsed. Thus, the psychological changes that follow a near-death experience appear to reduce the risk of suicide by changing the attitudes and beliefs of people.

The Personality of Those Who Have Near-Death Experiences

Greyson and Stevenson (1980) examined 78 people who reported near-death experiences and found that they were more likely than the general population to have reincarnation memories, to have communicated with the dead and to have seen apparitions of the dead, but were less likely to report extrasensory perception, clairvoyance and precognition. Thus, a variety of experiences that are relevant to the issue of whether there is life after death seem to occur to the same individuals.

On the whole, those in near-death incidents or life-threatening situations who have near-death experiences do not differ from those who do not have such experiences in sex, age or the time since the near-death incident when interviewed (Greyson, 1990), or in intelligence test scores, neurotic tendencies, extraversion or anxiety (Locke and Shontz, 1983). In a

study of people who reported out-of-the-body experiences in general (rather than near-death experiences), Gabbard and Twemlow (1981) found that they did not differ in death anxiety from a comparison group.

Sabom (1982) interviewed 78 people who had survived a near-death incident and, of these, 34 reported a near-death experience when interviewed (43 percent).[1] Those who had had a near-death experience did not differ from those who had not in sex, age, race, type of community in which they lived, education, occupation, religion or church attendance. Those who had had a near-death experience, however, claimed to have less knowledge of such experiences prior to the near-death event, and their near-death incidents had occurred further in the past (4.9 years prior versus 1.3 years).

Sabom found that those who had had a near-death experience more often had had it in a hospital, more often had been unconscious for more than a minute, and more often had received resuscitative measures as compared to those who had not had a near-death experience. Thus, they seem to have been closer to death.

Sabom rated each near-death experience for the presence of the ten elements described by Moody in his first book. Very few correlates were found. Females encountered "other beings" during the near-death experience more than men did, as did laborers and service workers. None of the other associations with personal characteristics or the circumstances of the near-death event were statistically significant.

Ring (1980) studied a sample of those who had been in near-death incidents as a result of illnesses, accidents and suicide attempts and found that 26 percent had deep experiences (according to his "core experience" scale), 22 percent had moderate experiences and 52 percent had a "non-experience." Those who believed themselves to be dead had deeper experiences than those who did not perceive themselves to be dying. The near-death experience was deeper for those who were ill, less deep for those in accidents, and least deep for those who had attempted suicide.

Overall, there was no difference in the depth of the experience in men and women, but women had deeper near-death experiences as a result of illnesses whereas men had deeper near-death experiences if they were in accidents or had attempted suicide. The depth of the experience was not associated with social class, race, marital status, age at the time of the interview, religiosity or religious affiliation. Those who were younger at the time of the near-death experience had deeper experiences, as did those with less prior knowledge of near-death experiences.

Prosnick (1999) studied a sample of undergraduates and community residents, of whom 16 percent reported having a near-death experience.

He found that having a near-death experience was associated with having experienced other mystical experiences, but not with psychological health, having peak experiences or with having resistances to psychological growth as described by Gestalt therapy. Ketzenberger and Keim (2001) found that students who had not had a near-death experience, but who knew more about what near-death experiences involved, had more positive attitudes toward near-death experiences.

Factors Affecting the Near-Death Experience

The Time Since the Experience

Serdahely (1991) compared the accounts of adults who had had near-death experiences an average of 38 years earlier with those of adolescents who had had the experience only two years earlier. Out of 47 characteristics, only two differed significantly. Thus, the time since the experience does not seem to have a great effect on the nature of the report of the near-death experience.

Despite this finding, it would be much better if reports of near-death experiences were collected from people soon after they had the experience — minutes or hours afterwards rather than years later.

Stress Level

Twemlow et al. (1982) found that those who had a near-death experience during cardiac arrest (rather than in less stressful circumstances) were younger at the time of the experience, but did not differ in the age at which they reported the experience to the researchers, sex, education, or personality (including danger-seeking tendencies, psychoticism, hysterical tendencies and death anxiety).

Near-Death Experiences and Mystical Experiences

Thomas and his colleagues (1982–1983) claimed to find that people who had had near-death experiences also reported having had more mystical experiences in their lives. However, what they asked was, in effect, "Have you felt that you were going to die?" This indicates an expectation of a near-death incident, not a near-death experience. A mystical experience was defined as feeling close to a powerful spiritual force or being

lifted out of yourself, a definition that seems to be rather mixed in its content; the two parts of the question seems to describe different experiences. This study shows the importance of, not simply doing research, but taking care to make sure that the research is meaningful and accomplishes what it says it does.

Studies of Transplants

Pearsall et al. (2002) reported ten cases of people given heart transplants whose personality and attitudes changed toward those of the donor. In one case, the donor was a vegetarian, and the recipient became a vegetarian. In another case, the donors was learning classical violin, and the recipient began to like classical music. However, Pearsall's cases indicate that the recipients in his cases knew quite a lot about the donor, and this knowledge might have affected the recipients' behaviors. Furthermore, Pearsall did not administer any objective psychological tests before or after the recipient received the donor heart and, of course, there could be no objective testing of the donor. Thus, the cases are merely suggestive anecdotes.

6

The Impact of Near-Death Experiences

People who have near-death experiences often report that the experience had a great impact on their lives (Kinnier et al., 2001; Knoblauch et al., 2001; Sabom, 1998). This chapter will examine the research on this issue.

Gallup and Proctor (1982) asked people who had had near-death experiences about the powers they had had *during* the experience. These powers included a greater feeling of brotherhood and sisterhood and of acceptance in general by others, power over death (whether to return to life or to die), super-bodies that were free from defects, tremendous intellectual powers (such as leaving the body and predicting future events), the ability to smell, hear, see, taste and touch things with greater awareness than usual, control over the emotions, obedience to a higher power and incredible willpower to accomplish tasks.

Several people reported that the near-death experience reduced their fear of death afterwards, usually because the near-death experience was so pleasant.[1] Many reported a strengthening of their religious beliefs after the experience, a sense of peace, a determination to live every moment of life intensely, a willingness to take risks, and a greater concern for others.

These effects are quite different from those reported by people surviving, for example, cardiac arrest without a near-death experience. Such patients interviewed by Druss and Kornfeld (1967) developed longstanding emotional problems such as insomnia, irritability and frightening dreams. Greyson (2003b) found that psychiatric outpatients who had a near-death incident experienced more psychological distress later than those who had not had such an incident. However, those who had had a

near-death experience at the time of the near-death incident experienced less psychological distress later than those who did not have a near-death experience.

Moody (1988) noted that those who have a near-death experience subsequently have less fear of death, realize the importance of love, feel connected with all things, appreciate learning, feel more in control of the course of their lives, have a sense of urgency, and develop their spiritual side, yet suffer from a "reentry" syndrome as they try to adjust to their world and as others try to adjust to them.

Flynn (1982) surveyed 21 people who had had a near-death experience and found an increased concern for others, a reduced fear of death, an increased belief in life after death, increased religious interest, and a reduced desire for material success and approval from others. Bauer (1985) noted positive changes in a sample of those who had had near-death experiences, such as an increase in life purpose, life control, the desire to find meaning in life, and death acceptance. Musgrave (1997) surveyed 51 near-death experiencers and found that most reported that after the experience they were more helpful toward others, more compassionate and understanding, open-minded in general, spiritually or religiously open, intuitive, and aware of guidance by a higher power.

In contrast, Ring (1980), in a sample of those who had had near-death experiences, found only a few changes after the experience. The respondents did *not* rate themselves as more loving afterwards or as having an increased appreciation of life, but they did become more religious and develop a stronger belief in life after death. Although their belief in God did not change, they became less afraid of death.

In a later study, Ring (1984) reported on the results of a questionnaire and interview study of over 100 people who had near-death experiences. They reported, on the whole, an increased appreciation of life, concern for others, a quest for meaning, and less concern with impressing others and materialism. They became more religious in a spiritual sense than those who did not have near-death experiences, although they did not change their attitudes toward the church as an institution. They also came to believe more in life after death and to have more paranormal experiences. However, Sabom (1998) reported that, although those who had near-death experience reported more paranormal experiences after the near-death experience, they also reported more prior to the near-death experience.

Interestingly, Ring (1995) noted that students who simply took his course on near-death experiences (and who had never had a near-death experience) also showed these positive changes, including a reduced fear of death and a greater belief in life after death.

Noyes (1982–1983) surveyed 138 people who reported having a near-death experience and identified five major changes: (1) a reduced fear of death, (2) a sense of relative invulnerability, (3) a feeling of special importance or destiny, often in order to fulfill a special mission in life, (4) a belief in having received a special favor from God or fate, and (5) a strengthened belief in life after death.[2]

Twemlow and Gabbard (1984–1985) noted that their respondents tended to shift from orthodox religious affiliations to less orthodox affiliations after the near-death experience. Sutherland (1990a) noted also that near-death experiencers became less formally religious (they attended church less often and did not place a higher value on organized religion) but more spiritual (they prayed and meditated more). Their fear of death and suicidal tendencies also decreased.

Greyson and Stevenson (1980) reported that 55 percent of their sample found the experience to be positive while 45 percent found it to be negative. Those who believed that they were dying were more likely to find the experience positive, as were those who experienced a panoramic memory review.

Sabom (1982) found that those who had had a near-death experience reported less fear of death and a greater belief in life after death than those who had not had the experience. They also scored lower on an objective measure of the fear of death.[3]

Greyson (1992) found that those who had near-death experiences felt that death was less of a threat than did those who had been near death but who did not have a near-death experience or those who had never been near death. The deeper the near-death experience, the lower the threat felt from death. Greyson (1983b) found that those who had a near-death experience found success in material or social areas less important, but did not differ in spirituality, altruism or self-actualization.

Kohr (1983) found that those who had had near-death experiences showed less religiosity and less preoccupation with their own deaths than both those who had been close to death but who did not have a near-death experience, and those who had not even been close to death. The groups did not differ in death anxiety or political orientation.[4]

Schwaninger et al. (2002) followed a small sample of cardiac arrest patients, some of whom had reported a near-death experience when interviewed soon after the cardiac arrest. They found that those who had had a near-death experience reported positive changes in understanding life and themselves, attitudes toward others, and religious or spiritual beliefs. They also reported being more intuitive and having a sense of a surrounding energy force or shield, but not more paranormal abilities.

In one of the few objective studies on these issues,[5] Greyson (1994) found no differences in scores on an objective measure of satisfaction with life between those who had had a near-death experience, those who had had a near-death event but no near-death experience, and those who had had neither.

Ring (1986) summarized the changes in near-death experiencers as follows: a general awakening of higher human potential, a greater appreciation of life, greater feelings of self-worth, increased concern for others, a greater appreciation of others, a decrease in the importance of material things or success, and a desire for a deeper understanding of life, especially its spiritual and religious aspects. Survivors become more spiritual, though not necessarily more religious, feel closer to God, are more convinced that there is a life after death, are more open to the possibility of reincarnation, and see all the world's religions as one.

However, Ring's (1980) and Greyson's (1994) studies found very little impact of the near-death experience on people, and Ring's (1995) study suggested that intellectual knowledge of the near-death experience obtained from a book or a class may have as great a positive impact on people as having the actual near-death experience. These studies cast some doubt on the reliability and validity of the results of the research reviewed above.

The Desire to Tell Others

Hoffman (1995a, 1995b) interviewed near-death experiencers about their desires to tell others. As the experiencers move through the stages of shock and surprise, they experience a need for validation (to find out if the experience was shared by others), problems in interacting with others, active exploration of the phenomenon, and integration of the experience into their lives. The patterns of disclosure of the experience to others depends, of course, on the previous relationship with the listeners and how listeners react to the information. But Hoffman found also that those who were familiar with information about near-death experiences were more likely to discuss the experience with others, and that aspects of the experience (such as whether paranormal experiences occurred, whether the experience was pleasant or unpleasant, and the nature of the precipitating event for the experience) also affect the person's willingness to discuss the experience.

Of course, the results of telling others about the near-death experience will depend upon their reactions. In Australia, Kellehear and Heaven

(1989) found that 57 percent of respondents felt that near-death experiences were evidence for life after death. Women, young people and those who believed in life after death reported that they would be more positive toward an individual reporting such an experience than would men, older people and those who did not believe in life after death. In China, on the other hand, Kellehear and his colleagues (1990) found that only 9 percent believed that such experiences were evidence for life after death, while 58 percent felt that they were hallucinations or dreams. Rural and young people reported that they would be more positive toward someone reporting such experiences than did urban and older people.

Psychic Experiences

Sutherland (1989) interviewed people who had had near-death experiences at least two years earlier. They reported a subjective increase in psychic experiences of all types after the near-death experience, including clairvoyance and telepathy, but also an increase in the frequency of more ordinary phenomena such as intuition and dream awareness. Their belief in life after death increased, and they felt less afraid of death.

Greyson (1983) studied members of the International Association for Near-Death Studies who reported having near-death experiences. They reported having more psychic experiences after the near-death experience than before, including waking ESP experiences, out-of-body experiences, encounters with apparitions, perception of auras, mystical experiences, and lucid dreams. They did not experience a change in psychokinesis (moving objects by means of will alone), communication with the dead, or reincarnation memories.

Among members of the Association for Research and Enlightenment, Kohr (1982) found that those who reported a near-death experience differed in many aspects, from those who had been near death but had had no such experience, as well as those who had not been near death at all, The differences included frequency of past life recall, frequency of mystical experiences, and frequency of psychic experiences in general (including ESP, out-of-body experiences, seeing apparitions, and psychokinesis). They also meditated more than the two comparison groups, found dreams more useful, thought about their own deaths more and were more religious.

Palmer and Braud (2002) found that people who had experienced a variety of "exceptional human experiences," including mystical, psychic and death-related experiences, all had transformative life changes after-

wards, with increases in feeling meaning and purpose in their lives and more positive psychological attitudes and feelings of well-being.

Odd Occurrences

Morse (1992) reported anecdotally that some of the people whom he interviewed who had had near-death experiences had problems with electricity and magnetism after the experience. Some reported that their wristwatches would not work, while others reported problems with lights and electrical appliances.

Morse also presented several cases whose medical illnesses (such as cancer) were cured after the near-death experience.

Do Survivors of Near-Death Experiences Need Counseling?

Greyson (2001) examined 194 people who had had near-death incidents, of whom three-quarters had had a near-death experience. He found that those who had had the near-death experiences had higher scores on a test of posttraumatic stress disorder than those who did not have such an experience.[6]

Thus, it is not surprising that it is sometimes reported that those who have a near-death experience occasionally have difficulty adjusting or coping with life (Furn, 1987a, 1987b) and relating to family members (Insinger, 1991). Of course, many of these individuals were close to death, which in itself may cause psychological problems. Immediately after the experience, the person may feel a sense of loss at leaving the afterlife behind, they may feel frustrated in trying to communicate the experience in words, and they may feel ridiculed by others if they report the experience. Often, medical staff ignore or minimize their experiences, and it has been helpful to have their experiences professionally legitimized and validated as knowledge of near-death experiences has spread in recent years. The long-term effects are, in contrast, more positive (as noted above), and so counseling is most appropriate soon after the experience. Indeed, Lukoff et al. (1995) have proposed that a new diagnosis should be included in revisions of the diagnostic manual of the American Psychiatric Association: "Religious or spiritual problem," a category that could include problems resulting from near-death experiences. In the 4th edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* of the American Psychiatric Association, Greyson (1997)

found four people who had had near-death experiences who might have fitted the diagnostic category.

Others have commented on this same issue, noting the importance of counseling for some near-death experiencers (Greyson and Harris, 1986) and recommending particular approaches, such as person-centered counseling (Miller, 1987).[7]

The International Association for Near-Death Studies has published guidelines for professionals. First, since patients can recall what happens during medical procedures, medical staff should behave as if the patient were conscious. Frivolity, crudeness and insults should be avoided.

Second, patients should be asked about their experiences after recovery. If the patient does not report a near-death experience, then the matter can be dropped. If the patient does remember a near-death experience, then this should be noted on the patient's record so that other medical staff know about it. The patient should be allowed and even encouraged to relate the experience, and should be allowed to express the associated emotions. He or she can be informed about near-death experiences, encouraged to read about them, and permitted to have a personal interpretation of the experience. The patient should not be referred to a psychiatrist or psychologist since that would imply that the experience was pathological.

Conclusions

Unfortunately, almost all of the studies reviewed in this chapter asked respondents about their feelings and beliefs prior to and after their near-death experience long after the experience. They were expected to recall accurately how they used to feel and compare that with their current feelings. Reliable and valid objective measures have never been used for the "before" feelings and attitudes and rarely for the "after" feelings and attitudes. Good research would have tested the respondents, using objective measures, on two separate occasions, before the near-death experience and afterwards, rather than relying on the respondents' memories of how they felt years earlier. Of course, such research is extremely difficult to conduct, but good research is rarely easy to do. Methodologically sound research is required before valid conclusions can be drawn.

Similarly, research into the personalities of those who have had near-death experiences (reviewed in Chapter 6) has been carried out after the people have had the experiences. Thus, it is difficult to know whether there were personality changes as a result of the near-death experience or

whether the same characteristics were present in the people before they had the experiences.

There is another methodological problem with the research. The studies reviewed often failed to include a control (or comparison) group. Noyes (1980) studied people who had been in life-threatening situations, but who did not necessarily have a near-death experience of the type discussed in this chapter.[8] These individuals also showed a pattern of favorable attitude change along the lines of those who actually have near-death experiences. Although Noyes did not attempt a quantitative comparison of those people who had been in life-threatening situations and who had a near-death experience with those who did not have such an experience, his paper suggests the possibility that it is the experiencing the life-threatening situation rather than having the near-death experience which was responsible for the attitude change. This possibility needs to be studied. Greyson's (1994) study comparing these two groups of people, mentioned above, found no differences between them in objective scores on a measure of life satisfaction.

On the other hand, Groth-Marnat and Summers (1998) compared people who had had near-death experiences with those who had had near-death incidents without a near-death experience. Both groups showed a positive change afterwards, but those who had the near-death experience experienced a greater change (both as rated by themselves and by others). For those who had had a near-death experience, the extent of the change was also positively associated with the depth of the experience.

A final methodological failing in the studies above is that they are self-selected samples and not random or complete samples of patients. Orne (1995) interviewed nine successive patients immediately after their near-death experiences. Only three felt positive about it, five showed "apprehensive plight" (and three of these five had a distressing near-death experience); while one found the experience "difficult." Clearly, therefore, interviews with unselected patients immediately after the near-death experience might produce results very different from those reviewed in this chapter.

7

Explanations for Near-Death Experiences

Many alternative explanations have been for offered to "explain away" near-death experiences— that is, to argue that they do not provide evidence for life after death.

But the People Were Not Really Dead!

Perhaps the people who report near-death experiences were not really dead (or even near death) for, after all, they were still living. Kastenbaum (1979) noted that, of course, only the experiences of those people who did not die are reported. Those who died or were not resuscitated have not provided a description of their experiences of dying. It may not have resembled the near-death experiences of those who survived to report it, and it may not, therefore, have been so pleasant.

Raymond Moody claimed, although he did not present the detailed results of any research study, that the closer to death the individuals were, the more complete the near-death experience was. So, by extrapolation, it could be argued that those who really died (and did not recover) would have had the most complete near-death experiences.

Kastenbaum (1998) has suggested that the near-death experience may be a memory that is created on the way back to consciousness rather than being something a person experiences at the death crisis. The near-death experience may be an attempt by the mind to make sense of the events that have occurred, after their occurrence.

Moody noted that some people have such experiences when not close

to death, sometimes spontaneously. He also noted that the experience does resemble in some ways general mystical and religious visions, although he felt that there were differences between these and near-death experiences. For example, mystical experiences do not usually involve a panoramic review of a person's. Elements of the near-death experience have been reported in non-near-death situations. For example, Holden and Guest (1990) reported the case of a woman who experienced a life review as she left her office to run an errand.

Gabbard et al. (1981) compared the experiences of those who had had near-death experiences with those who had had out-of-body experiences in other circumstances. The near-death experiences were more likely to involve noises, traveling through a tunnel, seeing the body from a distance, awareness of other beings, especially relatives, and seeing a light. Those having the near-death experience were also more likely to see a purpose to the experience, have their lives changed by the experience, have religious and spiritual experiences and have a lasting benefit. So, although the elements of the near-death experience may not be unique to the near-death experience, they were more common in the near-death experience.

Noyes and Kletti (1977a) compared those in life-threatening situations who believed they were about to die with those who did not believe this. Those who believed that they were about to die were more likely to experience feelings of unreality, a sense of detachment and a life review.

Noyes and Slymen (1978–1979) surveyed people who survived life-threatening danger for the presence of 40 experiences. They identified three clusters of experiences which they labeled mystical (such as a feeling of great understanding, sharp or vivid images and revival of memories), depersonalizing (such as loss of emotion, a sense that the body is apart from the self and that the self is strange or unreal), and hyperalert (sharp or vivid thoughts, speeded thoughts and vision and sharper hearing).

The frequency with which these experiences were reported depended upon the circumstances. For example, those seriously ill reported more mystical experiences, whereas those in car accidents or falling reported more depersonalization experiences. Those who thought they were close to death reported more mystical events, as did the younger respondents (under the age of 20).

Woodhouse (1983) suggested that, if a near-death experience was reported by someone whose EEG was flat (that is, someone in whom the electrical activity in the brain had ceased), this would rule out brain explanations of the phenomenon. This situation has not yet been reported. However, Woodhouse was wrong in his suggestion. The near-death experience could have been experienced either prior to or after the flat

EEG and so could be accounted for on the basis of this earlier or later brain activity.

Stevenson et al. (1989–1990) examined the medical records of 40 people who reported near-death experiences. (Incidentally, their near-death experiences did not differ from a sample of those who had no medical records available, except that those with medical records available more often saw their body from a different position.) Eighty-two percent of the sample reported that they were near death. However, an examination of their medical records showed that only 45 percent were actually near death. Thus, it appears that people exaggerate how close they were to death.

Kelly (2001) compared the near-death experiences of those who reported seeing deceased people whom they knew during the experience with those who did not see such people. Kelly had medical records on all of the individuals in the study. Those who saw deceased others were closer to death and more often had the near-death experience after cardiac problems or accidents and less often as a result of surgery or childbirth. The average time between the death of the deceased person and the near-death experience in which he or she appeared was ten years (with a range of four days to 67 years). The deceased people were equally often men and women, mostly relatives and from a generation previous to the subject. Seeing other figures during the near-death experience was not associated with closeness to death. Those who saw deceased people were more likely to also see a light and to experience a tunnel or darkness; they did not differ in out-of-body experiences.

Owens et al. (1993) studied the near-death experiences of patients who believed themselves near death and compared those who would have died without medical intervention with patients who would not have died. Those who would have died did not differ from the others in being in a tunnel, separating from their body or having a life review. They were more likely to experience enhanced light, enhanced cognitive functioning and positive emotions.

Unfortunately, it is clear that there has been little sound research pertinent to this critical issue. What is needed is a collection of reports of near-death experiences immediately after the people recover from the near-death incident, and accompanying reports by medical experts as to the closeness to death of the patients.[1]

It's the Medications Given to the People

Near-death experiences could be the result of the medications administered to the people by the attending medical personnel. For example, peo-

ple given anesthetics sometimes report a sensation of being drawn down a dark tunnel. Rogo (1984) presented reports of experiences from individuals given ketamine as an anesthetic or analgesic which are similar to near-death experiences, except that, as Rogo noted, the people having ketamine-induced experiences often feel anxiety and the out-of-body component of the experience may differ.[2] Similarly, Jansen (1990) suggested that ketamine-binding sites in the brain might play a role a producing near-death experiences.

Ketamine appears to block the receptors in the brain whose functioning is controlled by the neurotransmitter glutamate. Jansen (1997), who has taken ketamine and has had a near-death experience, claims that the experiences are similar.

Here is one account of a ketamine-induced hallucination:

> …My first memory is of colors. I saw red everywhere, then a yellow square on the left grew and crowded out the red. My vision faded, to be replaced with a black-and-white checkerboard which zoomed to and from me. More patterns appeared and faded, always in focus, with distinct edges and bright colors.
>
> Gradually I realized my mind existed and I could think. I wondered, "What am I?" and "Where am I?" I had no consciousness of existing in a body; I was a mind suspended in space. At times I was at the center of the earth, in Ohio (my former home), on a space-ship or in a small brightly-colored room without doors or windows. I had no control over where my mind floated. Periods of thinking alternated with pure color hallucinations [Johnstone, 1973].

This description does not resemble the near-death experience, and those cited by Jansen (1997) do not resemble the near-death experience either. It is highly probable that quantitative research comparing the two types of experiences would find them to be quite different. Indeed Bianchi (1997) pointed out one simple difference: namely, that those undergoing a ketamine experience do not perceive it as reality whereas those undergoing a near-death experience do. The experiences are subjectively different in that respect at least.

Blacher (1984) noted that people occasionally have some awareness during surgery despite the anesthetic administered. However, such patients commonly report the pain experienced as well as what was said by the medical staff. The reports by these patients do not appear to resemble near-death experiences.

The Role of Recreational Drugs

The experiences could be due to the recreational drugs (such as marijuana, morphine, heroin and LSD) that the people might have taken. For

example, Siegel and Hirschman (1984) have described near-death experiences reported by those under the influence of hashish. Grof and Halifax-Grof (1976) reported that one of their subjects who had taken LSD and who had a near-death experience reported that they were similar. However, the majority of those reporting near-death experiences have not been under the influence of these recreational drugs at the time.

Oxygen Deficits

The experience could be a result of an oxygen deficit in the brain or an excess of carbon dioxide in the air taken into the lungs. Blackmore (1998) studied children who suffered from reflex anoxia seizures. Their parents filled out questionnaires about the children's experiences, and only four percent of the children experienced tunnels, eight percent flashes of light, four percent the feeling of leaving the body, and four percent memory of past events. Thus, these experiences during loss of oxygen rarely resembled near-death experiences.

Related to this explanation, Lempert et al. (1994) induced fainting in normal people, in part by having them hyperventilate. Some had hallucinations that Lempert claimed were similar to near-death experiences, although he did not give a complete description of these hallucinations. He did count the frequency of the elements of near-death experiences in the hallucinations, and there were some differences. None of the hallucinations had a life review, and none had knowledge of the future. The hallucinations also contained more noises and voices than typical near-death experiences. However, some of the elements of the near-death experience, such as the out-of-body experience, were present in the hallucinations.

Epilepsy

The experience could be due to epileptic disorders such as temporal lobe seizures. For example, Mandell (1980) has claimed that temporal lobe seizures resemble near-death experiences, and Morse (1994b) claimed that the patients who underwent electrical stimulation of the temporal lobe by Penfield (1955) sometimes had experiences that resembled elements of the near-death experience. However, there is no evidence that most of those who have near-death experiences have epilepsy.

One patient of Penfield's described in the paper did have an out-of-body experience, but later he experienced a spinning sensation and then

a "standing up" sensation. One of the fullest reports of a patient upon receiving electrical stimulation of the temporal lobe is as follows:

> …something brings back memory. I could see Seven-Up Bottling Company … Harrison Bakery … I am trying to find the name of the song. There was a piano there and someone was playing. I could hear the song you know … someone speaking to another and he mentioned a name but I could not understand it … someone speaking to me in my left ear, Sylvere [his name], Sylvere. It could have been my brother's voice…. I seem to see someone — men and women — they seem to be sitting down and listening to someone but I do not see who that someone might be [Penfield, 1955, 455].

This is not at all like a near-death experience, and to conclude from this that temporal lobe activity might be a cause of near-death experiences involves a wild jump of one's imagination.[3]

Sensory Deprivation

The experience may be a result of sensory deprivation experienced by the person during the medical emergency, similar to the hallucinations experienced by people who are placed in sensory deprivation situations. Or perhaps the experience is simply the result of extreme stress. However, Moody (1988) argued that the experiences felt by those under extreme stress in the midst of combat differ substantially from near-death experiences, and the hallucinations reported by people in sensory deprivation environments (such as in relaxation tanks) differ considerably from near-death experiences.

Physiological Explanations

A large number of physiological explanations have been proposed to account for near-death experiences.

(1) The near-death experience could be a result of endorphins (morphine-like substances), which are released by the brain when people are under stress in order to alleviate pain. For example, Carr (1982) suggested that the stress of a near-death event leads to the secretion of neurohormones in the brain, endogenous opioid peptides called endorphins and enkephalins. These neurohormones provoke hippocampal activity, which triggers activity in the limbic lobe, which is the physiological basis of the

near-death experience. Carr produced no research to support his idea. It was proposed merely as a speculative hypothesis.[4]

(2) and (3) Even more speculatively, Wile (1994) suggested that Reissner's fiber in the center of the spinal cord might interact with the brain's endogenous opioids to produce the near-death experience, but he did not report any research evidence to validate this speculation. Jourdan (1994) speculated that near-death experiences were due to the blockade of the N-methyl-D-aspartate receptors in the hippocampus by these endogenous opioids.

(4) Floyd (1996) reported the case of one person who had an experience under the influence of electroconvulsive shock that was similar to a near-death experience. The implications of this report are far from clear. Almost no person reporting a near-death experience has had electroconvulsive therapy just prior to the experience.

(5) Whinnery (1997) suggested that the experiences of those who are put in gravity accelerators (such as a centrifuge) and lose consciousness have an experience similar to a near-death experience. The implications are similar to those of electroconvulsive shock above: does the acceleration cause a near-death experience or is a near-death experience, caused by the same physiological processes that cause loss of consciousness in a centrifuge? However, there is no similarity in the two experiences. Here are two reports of the experience from Whinnery:

> I was floating in a blue ocean, on my back … kind of asleep but not asleep. I knew the sun was up … like someone was trying to wake me up. Finally, I woke up and I was on the centrifuge! I did not want to wake up … I could see myself on the water and also look at the sun; the sky was very blue, the sun very yellow [Whinnery, 1997, 246].
>
> I was in the grocery store going down one of the aisles. I was … being propelled by something like a magic carpet, although I could not make movements. I wanted to reach out and get a carton of ice cream but could not move my arm or even my eyes to look for it. It was intensely frustrating to hear the warning horn and not be able to get me arm down to turn the darn thing off [Whinnery, 1997, 246].

These are nothing like near-death experiences.

Whinnery suggested that near-death experiences could be studied using the same physiological monitoring as researchers use when studying gravity-induced loss of consciousness. The problem with this suggestion is, however, that gravity-induced loss of consciousness can be obtained on demand (for example, by whirling people in centrifuges) whereas near-death experiences cannot be summoned or created at while.

(6) Morse, Venecia and Milstein (1989) proposed that emotional

stress[5] could create serotonin imbalances in parts of the brain (the midbrain dorsal raphe), although they do not specify the nature of this imbalance. This imbalance could trigger imprinted memories in the temporal lobe (a phenomenon that can also be induced by electrical stimulation and physiological stress such as oxygen depletion), leading to near-death experiences. Thus, near-death experiences are similar to hallucinations. There is, of course, no evidence that this mechanism exists, let alone plays any role in near-death experiences.

They Are Dreams

The experience may be (and, therefore, be no different from) a dream. Ring's (1980) subjects denied that the near-death experience was like a dream. They saw it as a real experience.

Palmer (1978) noted that near-death experiences can occur under anesthesia or when the person is asleep, on the verge of sleep or relaxed; but that they can also occur in people under acute stress, in which case Palmer thought that the person was probably close to fainting (vasopressor syncope). Palmer suggested that these states reduce the amount of proprioceptive feedback to the brain from the body and that the deficit of input results in the out-of-body experience. Palmer saw out-of-body experiences as primary-process material (much like dreams), which are efforts to cope with this deficit.

They Are Hallucinations

Siegel (1980, 1981) has argued that near-death experiences are very similar to descriptions given by people of hallucinations, whether drug-induced or otherwise (such as by anesthetics, fever, and exhausting diseases, as well as by the dying process). Ineffability is commonly reported by those having peak religious and mystical experiences. Hearing voices is common in surgical patients recovering from anesthesia. Seeing a bright light or cities of light are similar, according to Siegel, to hallucinatory experiences resulting from stimulation of the central nervous system, as is the out-of-body experience and perceiving a border or limit. Seeing deceased relatives is simply the retrieval of memory images of those people.

Unfortunately, Siegel's assertions suffer from two limitations. First, Siegel does not produce any quantitative comparisons of the reports of a

sample of near-death experiences and a sample of hallucinations to support his contention. Thus his assertions are speculative. Second, Siegel has to resort to a different explanation for each element of the near-death experience, which breaks the scientific rule that the best theories are those which are parsimonious.

Van Dusen reported that a few of the schizophrenic patients he interviewed had "higher-order" hallucinations occasionally, and one was described as follows: "He also had a light come to him at night like the sun.... When the man was encouraged to approach his friendly sun he [a] entered world of powerful numinous experiences ... he found himself at the bottom of a long corridor with doors at the end behind which raged the powers of hell. He was about to let out these powers when a very powerful and impressive Christ-like figure appeared and ... counseled him to leave the doors closed and follow him into other experiences which were therapeutic to him" (1973, 124). This is not similar to a near-death experience.

Some writers view near-death experiences as pathological. For example, MacHover (1994) viewed them as a form of delirium. It has also been suggested that those who have a near-death experience may be psychiatrically disturbed, and the experience is merely an accompanying hallucination or a delusion. In particular, autoscopic hallucinations are those in which one sees a double, a mirror image of oneself, dressed alike and mimicking one's behavior. Such hallucinations may resemble the out-of-body component of the near-death experience.

Relevant to this, Twemlow and Gabbard (1984–1985) found that 34 people reporting near-death experiences were normal on a self-report scale to measure psychopathology. Thus, those reporting near-death experiences are unlikely to be hallucinating, psychiatrically disturbed individuals.

Gibbs (1982) argued that near-death experiences differ from hallucinations in being predictable and orderly (since near-death experiences are so similar to one another) and take place often in those who are unconscious (whereas those who experience psychiatric hallucinations are conscious). Siegel (1980) also noted that people who have experienced both near-death experiences and hallucinations say that the two experiences are quite different.[6]

Sedman (1966a, 1966b) found that he was easily able to distinguish between imagery (experiences occurring in inner subjective space), pseudohallucinations (phenomena sensed but recognized by the person as not being true perceptions) and hallucinations (perceptions without stimuli but believed to be true perceptions by the person). Sedman found that

the psychiatric patients in his sample who had true hallucinations differed in diagnosis from those with pseudohallucinations and those who had mere imagery. Thus, it would be possible to devise criteria for these three types of experiences and to determine how similar near-death experiences were to each of them. It could then be ascertained whether near-death experiences might resemble imagery, pseudohallucinations or true hallucinations.

Near-Death Experiences Are Examples of Depersonalization

Noyes and Kletti (1976a, 1976b) believe that near-death experiences are simply episodes of depersonalization. They had people who had survived extreme danger describe their experiences using a predetermined checklist. They found that the experiences accompanying survival of danger resemble descriptions of depersonalization, with characteristics such as altered passage of time, unusually vivid thoughts, and a sense of detachment. However, they do admit that some of the near-death elements reported by their subjects, including heightened perception and revival of memories, are not characteristic of depersonalization.[7]

In a comparison of accident victims and recently admitted psychiatric patients, Noyes et al. (1977) found that the experiences of both groups were similar, but the experience of depersonalization by the psychiatric patients (as defined by Noyes) was stronger. (The experience of hyperalertness was similar in both groups of patients.)

Although Noyes chooses to label near-death experiences as instances of depersonalization, it is unlikely that they are. For example, Davison (1964) gives descriptions from people who have undergone depersonalization experiences. One patient "complains of feeling in a trance, detached from his surroundings which appear unreal, and other people seem odd and unnatural. The most distressing symptom is a feeling that his head has entirely disappeared, leaving only his eyes protruding on stalks. He feels he is going mad, and ruminates on the possibility of having damaged his brain. During the attacks, he is restless, unable to concentrate and unable to work and appears depressed"(Davison, 1964, 507). Another patient "describes the sensation as 'like being in another world,' 'time has no meaning,' 'as though I am dead.' In some of the attacks he experiences an unpleasant smell for approximately five minutes which reminds him of an occasion when his car radiator boiled dry. At other times his fingers feel greatly enlarged" (Davison, 1964, 507). These are not at all like near-death experiences.

Gabbard, Twemlow and Jones (1982) compared the descriptions of out-of-body experiences, depersonalization and the hallucination of seeing one self or one's double (autoscopy). In depersonalization, an observing self watches the functioning self whereas, in out-of-body experiences, the two selves are experienced as one. In depersonalization, people do not feel that they are out of the body; they experience the state as dreamlike, unpleasant and strange and feel panic, anxiety or emptiness; and the experience is stress-induced. Out-of-body experiences are not experienced as dreamlike, are typically pleasant, with feelings of joy and ecstasy or calm and peace, and are relaxation-induced. Depersonalization experiences affect mainly those under the age of 40 and occurred more in women than in men, whereas out-of-body experiences are common in both men and women at all ages.

In autoscopy, the double is active and may imitate the movements of the person. The observer may see only the face and shoulders of the double, and the double's body appears colorless and transparent. The accompanying emotion is usually sadness.

In the experience of loss of boundaries reported by schizophrenics, there is a loss of reality testing and chronic difficulty with the delineation of the body. The body is distorted in shape, and the location of the body uncertain. The person loses their identity and feels that he or she is going crazy. Clearly, the characteristics of autoscopy and schizophrenic body distortions sound very different from out-of-body experiences.

In order to make explanations such as this (near-death experiences as depersonalization) and earlier ones reviewed in this chapter (near-death experiences as hallucinations) convincing, what is required is a good comparative study of these different states. Here is an example of such research, although it does not include a sample of near-death experiences.

Harper and Roth (1962) compared samples of patients with temporal lobe epilepsy and phobic anxiety-depersonalization syndrome, which had been thought to be similar. The experiences were similar in that they both involved depersonalization, déjà vu, hallucinations, and attacks of fear. Harper and Roth found that they differed in that the depersonalization syndrome more often consisted of episodic anxiety, less often involved unconsciousness and loss of the power of speech, and less often resulted in self-injury and incontinence. The two groups differed also in the incidence of brain damage, age of onset, sex ratio, abnormalities of personality (such as marked dependence and immaturity), and family histories. Thus, the two syndromes appeared to be quite different.

Reliving the Birth Experience

Some of the elements, such as moving through a dark tunnel toward a light, may simply be the result of the rearousal of the birth experience, a flashback or a retrieval of the memory (Roedding, 1991). This may be especially true for near-death experiences that are frightening to the person (Bache, 1994). Lawson (1994) went further and suggested that both near-death experiences and reports of being kidnapped by aliens were based on perinatal memories. For example, for the alien abductees, the UFO is the womb, the cervix of the womb is the UFO doorway and the postnatal checkup by the doctor is the intrusive probing by aliens.

Blackmore (1991) suggested that, if this was the case, the near-death experiences of those born normally (through the birth canal) and those born by cesarian might be different, particularly concerning the tunnel element. This hypothesis has not yet been tested.

Could Near-Death Experiences Be a Product of the Collective Unconscious?

In Carl Jung's theory of the mind, people have a set of conscious elements and a set of elements in a personal unconscious (desires and thoughts from infancy and childhood years that were punished and forbidden expression by parents). In these respects, Jung accepted the theory of psychoanalysis proposed by Sigmund Freud. However, Jung believed that, in addition, people have a set of unconscious elements in their minds that they share with other humans, inherited in some way, which he called the collective unconscious, the elements of which were called archetypes. Jung used these concepts to explain how similar themes in stories and paintings appear to have originated independently in various cultures all over the world in different eras. Archetypes do not use verbal symbols (since these are culture-bound) but rather a visual and symbolic language. They are messages from the unconscious mind to the conscious mind.

The similarity of the near-death experience in people from different cultures and in different eras suggests to Jungian analysts that, when people are close to death, a particular archetype is stimulated and intrudes into the conscious mind (Heaney, 1983).

Jungian analysts would also suggest that reincarnation experiences and evidence of survival from apparitions and mediums might also be products of the collective unconscious. Ribi (1989), for example, gives an example of a five-year-old child who appeared to his father in Paris at

about the same time that the child died in London. Ribi suggests that the unconscious of the father was simply mirroring what really had happened. It was communicating to the conscious mind in a creative (and nonverbal) way. The fact that the archetypal images are messages from the unconscious means that the temporal sequence need not be correct, or even simultaneous.

For Jungian analysts, these experiences are merely synchronous events, noncausal but meaningful coincidences. Jung was open to the possibility that the whole of the universe is one integrated system and that events in one part of the system may be reflected in other parts of the system. Thus, events can occur that are related and synchronous in time, but that do not *cause* one another.

A similar explanation can be applied to mediums who communicate with the dead. Just as, while people are dreaming, they take the dream to be real, a medium takes all that she experiences as reality. Such experiences may be of therapeutic benefit for the survivors, but it should not be assumed that the experience is proof of survival. Ribi presented the case of a person who was skeptical about a medium's messages but had a dream that ridiculed the dreamer's own skeptical attitude. Perhaps the collective unconscious mind of the dreamer was telling the dreamer to be more open-minded.

It must be noted here that the majority of psychologists find Jung's idea of the collective unconscious to be unacceptable. There is no experimental evidence, they say, for its existence, just as there is none for survival after death.

A Psychological Defense Mechanism

The near-death experience may be generated psychodynamically as a defense mechanism to cope with the fear of death. It denies death, and reassures people about immortality (Ehrenwald, 1974).

A Higher Self

Ring (1980) proposed a mystical explanation for the near-death experience. He argued that the person's consciousness leaves the body. There is also a move to another level of consciousness, which Ring calls the fourth dimension, a new order of reality, which he compares to a holograph. The person encounters his or her "higher self" in this dimension, an experi-

ence that is externalized so that it seems like another person. This "other" appears as a bright light and is loving and forgiving, and initiates the life review.[8]

Alcock (1979) agreed with this explanation, viewing near-death experiences as mystical experiences, similar to the peak experiences described by Abraham Maslow (1968) that are common in self-actualized people (extremely psychologically healthy people) and in those experiencing the altered states of consciousness accompanying alpha waves in the brain.

Shaping by the Media

Perhaps the knowledge of near-death experiences is sufficiently common to shape people's experiences. Walker (1989) presented a near-death experience that was probably influenced by media reports. Kellehear and Irwin (1990) surveyed Australian students and found that their expectations about near-death experiences resembled the near-death accounts more than they did Biblical accounts of the afterlife. However, slightly more cited the Bible (34 percent) than near-death literature (23 percent) as their source of information about possible near-death experiences. Accounts of near-death experiences have been disseminated among the general population, leading to the likelihood that this information will shape the experiences of future near-death experiencers.

Twemlow and Gabbard (1984–1985) studied 34 individuals who reported a near-death experience in response to a survey of people reporting out-of-body experiences. They found that these people were less likely to have attended out-of-body workshops than the others in the survey.

Visions from God or the Devil

Some have suggested that near-death experiences are visions sent to the person by God or the Devil, an untestable hypothesis.

Explaining Parts of the Near-Death Experience

Others have proposed possible explanations for parts of the experience. For example, Blackmore and Troscianko (1989) suggested that the tunnel element in near-death experiences could be (1) an actual tunnel from this world to the next, (2) a symbolic representation of such a tran-

sition, (3) a real or symbolic reliving of the memory of the birth experience, (4) a product of the imagination, or (5) the result of a physiological process.

Twemlow and Gabbard (1984–1985) found that the presence of a fever during the near-death out-of-body experience increased the probability of hearing noises; those who were told that their hearts had stopped beating were more likely to have had a sense of power during the experience and to have been aware of other beings; those who were in an accident at the time were less likely to want to return to their bodies and were more likely to experience joy; those under general anesthesia were more likely to see a brilliant light and to wish to keep the experience a secret; those under the influence of a drug were less likely to experience part of their minds as being back in their bodies, and were more likely to be aware of other beings and to feel that these beings were trying to communicate with them; and those who were in severe pain felt less attached to the physical body, and were more likely to feel confused about the experience, have a sense of freedom, see their body from a distance, and be in the same environment as their body. Those under the influence of a drug had greater "attention absorption" (a cognitive style conducive to experiencing altered states of consciousness) and those in severe pain were less hysteroid on personality tests.

Twemlow and Gabbard thought that the near-death experience in those under the influence of drugs resembled depersonalization experiences with hallucinatory features (Siegel, 1980), resembled some experiences under LSD (Grof and Halifax, 1978) and could represent recall of the birth trauma. The effects of cardiac arrest on the experience are consistent with the emergence of a grandiose self, a manic triumph after transcending death (Kohut, 1971).

These results indicate that preexisting conditions had a great impact on the near-death experience,[9] although the preexisting conditions did not determine the experience totally. For example, nine of the ten people who saw a brilliant light were under general anesthesia, whereas only ten of the 22 who did not see a brilliant light were under general anesthesia.

Comparing the Near-Death Experience to Similar Experiences

Bates and Stanley (1985) prepared an interesting comparison of the qualities of different types of experience: near-death experiences— out-of-body experiences, depersonalization, cosmic consciousness and LSD-

induced hallucinations—based on their reading of the reports (see the accompanying table). It can be seen that the experiences are quite different, and no two experiences are identical.[10]

Table 2—Qualities of Difference Types of Experiences (from Bates and Stanley, 1985)

	Near-death	Out-of-body	Depersonalization	Cosmic	LSD
Blissfulness	yes	yes	no	yes	no
Altered sense of time	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Sense of separation from body	yes	yes	no	no	no
Loss of sense of identity	no	no	yes	no	no
Transcendence of identity	yes	no	no	yes	no
Unusual perceptual clarity	yes	yes	no	yes	yes
Unusual lucidity of thought	yes	no	no	yes	yes
Tunnel-like images	yes	no	no	no	yes
Encounter with bright light	yes	no	no	no	yes

A Criticism of the Critics

The research conducted on near-death experiences has been, in general, quite poor. Many methodological weaknesses are found in the research.

1. Often the samples are not uniform or easily duplicated. For example, Greyson and Stevenson (1980) obtained their sample of reports from letters to a national magazine (which, they did not specify), responses to announcements to requests for participants in "professional newsletters" (which, they did not specify), and communications to one of the authors. Samples should be uniform, that is, all from one type of source, and described in enough detail that another researcher could obtain a similar sample.

2. Research should have exact and accurate data. Sabom and Kreutziger (1977) reported that they interviewed "roughly" 50 patients. Such research is careless.

3. Grosso (1981) noted that research interviewing those who have had near-death experiences is interesting, but research is also needed on

those who have been through near-death *events* regardless of whether they have had a near-death experience. He suggested that queries about near-death experiences should be part of all routine examinations of resuscitated patients.

Critics of the idea that near-death experiences provide evidence for survival after death have been lazy. It is easy to postulate alternative theories of the causes of near-death experiences—-that they result from drug-produced hallucinations, sensory deprivation, oxygen shortages in the brain, temporal lobe epileptic-type seizures, depersonalization symptoms, defense mechanisms stimulated by the fear of death, wish-fulfillment, a recapitulation of the birth experience, or a product of Jungian-type archetypes.

But many of the explanations are not open to research and so are not scientific in nature. For example, the possibility that near-death experiences might result from an archetype is an untestable hypothesis.

Other critics have not conducted any research which might test their theories—for example, giving people who have drug-produced hallucinations and those who have near-death experiences identical checklists of symptoms and experiences to complete so that it is possible to examine whether the experiences are similar or not. (Note also, that the time between the experience and completing the checklist would have to be the same for both groups. Often those who have near-death experiences are questioned months or years later.)

For example, Alcock asserts "no doubt that ordinary hallucinations can contain virtually all of the elements described by Moody…." (1979, 37). However, he produces no sound evidence that this is true. He simply cites other authors who assert the same thing.

Jansen (1990, 1997), in pushing his theory that near-death experiences are like ketamine-induced hallucinations, asserts the two types of accounts are closely matched. However, his references to this research turn out to be to Siegel's (1980) paper, which is not a report of research but merely a review of the literature. Thus, Jansen produces no direct evidence for his theory.

Furthermore, as Gabbard and Twemlow (1981) have pointed out, the fact that several phenomena appear to be similar does not mean that they have the same underlying cause. Indeed, as any student of abnormal behavior knows from reading an introductory text, people who are diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic may have quite different causal factors, including abnormal metabolism of dopamine in the brain (a neuroscience explanation), strong unconscious homosexual impulses (a psychoanalytic

explanation), and labeling by dysfunctional relatives (R.D. Laing's labeling explanation). Thus, there is no logical requirement in, for example, Siegel's (1980) theory, that people undergoing a near-death experience have the same neurological status as those having hallucinations.

What is needed to resolve these issues? Consider the proposal that near-death experiences are the same as depersonalization experiences. A good research study requires, say, 100 reports of near-death experiences and 100 reports of depersonalization experiences. These reports need to be collected in the same way. Near-death experiences are usually related to the investigator months and years after the experience. In this case, either the depersonalization experiences must be collected in identical conditions, that is, the same number of months and years after the experience or, even better, both the near-death and depersonalization experiences have to be collected immediately after the time of the experience.

Next, one team of investigators must examine 50 of the near-death experiences while another team examines 50 of the depersonalization experiences, in order to decide upon what are the basic elements of each type of experience. Each team must produce a checklist of these elements.

Next, these elements are combined and randomized. Then a third team reads the remaining 100 reports of experiences (50 near-death experiences and 50 depersonalization experiences, randomly arranged) and completes the checklist for each of the 100 reports.

Finally, a statistician explores whether the two sets of 50 reports differ.

The next study would be to find new samples of those who have near-death experiences and depersonalization experiences and have them complete the same checklist for their experience. A statistician can then explore whether the two sets of checklists differ.

This has never been done for any of the theories reported above.

One Critic's Explanations

Blackmore (1993) proposes the most detailed explanation of near-death experiences, suggesting a physiological cause for each element of the prototypical experience.

1. She suggests that cerebral anoxia (the brain being deprived of oxygen), combined with an associated buildup of carbon monoxide, can be one of the triggers of a near-death experience and account for some of the elements, including floating, euphoria, vivid beautiful visions, and out-of-body experiences. Blackmore suggests that the anoxia results in changed

electrical activity in the brain (which she labels as disinhibition and disorganized excitation), and that it is this altered electric activity that causes the near-death experience.[11]

2. Blackmore also presents a speculative hypothesis as to how a disinhibited visual cortex (the part of your brain at the rear of your head) might lead to random firing and how this might lead to the apparent perception of a tunnel effect. Chemicals (drugs and medications) that increase the frequency of the tunnel element in near-death experiences do so by having an impact on disinhibition of the visual cortex.

3. Blackmore suggests that feelings of bliss are a result of the endorphins (which are peptides synthesized in the brain) produced during the stress of the near-death incident they have a psychological effect much the same as opiates. She suggests also that endorphins can cause electrical seizures in the brain, which may lead to visions.

4. Blackmore argues that the life review was a result of endorphins being released in the brain under stress and lowering the threshold for seizures in the limbic system and termporal lobe. These seizures cause the life review.

Many of Blackmore's hypotheses have been suggested by previous writers. Her arguments, however, are more detailed and better argued than those of others. But, and this is the same criticism made earlier, Blackmore presents no empirical evidence for her hypotheses. She presents no studies (methodologically sound or unsound) comparing the visions produced by opiates and endorphins with near-death experiences. She presents no studies comparing the visual effects produced by disinhibition of the visual cortex and near-death experiences. And so on. Her hypotheses are speculative,[12] and without empirical evidence, her reasoning is unconvincing.

An Example of a Good Study

One study has appeared that begins to test the validity of some of the explanations for near-death experiences. Parnia et al. (2001) interviewed 63 patients with cardiac arrest soon after the problem. Only four reported a typical near-death experience. All patients were given physiological tests, and those with near-death experiences did not differ in blood levels of sodium, potassium or carbon dioxide. They did have higher levels of potassium dioxide than the control patients. The four with near-death experiences were without any heartbeat or pulse. Parnia concluded

that the near-death experiences arose in these patients during unconsciousness.

This type of study, with measures taken during the cardiac arrest and interviews soon afterwards, is a model for future research on near-death experiences.

Conclusion

As mentioned in the preface, the aim of this book is to look for *empirical evidence* that there is life after death. The next chapter will discuss whether any has been found. Speculative theories do not constitute evidence. For a scientist, hypotheses and theories, and predictions made from them, are an important first step, but they must be followed by empirical tests of the hypotheses and the predictions.

The quality of the theorizing and research by the critics of the idea that the near-death experience is evidence for life after death is extremely substandard for scholars writing in the modern age. At least those who believe that the near-death experience does prove the existence of life after death have conducted some research, poor though it may be. The critics, on the other hand, have not produced a single study — poor or good.

8

Does This Show There Is Life After Death?

It is time to review the material presented in the five preceding chapters and discuss whether the research supports the existence of life-after-death.

Criticism of the Research

Greyson (1998, 1999) has recently pointed out that there is no adequate definition of what a near-death experience is. The result is that the research from different investigators is difficult to compare (since they use different definitions). It is not even possible to calculate the incidence of near-death experiences.

For example, many investigators use the term "near-death experience" to mean the experience described by Raymond Moody in his first book in 1976, *Life After Life*. This definition is quite restrictive since it would eliminate all other types of experience.

The Moody-type near-death experience can be rated for its depth — that is, how many of the 15 or so elements were present — but then that raises the issue of how many elements must be present for an experience to qualify as a Moody-type near-death experience. If it has all 15, that is fine, but what about five elements or just one? Is that sufficient?

Other investigators take the term "near-death experience" to mean *any* experience that occurs in a life-threatening situation. This opens the field up immensely and, for example, permits the inclusion of the unpleasant and hellish experiences that are occasionally reported.

Because the term used is "near-death," then this also raises the issue of whether the individual must be near death and, if so, how near?

Greyson (1998) raised a number of other methodological issues.

1. Often the sample sizes in the research are small (good research requires large sample sizes). On other occasions, the sample size is not known. Researchers are expected to know how many subjects they used and to report this number.

2. The samples are usually not random but rather volunteers and people who are referred to the investigator. Good research requires random samples and, even if random samples are not possible, complete subject pools (such as *everyone* in a large college class or who is at a union meeting). The use of volunteers biases the results, and it is not known in what way the results will be biased.

Often, the samples used are not uniform or easily duplicated. For example, the samples used by Greyson and Stevenson (1980), discussed in Chapter 7, were from a variety of sources, none of which were described in enough detail that another researcher could obtain a similar sample.

3. Since much of the research on near-death experiences is done by those who believe that these experiences provide evidence for life after death, the questions are often leading and biased. Melvin Morse (1994) has argued that Kenneth Ring's research is flawed in this way.

4. Much of the research on near-death experiences is on experiences that are recalled from many years before. Memory is not good for such events. It is crucial that research on near-death experiences use experiences which are only hours, or at most days, old.

The result of these inadequacies in the research meant that Greyson (1998) was unable to provide a valid estimate of even the incidence of near-death experiences. The estimates in the various studies he reviewed ranged from 0 percent to 100 percent!

5. Many experiences are postulated to be similar to near-death experiences and, therefore, to be explanations of near-death experiences. As has been noted above, there has rarely been any good research comparing these experiences.

6. Well-done scientific research can usually be replicated by other researchers. Much of the evidence proposed in support of the existence of life after death relies on isolated incidents that cannot easily be replicated or reproduced by others. For example, Morse (1994) reports the case of a seven-year-old girl who could give a detailed description of her resuscitation, including a nasal intubation and being placed in a CT scanner. Such cases are not easily reproduced. Could researchers go into the operating

room, watch a similar operation, and obtain similar information from a child patient? And if not, under what conditions could they obtain such information? To take an analogy, a single individual might fit the astrological description of a Gemini individual, but that does not provide scientific evidence that astrology is valid. Convincing research that can be reproduced requires large samples of subjects, accurate measurements, and statistical analyses of the data.

7. Good researchers are aware of what controls must be introduced into research in order to produce convincing results. For example, commenting on reports that psychic phenomena (such as extrasensory perception) can accompany out-of-the-body experiences, Palmer (1978) noted that researchers need to show that psychic phenomena are *more* common during out-of-the-body experiences, not simply that they supposedly can occur.

Does Anyone Do Good Research?

Interestingly, the answer to this is yes. The good research is limited, and it done by those not necessarily focused on near-death experiences. This research is carried out by doctors and nurses in emergency rooms. For example, Finkelmeier et al. (1984) surveyed 60 patients who had "cardiac death" and found that 20 percent were aware of medical procedures, 5 percent experienced separation from their body, and 4 percent experienced a tunnel with a bright light at the end. Compared to patients with disturbances in their heart rhythm, these cardiac death patients felt more anxiety and feelings of dependency and made greater changes in their lives after the hospitalization.

Tosch (1988) interviewed 15 patients after their head injury and coma. Eight recalled nothing, while the other eight reported three experiences: (1) feelings of imprisonment ("I felt like I was being held for no reason. I wanted to leave"), (2) sensory experiences (one patient saw "deformed human shapes" that caused him to feel unreal), and (3) death-like experiences ("I had a weird feeling that I had died").

Lawrence (1995) surveyed 100 patients who had been unconscious and found five types of experience:

1. Unconsciousness— no experience at all (27%).
2. Inner consciousness— an awareness of the inner self (9%): "It was just black. It was dark. Eventually I passed out and the pain went away" (229).

3. Perceived unconsciousness—hearing but not able to respond to stimuli (27%): "I heard a thumping on the stairs, and then I heard people coming in the bathroom. I could hear the paramedic saying, 'We are losing him' and I tried to say, 'No, you're not.' … But I could not move and I could not talk or open my eyes" (229).

4. Distorted consciousness—perceptual, memory and personality distortions (14%): "Even now I still see birds out there and red and dark blood on the wall here. I look out the window and I see these birds over there. When I blink my eyes they are gone. I look back once here and I see blood running down the wall" (230).

5. Paranormal experiences (23%): these patients had near-death experiences or, at least, some elements of the experience, although two patients reported seeing the "Grim Reaper," which is not part of the prototypical near-death experience.

Recent Good Research

Van Lommel et al. (2001) recently conducted a sound study of near-death experiences. They interviewed all survivors of cardiac arrest in several hospitals in the Netherlands within a few days of the resuscitation.

Of the 344 patients, 18 percent reported a near-death experience. Using Ring's scale, 6 percent had a superficial experience, 5 percent a moderate experience, 5 percent a deep experience and 2 percent a very deep experience. The most common components were positive emotions (in 56% of those reporting a near-death experience), an awareness of being dead (50%), and moving through a tunnel (31%). The least common components were the presence of a border (8%) and a life review (13%).

Van Lommel compared the patients who reported a near-death experience of any depth with those who did not and found that a near-death experience was more common in those under the age of 60, if it was the first heart attack, if they died in the next 90 days, if they had had near-death experiences before, and if they did not have a generalized memory defect after the resuscitation. Extra medication, duration of unconsciousness, duration of cardiac arrest, intubation and electrophysiological stimulation were not related to the frequency of having a near-death experience. The depth of the near-death experience was greater in women, those who had CPR outside of the hospital and those who died in the next 30 days.

In two-year and eight-year follow-up interviews, those patients who had had a near-death experience reported more positive effects from the

near-death incident, such as becoming more loving and empathic, having less fear of death, and having a greater sense of an inner meaning to life.

Unresolved Questions

Kastenbaum (1996) noted several questions that need to be addressed:

1. Why do the majority of those who have close calls with death not report NDEs?
2. Why are some NDEs nightmarish while others are comforting?
3. Why are some NDEs experienced in non–life-threatening situations?

Morse (1994) suggested some other questions, which will be rather more difficult to answer:

4. If people who have near-death experiences sometimes have a choice of whether to return to life or not, does this mean that those who die have made the choice *not* to return?
5. Are those in comas stuck in the near-death experience, perhaps the tunnel, or unable to complete the experience?

Kastenbaum suggested several crucial areas of research. For example, reports are needed from those who have NDEs during close calls with death to compare with those from people who have NDEs in non–life-threatening situations. He also urged that reports be taken under controlled conditions; in particular, to eliminate the bias of eager researchers who believe that NDEs prove that survival occurs. Kastenbaum also urged that some measure of closeness to death (and type of closeness) be attached to each NDE report. Did the heart stop and for how long? Was the person in a coma; what depth was the coma? How long did the coma last? Or similar measureable facts. Kastenbaum urged that researchers impose rigorous research standards.

Some scholars have wondered why, since near-death experiences involve an apparent split between the mind and the brain, such a split cannot occur at other times. Of course, this has been reported, one example being the out-of-the-body experience.

Kastenbaum noted, with regret, that near-death researchers appear to have given up. Recent issues of the *Journal of Near-Death Studies* have published fewer research studies than in earlier years, and the rigor of the few studies has not improved.

Have It Been Proven That There Is Life After Death?

Kastenbaum (1996) has discussed the relevance of near-death experiences as evidence of survival. Kastenbaum was convinced that near-death experiences are not fabrications by the people reporting them. However, he viewed them as reports, not as experiences. As a researcher, he does not experience what the reporter is telling him, but he can conduct research on the report. This is especially relevant to reports in which the experiencer recalls a near-death experience from many years ago. In this case, not even the experiencer is "experiencing" the event, but is reporting a memory. The "I" that gives the report is not the same "I" who had the near-death experience many years earlier.

Kastenbaum was not convinced that NDEs are evidence for survival after death. He suggested that NDEs are mental states that occur when people can do nothing directly to improve their chances of surviving a crisis. The state serves to quiet the nervous system and conserve energy. In addition, he asserted, "People who have died and stayed dead have not necessarily had the experiences reported by those who have shared their extraordinary episodes with us" (261).

Cook et al. (1998) argued that there were three features of near-death experiences that were particularly relevant to the issue of life after death. First, thinking (or, more generally, mental activity) persists or is enhanced at a time when the physiological functioning of the body is diminished. This suggests that consciousness may not be completely dependent upon physiological processes.

Second, the out-of-the-body experience suggests that the mind can function outside of the body and so may survive the death of the body. Third, people who have near-death experiences sometimes report paranormal knowledge, such as when the mind perceives stimuli that are not present in the room or the place where the body lies, or when the person acquires knowledge that is not currently known, as when a person in a near-death experience meets the spirit of a deceased person whom no one yet knows is dead (the so-called "Peak in Darien" case). Certainly, if all three of these components occur together in a near-death experience, then such a case may be strongly suggestive of life-after-death.

However, in searching for cases, Cook could cite only cases published by others from times past, such as a case published in 1957 about an incident that occurred in 1916. Cook and his colleagues also collected their own cases, but again the evidence was often of experiences long past, and efforts to check upon the details failed. All of their cases were recorded years after the experience, sometimes as long as 55 years. The case Cook felt was

most supportive was that of a 56-year-old man who was operated on for quadruple bypass surgery. During the surgery, he had a near-death experience, including the sensation of floating out of his body and observing the operation. In particular, he described the surgeons working on his leg (they stripped some veins to create a bypass graft) and one of the team flapping his arms as if trying to fly, a gesture which that surgeon habitually made during surgery. The patient wrote the experience down in 1990, and Cook's team interviewed the surgeons in 1997. The surgeon who flapped his arms did not recall whether he did so or not, and the other surgeon did not recall him doing so, although he did confirm that the patient reported the experience immediately after the surgery.

In this case, the best case that Cook could produce, the experience was not recorded for two years and the surgeons were not interviewed until nine years had passed. Given that many patients report near-death experiences and that many of the researchers (such as Ian Stevenson and his team) are located in a university with a medical school, it is amazing that no case has yet appeared in which a near-death experience (let alone one with the features that Cook focused on) has been recorded (with audio or video recorders) immediately after the patient recovered and the details checked there and then. This needs to be done, and it is surprising that it has not yet been done.

Conclusions

First, the critics of the near-death experience have not produced any research to support their alternative explanations. Therefore, at the present time, their explanations must be placed on hold.

Second, there are several features of the research on near-death experiences which are troubling.

1. There appears to be huge impact of culture on the near-death experience. Despite the opinions of those publishing the accounts of near-death experiences from different cultures that they are similar, the differences are striking. If near-death experiences are evidence for life after death, they should be the same in every culture.

2. The role of the features of the near-death incident in affecting the near-death experience is disturbing. The tunnel experience may be more common in those who have cardiopulmonary arrest (Drab, 1981). Panoramic review may be more common in those who are in accidents (Noyes and Kletti, 1977; Stevenson and Cook, 1995). Twemlow and Gab-

bard (1984-1985) found evidence that fever, heart stoppages, accidents, general anesthesia, drugs and medications, and severe pain affect the nature of the near-death experience. These studies were not completely methodologically sound, but future research, to be convincing, must study and eliminate the effect of these kinds of variables.

3. Ring's (1992) research comparing NDERs and UFOers is quite disturbing. It suggests that both groups have similar childhood experiences, personality traits, and even psychiatric symptoms. Since UFO encounters do not provide evidence for life after death, it seems that NDEs may not do so either, and both may be products of eccentric minds.

On the other hand, if reports of near-death experiences in very young children and in those blind from birth could be obtained immediately after the near-death incident and were found to be similar to those of adults, then this would support the validity of the near-death experience as assertion for life after death. But good research on these two groups has not yet appeared.

Thus, at the present time, the evidence that near-death experiences do provide evidence for life after death is unconvincing.

Part Three

Reincarnation

9

Introduction to Reincarnation

Reincarnation is a phenomenon in which, after a person dies, the soul or spirit survives and waits for a period of time before entering the body of newly conceived baby. This baby then may possess memories of some of the life experiences of the previous person from which the soul or spirit came. Reincarnation then, if it can be proven, would provide strong evidence for life after death.

The Typical Case

Stevenson (1977c) has collected many hundreds of reports of reincarnation, often personally interviewing the people involved. He describes the typical case as follows. A child, two to six years old, begins to tell his parents about a previous existence. The child may show unusual behavior from the point of view of his family, but this behavior later proves to be consistent with the previous existence.

The child asks to be taken to the place where he lived previously, and his family tries to identify the previous incarnation. The search for the previous family is successful, and the child is found to be correct and accurate in about 90 percent of the statements he makes about the previous existence. After the age of five or six, the child talks less about the previous existence, and his memories fade.

Stevenson (1977) reported that he and his colleagues had collected more than 1,600 such reports, mainly from India, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, and Native Americans of the Pacific Northwest. These are regions and cultures where the inhabitants believe in reincarnation. Reports from Europe and much of America, where

belief in reincarnation is rare, tend to be less numerous and poorer in quality.

How Common Are Reincarnation Reports?

Barker and Pasricha (1979) interviewed 91 people in Uttar Pradesh in India and found that 77 percent knew about reincarnation, while 21 percent remembered previous lives. Those with reincarnation memories ranged in age from three to 65, with a median age of 22. The majority were men, Hindu, from the lowest castes, and later-borns. They usually first remembered the previous life between the ages of two and five, and their families were more familiar with the idea of reincarnation than the average family in the region. The specific identity of the previous existence was identified in 68 percent of the cases, and these previous identities were Hindu, died between the ages of ten and 80 (with a median age of 45), and tended more often to be of a lower caste than of a higher caste as compared to the present person. In 68 percent of the cases, the parents tried to suppress their child's memory of the previous personality. In nine of the 13 identified cases, the deceased person and the parents of the present person had met and lived in the same or a neighboring village. In the other four cases, the previous person lived between six and 45 kilometers distant.

Factors Affecting Reincarnation Experiences

Violent Death

In a study of cases of reincarnation reported from eight different cultures, Chadha and Stevenson (1988) found that reports of previous lives that ended violently were different in two ways from reports of previous lives that ended nonviolently. First, those reporting violent deaths in prior lives were reincarnated sooner (after an average of 46 months versus 73 months). Second, the person began talking about the previous life at an earlier age if the previous death had been violent (at age 32 months versus age 43 months). Interestingly, people were more likely to report the cause of death in the previous life spontaneously if the death had been violent (94 percent versus 52 percent).

The incidence of violent deaths in reincarnation reports from India varied from 35 percent (in a small random sample) to 47 percent in non-

randomly selected series of reports. The incidence of actual violent death in India is only seven percent, and so violent death seemed to result in reincarnation more often than would be expected based on its actual rate of occurrence.

The results reported by Chadha and Stevenson are consistent with Hindu beliefs, for a violent death is necessarily a premature one and so the need to be reborn will be stronger. A similar belief also occurs among the Tlingit of Alaska.

Stevenson and Chadha (1990) found that the age at which the child first mentioned the previous life was not associated with the age at death of the previous incarnation or the interval between its death and the child's birth. The mean age at death of the previous person did not differ in violent versus natural deaths and was not associated with the interval between its death and the child's birth. This latter finding conflicts with their earlier report (Chadha and Stevenson, 1988).

Punishing Children for Reporting Previous Lives

Western parents often punish children who report previous incarnations because they think the children are lying. In the East, parents also sometimes punish such children for very different reasons. There is a belief that children who remember previous lives die young. The parents may also fear losing the child (by kidnapping or by seduction) to the family of the previous life. The parents may also feel threatened by descriptions of a previous superior life, be embarrassed if the previous life was of low social status, or fear reprisals if the child claims to have been murdered and names the murderer.

Stevenson and Chadha (1990) studied reports of previous lives by children in Asia and found that in 41 percent of the cases, the parents tried to suppress the child's talking about previous life.[1] Those children whose parents suppressed the stories did not differ from the other children in the age at which they began talking about their previous life, nor in the age at which they stopped. Thus, attempts at suppression did not seem to have an impact on the children.

The Effect of Culture

Stevenson (1983a) compared reincarnation reports from mainstream children in America and India and found many differences. The previous

incarnation was identified in 77 percent of the Indian cases compared to only 20 percent for the American children. For the American children, the previous incarnation was almost always a family member (94 percent) whereas this was the case for only 16 percent of the Indian children. Both American and Indian children began talking of the previous life at the same age (37 and 38 months respectively), but the American children stopped talking about it sooner (64 versus 79 months).

Both groups made the same number of statements, but the Indian children more often mentioned the cause of death (78 percent versus 43 percent). However, when the cause was mentioned, the American children more often reported a violent death (80 percent versus 56 percent). For those who experienced a violent death, the incidence of phobias in the present life associated with the mode of death in the previous life was the same in both groups of children. More of the American children had a different sex in the new life than in the past one (15 percent versus 3 percent).[2] Both groups of children had, on the whole, undistinguished previous lives.

We will consider the effect of culture in more detail in Chapter 11.

Beliefs About Reincarnation

Primitive Peoples

Stevenson (1985) reported on the reincarnation beliefs of the Igbo of Nigeria. The Igbo believe that a person may improve his status from incarnation to incarnation, and this belief comforts those who have not raised their status in their present lives. It becomes important for the Igbo to identify the deceased person of whom a new baby is the reincarnation, for then the baby assumes the status of that person.

At death, the Igbo believe that the person's soul goes to a realm of discarnate beings, a joyless limbo from which the souls yearn to escape. Thus, the Igbo have no aversion to being reincarnated (unlike the Hindus and Buddhists). In order to calm the discarnate soul and ease the transition to a new body, there is a special ceremony, the second burial, which takes place from one week to one year after the physiological death of the person. Those who die young are believed to be reincarnated sooner than those who die in old age.

Good behavior in one life leads to a higher status in the discarnate realm and in the next reincarnation. Bad conduct could lead to reincarnation as a twin or being born feet first (both taboo conditions), an

unhappy reincarnated life, or reincarnation as an animal. Those whose lives were worthless and those who died prematurely or by suicide may never be reincarnated, and the survivors can prevent a person from reincarnating by denying burial to the corpse or by burying it face downwards.

The Igbo expect to reincarnate in the same family. Changing sex is possible if the soul desires this. A soul may also reincarnate into two or more (even 12) new bodies. On rare occasions, a part of the soul may reincarnate into a new body before the former body dies. The former incarnations of babies are identified by such things as birthmarks or defects, specific behaviors shown by the child and memories of the child of former lives, or by an expert on these matters in the community.

Some souls do not wish to be reincarnated, and they die quickly after reincarnation into a new body. These *ogbanje* children sometimes can be saved through the intervention of a doctor with special skills. If this fails, the parents may mutilate the child, before or after death, because they believe that the *ogbanje* tribe expels disfigured persons and so the soul may become normal.

Since sickle cell anemia and other illnesses are common in Nigeria and cause the death of many young children, it has been suggested that the concept of the *ogbanje* was developed to explain the high death rate of children. However, Edelstein and Stevenson (1982; Stevenson and Edelstein, 1982) identified 14 children (about six years old) who had been mutilated because they were suspected of being *ogbanje* and found no increased incidence of the sickle cell gene trait.

Native American Beliefs

Many native American tribes believe in reincarnation. Mills (1988) described the beliefs of the Bulkley River Carrier, the Gitksan and the Beaver Indians in British Columbia, Canada. All three groups believe that people are born again into the same families from which they come and, incidentally, that animals are reincarnated into the same species. The beliefs are stronger in the older Indians than in the younger generation.

Before being reincarnated, the spirits dwell in the land of the dead. The Carrier Indian spirits spent an average of 180 months in the land of the dead before reincarnating whereas the Beaver Indian spirits spent only 12 months. The identity of the newborn baby is discovered by the mother having a dream prior to the birth, by birthmarks on the baby, by similarities of personality and behavior to the deceased person, by the child speaking from the point of view of the deceased person, or by an expert in the community (a *kaluhim*). Mills gave an example of a *kaluhim* announcing

that a new baby, Jeffrey, was his uncle Will (his mother's brother), after which an aunt had a dream that this was so. When Jeffrey was five, he was taken to the place where his uncle had had an accident, a place which he seemed to recognize, and he announced that he was Will. He then went to live with his grandparents as their child.

The beliefs of the three neighboring Indians groups differ in some ways. The Gitksan believe that a spirit can be reincarnated simultaneously in several living people, while the Beaver believe that a change of sex can occur. The reincarnated Gitksan spirits were older at death than the spirits of the other two groups (69 years on the average versus 22 for the Carrier and 30 for the Beaver). Both the Gitksan and the Beaver believe that the spirit can choose its new parents for the reincarnation. There is no goal of escaping from the cycle of death and rebirth as in Hindu traditions.

Since babies are reincarnated relatives, they are treated with great consideration and as if they were quite mature. After all, parents may be raising their own cherished parents or grandparents, and so they are more willing to tolerate the child's shortcomings.

Eastern Views

Hindu beliefs allow for the human spirit to be reborn as a plant or animal, and this can be the result of a sinful life. Western belief systems tend to reject this possibility. Like Plato, Chinese Buddhists believe that spirits are forced to drink a potion before returning to earth in a new body, a potion that causes all memories to be erased. However, commentators have remarked that, if reincarnation is meant to atone for past misdeeds, it would be beneficial for the spirit to remember the past so that it might benefit from this experience. Skeptics have also remarked that if people are atoning for misdeeds committed in earlier lives, then people should not attempt to relieve the distress and misery of others, for to do so is interfering in the process created by God or the gods. (It might also be noted that reincarnation as a means of atonement serves to excuse God from accusations of cruelty and injustice.)

Is a Person's Next Reincarnation Meant to Redress Previous Misdeeds?

It is commonly believed that in future reincarnations people pay for misdeeds from earlier lives. For example, Ivanova (1986), who firmly believed in reincarnation, gave an example of a sadist who had tortured animals and people, who in his next life was the victim of the sadism of

others and who risked his life when he saw others being maltreated. Another man had seduced a young woman who had then drowned herself and her unborn child. In his next life he married a woman who was paralyzed and whom he had to take care of, and he lost his own daughter in an airplane crash. Ivanova felt that each incarnation is a lesson and, if understood, a step forward.

Although this is a common belief, it is hard to understand why there are still people learning lessons if they have been around for millions of years on earth. One would have thought that the spirits available for reincarnation would have progressed to higher levels of existence by now.

Do Parents Treat You Differently If You Are Considered to Be a Reincarnation?

There are good and bad consequences to being thought to be the reincarnation of a specific person. For example, among the Igbo in Nigeria, a child who is thought to be the reincarnation of a specific person is often excused for unacceptable or idiosyncratic behavior if the behavior reflects the personality of the previous incarnation (Nwokah, 1987). The child is often prevented from visiting places where the deceased ancestor was injured or died. However, the parents do not typically refer to the reincarnation belief when speaking to the baby.

There may be bad consequences, though. For example, Salvador Dali, the surrealist painter, was born in 1904 and was thought by his parents to be a replacement and a reincarnation of his older brother, who had died in 1901 at the age of seven from meningitis (Romm and Slap, 1983). He was called "saviour" and told that he was the living portrait of his brother. Dali always competed with this memory. His behavior was exhibitionistic, rebellious and eccentric partly to establish his uniqueness. He said, "I wish to prove to myself that I am not the dead brother but the living one." When he failed to acquire the attributes of his dead brother, he disappointed his parents and invited their rejection. The recognition he received for his own accomplishments diminished the memory of his brother and caused his parents pain.

Objections

Impossibly Good Memories

Thouless (1984) has objected to some reincarnation memories as being too good. One subject, for example, reported the days of the week on which

events occurred in previous lives, as well as the year, whereas Thouless could not remember such details for early events in his own life.

Fraudulent Cases of Reincarnation

Stevenson (1988a) has documented many cases of deception and self-deception in claims of reincarnation. In one case of an Israeli for whom it was claimed that he spoke ancient Hebrew dating from the time of King David, Stevenson decided that the journalist who first reported the case had invented it.

In other cases, he decided that there was strong motivation on the part of some participants to believe that reincarnation had occurred. In one case in India, the son of a man had drowned and, when a distant relative claimed that her son was a reincarnation of his son, the man wanted to believe this. In a case in Turkey, a father so admired John F. Kennedy that he named his son after him, and his son eventually claimed to be a reincarnation of the assassinated president.

In other cases, Stevenson was able to finds details suggesting that villages had consciously deceived investigators, hoping for some reward for having one of their children be a reincarnation of some particular person.

The existence of fraud in some cases, of course, raises doubts about all cases. If some cases can be proven to be fraudulent, either through intentional or unintentional fraud, this taints those cases presumed to be authentic. Perhaps the cover-up is better in these apparently authentic cases. Though this is possible, it is not proven. In many fields of science, cases of possible fraud have been uncovered, even involving Nobel Prize–winners. Cases of fraud in these fields do not mean that all of the research is fraudulent. However, in a controversial field, such as survival after death, cases of fraud damage people's faith in the research.

Marriott (1984) noted that those seeking to prove reincarnation are in a bind. If there is no written or oral record of the information produced by someone about a past life, then scientists will not consider the case valid. On the other hand, if a written or oral record is found, then scientists can claim that the person read or heard the information.

One feature of the research argues against fraud. In Stevenson's studies, some regularities appear. For example, in the study of child cases, the children begin to remember the previous lives at about age three and forget the details at about nine. Phobias in these children are related to the mode of death of the person in the previous life, and the incidence of phobias is similar in cases where the previous life can be authenticated and in those in which the previous life cannot be authenticated. If fraud was oper-

ating, these regularities would be impossible to coordinate between all of the thousands of cases, most of which occur in small villages in nations scattered over the world.

Unsound Investigation

In addition to fraud, there are also incompetent investigators. In the famous case of Bridey Murphy (Bernstein, 1956), Virginia Tighe, a housewife in Pueblo, Colorado, was hypnotized by Morey Bernstein and began to recall an existence in Ireland as Bridey Murphy.[3] The book on the case became a bestseller, but even a superficial investigation would have revealed (and eventually did reveal) that the facts recalled by Mrs. Tighe could all be found to stem from childhood experiences in Chicago, where she lived across the street from a woman whose maiden name was Bridey Murphy (Gardner, 1957). This case is not so much a fraud as a result of incompetence on the part of the investigators.[4]

Cryptomnesia

One common objection raised against reported cases of reincarnation is the possiblilty of cryptomnesia. In cryptomnesia, the person learns and remembers information about a dead person but later forgets the source of the information and the fact that he or she ever obtained it. Thus, it is also called source amnesia. Cryptomnesia can be called upon to explain all kinds of data that suggest life after death, as well as such phenomena as déjà vu and unintentional plagiarism.

Source amnesia has been studied by cognitive psychologists. Schacter and Tulving (1982) made a distinction between episodic memory (in which the person remembers personal, autobiographical experiences) and semantic memory (in which the person remembers other knowledge, such as that the capital of New Jersey is Trenton). Most episodic memories can be put in the form, "I did such and such, in such and such a place, at such and such a time." In contrast, information stored in the semantic memory is detached from any autobiographical reference. The information was learned, but the person need not possess any information about the learning episode in order to retain and use the information.[5]

Most of the memory deficits in cases of amnesia caused by brain damage and hypnosis are of episodic memory, and semantic memory is left relatively undisturbed. (The reverse deficit is extremely rare.) For example, one patient with amnesia after encephalitis was taught a piece of music. The next day, he could play the piece but had forgotten when or where he had learnt it. If people are presented with information under hypnosis,

they often remember the information while forgetting how it was acquired, even when such amnesia was *not* suggested during hypnosis.

An example of cryptomnesia is given by Kline (1956). He hypnotized a client who then spoke in a strange language that was eventually identified as Oscan (a language spoken in western Italy and superseded by Latin). An example of the language is in a fifth century scroll, which the client denied ever having seen. However, under hypnosis, he remembered being in a library when someone next to him was reading a book which had a reproduction of the scroll, and he was able to recall the words in detail under hypnosis.

A similar example comes from Kampman and Hirvenoja (1978). A Finnish girl of about 12 was regressed during hypnosis to eight previous lives, including one as an English girl called Dorothy who lived in the Middle Ages. This girl sang a medieval song. Seven years later, under hypnosis again, she remembered that she had seen the song in the Finnish translation of a book of English songs, a book which could be traced.

However, Marriott (1984) noted that, if people are skeptical about the reincarnation memories produced by people under hypnosis (see chapter 12), researchers must be careful about uncovering evidence of cryptomnesia using hypnosis, for such evidence obtained under those conditions may be equally invalid.

Stevenson (1983b) reviewed the evidence for cryptomnesia. He noted the bind for investigators. If a source is found to verify the reincarnation report or "other-life" communication, then a possible source for cryptomnesia has also been found. Cryptomnesia can be eliminated as a possible explanation only when the person reports information that could not be derived from printed or other normally available sources. Such a situation might arise if the person is too young to read or has no access to television; if the corroborating evidence exists only in oral testimony or unpublished reports such as diaries; or if the person shows a level of skill so great that he or she could not have forgotten learning it, as in responsive xenoglossy (talking fluently in a foreign language unknown to the person).

Cryptomnesia would be facilitated, according to Stevenson, if the amount of information communicated was scanty; if the information was initially heard from popular media, such as television and the printed word; if the duration of exposure to the material was brief; if the period of retention is brief; or if the person is prone to dissociative disorders (since dissociation involves amnesia).

Stevenson argued that, if a critic claims that cryptomnesia is the cause of some particular reincarnation memory, then the critic is duty-bound

to prove this. An analogy is plagiarism — to accuse someone of plagiarism, the accuser must produce the original passage that has been copied.

Paranormal Abilities

Some have suggested that reincarnation memories are the result of paranormal interactions among living people; in particular, extra-sensory perception and clairvoyance. Anderson (1985) however, has noted that there is little evidence for such ESP. If instead, such paranormal powers are credited to the deceased (who communicate with the living via ESP), then they display powers in death that they did not possess in life. Anderson also suggested that it would be impossible to provide evidence to support either of these explanations.

The existence of ESP is as difficult to believe in as reincarnation. So, to explain one unlikely phenomenon using another unlikely phenomenon is not progress.

Why Do Some Forget Previous Incarnations?

The fact that the majority of people do not recall previous incarnations is sometimes used to argue against the existence of reincarnation. However, absence of memory is not proof that an event did not happen. People forget their infancies, yet they surely occurred.

Other Suggestions

Some commentators have suggested that recalling previous existences is a psychiatric symptom, and so people who do so are psychiatrically disturbed. There are instances where a person who is psychiatrically disturbed claims to have been reincarnated. For example, Pasricha et al. (1978) described a man who was psychotic, probably schizophrenic, who during one interview talked about a previous life. After his recovery, he never made such claims again. However, his claims of being reincarnated were not symptoms of his psychosis. Furthermore, not all those recalling previous existences are psychiatrically disturbed.

Schneck (1986) described a schizophrenic patient who had the delusion that her present life was an exact duplication, moment by moment, of her previous life. She denied that this was déjà vu, and she did not expect to be reincarnated.

Other explanations include that the person is simply daydreaming and fantasizing, that reincarnation memories are products of the Jungian collective unconscious (which would not explain the accuracy of reported

memories of a previous existence), and that the reincarnation report is a result of paramnesia, in which the person's family and the family of the supposed previous incarnation have met and inadvertently exchanged information (which would not explain situations in which the two families had never met).

10

Research on Reincarnation

The leading researcher into reincarnation is Ian Stevenson. He and his associates have collected thousands of cases, and they have made an effort to verify the accuracy of the information given by the children in many of the cases. Stevenson's work and the views of his critics will be reviewed in this chapter, as well as research by other investigators.

Studies of Samples of Cases

Stevenson and his colleagues have collected large numbers of cases of reincarnation from some nations, which permit a description of the typical cases in each nation and comparisons between nations.

India

Barker (1979) summarized 113 cases collected by Stevenson from India, most of which came from the northern regions. Barker described the typical pattern as follows. The case is usually a young child, about three years old when he or she first spontaneously talks of a previous life. The child comes from a large family and is usually a later-born child. The child is normal physically and mentally, but the parents view the child as more mature than his or her siblings had been at the same age. The child is preoccupied with the memories and shows behavior that is appropriate to the life he or she recalls, such as habits, preferences and phobias. Although the parents are sympathetic to the idea of reincarnation, they respond to the child's memories with indifference or hostility. The child may request to be taken to his previous home, which averages about 20 kilometers from where he or she lives. The parents have had slight or indi-

rect contact with the child's previous family or personality or have heard about the person by reputation. They take their child reluctantly to the town when he or she is roughly five years old, where there is an emotional reunion. The memories begin to fade when the child is about six.

Nigeria

Stevenson (1986) reported on 57 cases of reincarnation from the Igbo in Nigeria. The majority (77 percent) were male, as were the majority of the previous personalities—in 82 percent of the cases, the previous personality was of the same sex. The previous personality had been identified in 93 percent of the cases, and the previous personality was from the same immediate family in 72 percent of the identified cases and from the same extended family in 21 percent of the cases. The median interval between the previous personality's death and the subject's birth was 34 months (with a range of six to 540 months). The median age at death of the previous personality was 55 years (with a range of six months to 100 years). Only 30 percent of the previous deaths were from violent causes.

In 39 percent of the cases, Stevenson observed birthmarks or defects on the person that were said to correspond to a wound or mark on the previous personality. Ten subjects had phobias, and seven of these were related to the mode of death of the previous personality.

Compared to cases in other cultures, Stevenson noted that the Nigerian cases less often reported announcing dreams occurring to the mothers of the cases, and they less often reported details of the previous existence. The incidence of males was slightly higher than in other cultures, the incidence of same-family cases higher, the percentage of sex-change cases relatively higher (lower only than the Burmese cases), the interval between incarnations relatively higher (second only to American cases), and the age at death of the previous personality relatively higher (second only to the age of the Alaskan Tlingit cases).

Comparisons of Reports from Different Nations

Stevenson (1970) compared 52 reports of reincarnation experiences in Turkey with 28 from Sri Lanka and 47 from the Tlingit in Alaska.[1] The Turkish cases came from Turkish Alevis in south-central Turkey, an offshoot of the Shiites, an Islamic sect that believes in reincarnation. The Turkish Alevis accept rebirth in animals, but do not believe that spirits can change gender. They believe that deformities at birth or downward

changes in status are a result of misconduct in former existences, but not necessarily the most recent existence. Some believe that only those who die violent deaths are reincarnated, while others believe that everyone is reincarnated but only those who die violently remember previous existences. They also believe that reincarnation need not take place immediately after death.

The majority of the Turkish cases were male (85 percent), compared to 72 percent of the Tlingit and 54 percent of Sri Lankans.[2] No Turkish cases reported being a different gender in a previous existence, or an animal. The previous personality was identified in 87 percent of the Turkish cases, 96 percent of the Tlingit cases and 43 percent of the Sri Lankan cases.[3] In cases where the identity of the previous existence was ascertained, the previous personality was unrelated to the present personality in 93 percent of the Turkish cases; this was similar to the Sri Lankan cases (83 percent) but not to the Tlingit cases, where 72 percent were related on the mother's side.[4]

Most of the deaths for the previous existence in the Turkish cases were violent (76 percent), unlike the Sri Lankan cases (48 percent) and the Tlingit cases (56 percent). Even after controlling for the gender of the person, this difference was still found for the Turkish cases versus the Sri Lankan cases.

Birthmarks and deformities were more common in the Turkish cases (54 percent) and Tlingit cases (51 percent) than in the Sri Lankan cases (14 percent). Most of the birthmarks were related to fatal bullet or knife wounds to the previous personality, though a few were the result of surgical operations. Stevenson (1973) noted that, in more than 150 cases, he had found only one case where the birthmark was on the person who inflicted the wound — all the others were on the victim.

Dreams announcing the identity of the forthcoming baby, primarily dreamt by the mother while pregnant, were more common in the Turkish cases (44 percent) and the Tlingit cases (47 percent) than in the Sri Lankan cases (4 percent).

The median (or average) age of the previous personality at death was 30 years for the Turkish cases, 25 years for the Tlingit cases and 14 years for the Sri Lankan cases. The median interval between existences was nine months for the Turkish cases, 48 months for the Tlingit cases and 21 months for the Sri Lankan cases.

Only two of the Turkish cases and one of the Sri Lankan cases selected their mothers for their present existence, as compared to ten of the Tlingit cases. Stevenson (1973) felt that Sri Lankan families were more accepting of children's reincarnation tales than European and American families.

Stevenson was struck by the similarity in the Turkish and Tlingit cases because they came from two cultures separated by so many thousands of miles and with minimal cultural interaction, if any.

Stevenson (1975, 1977d) reported on 24 cases obtained from the Haida, a small group living in British Columbia and Alaska. A full case from the Haida included (1) the predeath expression of wishes concerning reincarnation, (2) dreams announcing the identity of the baby to be born, (3) birthmarks and other features to help identify the previous personality, (4) memories of the previous life, and (5) unusual behavior corresponding to the previous personality. Stevenson found only one case with all five features, however.

The majority of the cases (71 percent) were males, and no personality changed sex. Three-quarters of the cases were born into the same family (equally often from the mother's and father's side), and all the previous personalities were known to the new family. Announcing dreams were present in 58 percent of the cases, and the previous personality died violently in 28 percent of the cases. Birthmarks or deformities were present in only 17 percent of the cases. The median interval between the death of the previous personality and the birth of the reincarnation was four months (and so the transfer of the personality occurred in the womb), with a range of two weeks to seven years. Three cases chose the new parents, and some chose new physical or psychological features. For example, one man, who hated fishing, asked to have only one hand and was indeed reincarnated into a baby with only one arm.

The Haida cases were similar to the Tlingit cases in having a preponderance of males, an absence of sex changes and an absence of announcing dreams. The Haida reports had a smaller percentage of identifying birthmarks and deformities (21 percent versus 54 percent), a lower incidence of violent deaths in the previous personality (29 percent versus 56 percent), a shorter time between lives (four months versus 48 months), and less often a relationship through the mother's side between the child and the previous personality (33 percent versus 70 percent).

The Haida do not believe in human-to-animal changes in reincarnation, and none were reported. However, they do believe that a soul can split and be reincarnated into two babies, and that this occasionally happens.

Reincarnation Memories in Twins

Pasricha (2000) has reported cases from his studies and those of Ian Stevenson of twins who remember past lives. In some cases, both twins

remember past lives, but in other cases only one twin does so. When both twins report past-life memories, the previous personalities are sometimes unrelated, sometimes friends, and in some cases siblings. Pasricha suggested that a close bond in previous lives might result in a close bond in the next lives. In some cases, the relationship in the past lives persisted in the present lives. For example, the dominant person in the past life may remain the dominant person in the present life.

The Stability of Accounts Over Time

Pasricha and Stevenson (1987) compared reincarnation reports from India pre–1936 and post–1965 for 54 variables. There were only five significant differences: the later reports were better investigated, less often had the previous personality identified, more often died violently, and were younger when signs (such as phobias) and talk of the previous personality appeared. Pasricha and Stevenson felt that stability of the reports supported their authenticity.

Unsolved Cases

Cook et al. (1983) compared 576 solved cases of reincarnation with 280 unsolved cases, that is, cases where the previous personality could not be identified. The proportion of unsolved cases varied greatly from country to country, ranging from 80 percent in the United States to 3 percent in Thailand. Unsolved cases more often involved previous personalities who were unrelated and unknown to the subject.

In many ways the two types of cases were similar. They did not differ in the average age of first mentioning a previous personality, the frequency of talking about the previous life, mention of the mode of death of the previous personality, or the incidence of phobias related to the previous personality's mode of death.

In the unsolved cases, however, the subjects stopped talking about the previous personality at an earlier age, less often knew the name of the previous personality, and more often died violently in the previous life. Interestingly, for the solved cases, the subjects were much more likely to mention the mode of death of the previous personality if it was a violent death.

Cook et al. noted that these results did not help in determining whether the cases were pure fantasies, memories of previous lives that were

unverifiable because of insufficient information, or a mix of real memories of previous lives and details of the subject's present life.

The Fears and Phobias of Children

A phobia is an irrational fear of great magnitude of an object that does not merit such extreme fear. It has long been noted that many phobias are of objects that might have been feared by primitive people but which no longer merit such fear, such as snakes, drowning and thunder.

Stevenson (1990a) studied 387 children, 141 (36 percent) of whom had phobias. The incidence varied by nation: 26 percent in Indian children, 31 percent in American children and 51 percent among the children of Druses in Lebanon.

Interestingly, the phobia was often related to the mode of death of the previous reincarnation, and phobias were more common if the previous death was violent. For example, a phobia of water was found in 64 percent of the children who had died by drowning in the previous life. A boy who remembered a previous reincarnation where he died from food poisoning after eating yoghurt showed a marked aversion to yoghurt.

The phobias were sometimes generalized. A boy who had been killed by a truck in a previous life had a phobia of *all* motor vehicles. Another boy who had been killed by a truck in a previous life also showed great fear at the site of the accident. In many cases, the phobia appeared *before* the child spoke of his previous life. A Turkish boy showed a fear of airplanes overhead before he could speak. Later he told of a previous life in which he died in airplane crash. As the memory of the previous life faded in the child, so did the phobia.

Stevenson noted that, in the cases where the identity of the previous reincarnation was identified, the child was shown to have knowledge from the previous life far above and beyond the phobia.

Skeptics can propose other explanations:

1. Childhood trauma occurring in the present life: Stevenson did not find one instance where a remembered experience in the current life of the child could account for the phobia.

2. Imposed identification: Perhaps the expectation that a child was the reincarnation of someone who had died in the past would lead that child to identify with the deceased person and mimic some of the behavior, including a phobia. However, Stevenson found that the incidence of phobias was the same in children for whom the previous incarnation could

be identified as in those for whom the previous incarnation was never identified.

Birthmarks

Stevenson (1993) reported on 210 children who had visible birthmarks and found postmortem reports on the alleged previous incarnation for 49 of the children. In 88 percent of the cases, the birthmark on the child and the wound that killed the previous incarnation were both within an area of ten square centimeters at the same anatomical location. This is remarkable, but the association is confounded by the fact that the child (and family) obviously knew of the birthmark and so the presence of the birthmark may have influenced the story that the child told of the previous incarnation. There is no way that a research study could eliminate this effect.

Who Remembers Previous Lives?

Haraldsson (2003) compared 30 children in Lebanon who had past-life experiences with 30 who did not and found no differences in sociability, suggestibility, cognitive skills or school performance. The children with past-life experiences did score higher on a problem behavior checklist (especially for fear, anxiety and aggressiveness), on the incidence of a fantasy life (such as dreaming and daydreaming) and dissociative tendencies (such as referring to themselves in the third person).

Haraldsson (1995) compared 23 children aged seven to 13 in Sri Lanka who reported previous lives with 23 who did not. The two groups of children did not differ in intelligence, suggestibility, or confabulation (making up stories). The children who reported previous lives were more cognitively mature (for example, they had better memories of recent events and did better in school). As rated by parents, these children were also more argumentative, stubborn, talkative, nervous, tense, and concerned with neatness and cleanliness. They had a stronger need to be perfect but showed off less. Overall, they seemed to have more problems than the comparison group of children.

Haraldsson et al. (2000) compared 27 children in Sri Lanka who reported previous lives with 27 children who did not. The two groups did not differ on measures of intelligence and cognitive skills (although the children remembering previous lives did have a higher class rank), suggestibility, family cohesion, or control. The children who remembered

previous lives showed more problem behaviors of all kinds (such as anxiety, obsessional and perfectionist traits, and arguing) and higher scores on a measure of dissociative traits (such as frequent daydreaming and referring to themselves in the third person).

Haraldsson's studies on this issue, however, are very confusing. In another report. (Haraldsson, 1997), he compared 30 children in Sri Lanka who had memories of previous existences with 30 control children and reported that the children with memories of previous lives had higher IQ scores, performed better in school, had larger vocabularies and better memories, and were gifted. They did not differ in suggestibility, but argued more, were more nervous and stubborn, were more often perfectionists and were more concerned with cleanliness. It is not clear from Haraldsson's reports whether he is reporting on new samples of children, the same samples, or overlapping samples. The results are also inconsistent. In the two reports above, the results differ in whether the children with memories of previous lives were more intelligent and gifted or not.

Individual Cases

Stevenson (1979) stated the criteria for a good case of reincarnation. First, the previous personality must be identified. Second, the family with the subject reporting the previous life must not have searched for or met the family from which the previous personality came. Finally, the child should show behaviors, birthmarks and xenoglossy related to the previous personality and uncharacteristic of the present family. In many cultures, the previous personality belongs to the same family, and so these cultures are less likely to produce an ideal case. Stevenson felt that Indian cases were more likely to be ideal than those from other cultures.[5]

A Burmese Case

Stevenson (1977a) reported the case of Ma Tin Aung Myo born in 1953, whose mother repeatedly dreamt of a Japanese soldier while she was pregnant. When Ma Tin was four, she began to refer to a previous life in which she was a Japanese soldier who had been killed by strafing from an allied plane. She recalled that she was from northern Japan, was married and had children. She recalled no names, and the previous incarnation was not identified.

Ma Tin had a fear of airplanes and would cower and cry when they

flew over. She also seemed to dislike cloudy weather, which made her wish to go to Japan. She was frequently "homesick." She did not like the Burmese climate, nor Burmese food, but she liked half-raw fish. She learned Burmese easily but often used strange words which no one could recognize.

Ma Tin insisted on wearing boys' clothes and wore her hair short. She liked to play at being a soldier and boys' sports such as football. Her teenage friends addressed her with a male honorific (Ko) and, when the school insisted she dress as a girl, she dropped out.

When Stevenson met her in 1972, Ma Tin was overtly masculine and expressed the desire to have a wife. She had lost her fear of airplanes and now liked Burmese food. She had lost her desire to go to Japan. But she was intransigent about her sexual orientation and said that she would never marry a man. Ma Tin was ignorant of transsexual surgery, but she did express the desire to be a man in her next reincarnation. Her family had several explanations for Ma Tin's gender dysphoria: that the Japanese soldier had been shot in the genitals, that he had wanted to change sex, or that he had molested young girls and was suffering retribution in this reincarnation.

This case is interesting but weak because it was not possible to identify the previous personality and go to Japan to verify the information.

Sri Lankan Cases

Stevenson and Samararatne (1988) reported three cases from Sri Lanka in which written records were made of what the child said about the previous life *before* an attempt was made to verify the statements. In one case, a girl named Thusitha was born on July 29, 1981. When she was about three, she said she used to lived in a town 220 kilometers distant, where her father sold flowers, and that she had drowned. The investigator learned of the case in the fall of 1985, visited the family and wrote down the information that Thusitha gave him. He then went to the town where she claimed to have lived and tracked down a family who fitted the information. Of 13 statements made by Thusitha, ten were correct for this family, such as that her brother there had been dumb and that she had drowned. Thusitha later made 17 more statements, 15 of which matched the family. The previous personality was named Nimalkanthi.

However, some statements did not match the family. Thusitha said that her father in the previous life had been bald; this father was not. She said his name had been Rathu Herath; it was not. However, an uncle and

grandfather were bald, and a cousin by marriage was called Herath. Thusitha said she had had sisters, but in fact Nimalkanthi had had only one sister. Furthermore, Thusitha's parents had visited the town of Thusitha's previous life before she was born.

Stevenson himself went to the town of the previous personality and asked the vendors of 19 of the 20 flower stands whether any member of his family was dumb and whether any member had drowned. Only one family besides Nimalkanthi's had a dumb family member, and none had lost a family member by drowning.

The three cases reported by Stevenson and Samararatne are good in that written records were made soon after the child spoke of the previous life and before any attempt was made to verify the statements. However, the investigator was not a member of the village of this family (and so was unable to verify personally the truth of the lack of contact between the two families) and was not present when the child first spoke of the previous life (and so could not record the first statements personally). In legal terms, the evidence in this case concerning Thusitha's first statements and the data concerning the history of the two families is either hearsay or must be taken on trust.

A second subject, Iranga, recalled an existence in a town 15 kilometers distant. She made 43 statements, of which 38 were later confirmed. Her family had visited the other town but had no knowledge of the family Iranga recalled. A third subject, Subashini, recalled an existence in a town 95 kilometers distant. Twenty-five of her statements were later verified. In this case, Subashini's mother had relatives in the distant town, but she did not know the family she spoke about.

None of these three children knew the name of her previous incarnation, but they named the places where they had lived. Stevenson or his associates located the previous incarnations, and noted that the families involved had not met.

Stevenson and Story (1970) reported the case of Disna, born in 1959 in a small village in Sri Lanka. When she was three years old, Disna spontaneously reported experiences from a previous existence that took place in a village three-and-a-half miles away. In response to questions, she revealed more information, but she showed no desire to visit the village.

Her family persuaded her to visit the village in 1964, and she seemed to recognize the place and to reveal accurate knowledge, such as entering the home there by the same door used by previous personality, Babanona, a woman who had died in 1958, 15 months before Disna was born.

Stevenson and his colleagues investigated the case in 1965 and again

in 1968, at which times Disna still remembered the details, although she had ceased to refer to her previous existence spontaneously.

Stevenson noted that the two families knew each other casually, enough to recognize one another on the road if they passed. They never had any social acquaintance, nor had entered each other's houses. The two families did, however, have two mutual acquaintances.

Disna reported 34 facts about her previous existence, and 33 of these were verified by informants. The details were so extensive that Stevenson felt that the identification of the previous personality was quite unambiguous, for example, that Babanona had travelled by car and train to visit relatives in a specific town.

Disna made 15 statements indicating recognition of people and places in Babanona's life, and she was correct in 14 of these. In addition, Disna showed several personality traits similar to Babanona, such as religiousness and antagonism toward Babanona's son. She also showed similar skills, such as being able to weave coconut leaves when she was only three years old. Disna differed from other cases, according to Stevenson, in her reluctance to visit the home village of Babanona and in that she reported that her previous life had been unhappy.

Stevenson felt that fraud was unlikely in this case, and he was unable to find evidence that Disna had acquired this information from visitors to her home. Extrasensory perception could not be ruled out, except that Disna appeared to have no other paranormal abilities. Thus, possession or reincarnation remained the most likely explanations for the case.

Xenoglossy

Occasionally, it has been claimed that someone can speak a foreign language without having had any experience hearing, learning or speaking the language. This phenomenon is called xenoglossy. If the person can also write the language it is called xenography. Xenoglossy is thought to provide evidence for reincarnation, since one possible explanation is that the person knew and spoke the foreign language in a previous existence.

If the person can simply speak the foreign language, the phenomenon is called recitative xenoglossy, but if the person can also understand the foreign language the phenomenon is called responsive xenoglossy. There have been reports of people supposedly speaking dead languages such as ancient Egyptian (for example, see Kautz, 1982), but these are much harder to authenticate since no one living has knowledge of the sounds of dead languages.

Stevenson (1976a) presented a case which others have also commented on. An American Methodist minister learned hypnotism and, in the course of his practicing, hypnotized his wife, who uttered German phrases while in the trance. The person who spoke German called herself Gretchen. Of the 22 sessions in which Gretchen spoke, 19 were taped. For several of the sessions, Stevenson, who spoke German, and other German-speaking people attended and asked Gretchen questions.

Stevenson took great care to find out if the woman could have learned or heard German while growing up. He visited the region where she was born (Clarksburg, West Virginia), interviewed relatives and neighbors, and ascertained that the women had no experience with German-speaking people. She also passed a polygraph test in which she was asked about her experience with German.

The story Gretchen told, of being the daughter of the mayor of a German town, of religious persecution and of an early death, probably in the late 1800s, provided details that could be checked. However, Stevenson was unable to authenticate her story by going to Germany and searching for such a person.

As far as her knowledge of German was concerned, Gretchen could speak responsively (that is, answer questions put to her in German). Her grammar was more defective than her vocabulary; her pronunciation sometimes good and sometimes inaccurate; the words that she wrote often misspelled. She did not speak with any specific German dialect.

In the 19 transcripts, Stevenson counted 237 German words that Gretchen first introduced; that is, she spoke them before any of her questioners used them with her. She uttered 120 German words before any German was spoken to her. (Her husband, who hypnotized her, did not speak or understand German.) Many of these words, of course, were similar to the English equivalent. However, about half were not, and Gretchen used a number of archaic and obscure German words.

Stevenson admitted that the woman may have learned some German without the knowledge of her friends and relatives and forgotten that she had learned it, but he doubted this after his checks in her home state. Stevenson suggested that her ability to speak German could be evidence of reincarnation (of a previous life in which she spoke German) or of possession in which, during the hypnotic trance, a disembodied soul was able to take over her mind. She thus might be acting as a medium for this disembodied soul. Stevenson felt unable to decide firmly on this, but he leaned toward feeling that it was a case of possession rather than reincarnation. Either way, this case of xenoglossy, if authentic, provides evidence for life after death.

Criticisms

Thomason (1987) pointed out that Stevenson's report of this case is woefully weak. She argued that Gretchen (and other cases reported by Stevenson) showed no convincing knowledge of the language. First, even the most uneducated person soon develops a vocabulary of thousands of words and masters the grammatical rules of the language by age four or five. Gretchen spoke only 120 words, many of which were like the English (brown and braun). Gretchen did not converse. Much of the time she answered "yes" or "no" or repeated what the questioner asked. She responded much more fully to questions asked in English than to those asked in German. She spoke German about as well as someone who had studied German for one year some 20 years ago. Finally, most people understand a language better than they can speak it (young children, for example). Gretchen did not; she understood it as poorly as she could speak it.

Thomason proposed a proper test of language skill. Almost all languages have lists of common words. Take the 200 most common words (such as mother and water). Have the subject translate those words into the language of the previous incarnation. Simple phrases can be presented too. After a month, repeat the test without warning the subject that he or she will be retested. The performance should be identical the second time. Next, read the subject a simple short story in the foreign language and then have the subject answer simple questions about the story. And finally, have a linguistic expert, such as Thomason, involved in the conduct of the study.

In an earlier paper, Thomason (1984) examined brief recordings of two other xenoglossic subjects and a written transcript of a third. She concluded that in none of the cases did the people speak the languages they were supposed to be speaking (Bulgarian, Gaelic and Apache). Instead, the sounds were based on their native (or acquired) language, both in phonological structure and intonation. In an analysis of a transcript reported by Stevenson of a subject supposedly speaking Swedish, Thomason found that many of the words used by the subject were first presented to her by the interviewers both in Swedish and, when she did not respond immediately, in English. Only 60 words of her 100-word vocabulary were first used by the subject. Many of these 60 words were similar to words in languages the subject knew. Some of the subject's responses were unintelligible to the interviewers, some were grammatically incorrect, while others were not the way a Swedish person really speaks.

Thomason concluded that there was no evidence that any person had

ever spoken a real human language without having been previously exposed to it.

Similarly, Samarin (1976) reviewed a published case from Stevenson of a man who spoke Swedish. Samarin noted that the vocabulary of the man included only 60 words introduced by him before his interviewers used them; the man made occasional grammatical mistakes (including incorrect articles and incorrect inflectional endings); and the man mispronounced some words, while others had an American quality. Some of the interviewers thought that the words were occasionally closer to Norwegian and Danish than to Swedish. The man also used English words as well as Swedish, but Samarin notes that Stevenson did not examine the quality of the English spoken. Samarin could not understand why Stevenson had not enlisted linguists to participate in the study of the man. Other cases are even less convincing as these cases. For example, Stevenson and Pasricha (1979, 1980) reported on a woman in India who lived in Maharashtra who, in 1974, when she was 32 years old, developed a new personality who spoke Bengali. This personality had taken over some 30 times for periods lasting one day to seven weeks. The personality appeared to have lived around 1810 to 1830 and gave the names of six men in her family as well as the names of towns, which were traced to a region of Bengal. Supposedly, the woman had never visited Bengal, and her family did not speak Bengali, although there were Bengali people in the town and the woman had studied Bengali script in school for a brief time. However, Stevenson himself did not meet or interview the woman, there were no linguists involved in the study, and there were no accurate counts of correct versus incorrect statements made by the woman.[6] The case is odd also because it did not follow the typical Indian pattern for reincarnations (a child remembering a previous existence in a nearby town a few years previously).

Criticisms of Stevenson's Research

Wilson (1987) has criticized Stevenson's studies on several grounds:

1. Stevenson himself and his assistants believe in reincarnation. Therefore, they are biased, and this bias may affect the collection and coding of data so that it is in agreement with their belief.

2. Stevenson minimizes cases in which witnesses say that the child was coached. Wilson mentions two cases in particular, Sunil in Sri Lanka and Ravi Shankar in India where coaching probably took place.

3. In many of Stevenson's cases, the child comes from a poor family

and the previous reincarnation was a member of a wealthier or higher caste family. Thus, Wilson argues, there is a clear motive for the child (and the family) to argue for the reincarnation. Wilson lists nine such cases from India and Sri Lanka, but since he does not report how many cases he searched to find these nine, it is not clear how common this occurrence was.

4. The rules regarding reincarnation change from culture to culture. Thus, among the Tlingit, the previous person and the child come from the same family, but in India and Sri Lanka, they do not. Wilson argues that the time between reincarnations, the distances traveled by the "spirit," and the relationships should be invariant from culture to culture if reincarnation is valid phenomenon.

It is obviously preferable for a neutral third person to check the places and people named by subjects for previous lives than for researchers to check the facts themselves. However, in cases where the reincarnation takes place within one family, this is impossible. It is also more difficult if the reincarnation is of a recently deceased person.

Chari (1981) noted that Stevenson makes no attempt to explain why reincarnation memories are common in some countries, and in some regions of the countries, than in others. Furthermore, Chari felt that Stevenson (and others) should propose criteria to distinguish between reincarnation and possession.

Attempts to Replicate Stevenson's Results

Stevenson has attempted to replicate his own results. Pasricha and Stevenson (1979) explored the reliability of Stevenson's reports by comparing cases of reincarnation from northern India obtained by Stevenson and those obtained at a later date by Pasricha. The reports were compared on 56 variables, and differences found on only 12.

Stevenson's cases came more often from towns, as did the previous incarnations, and the fathers of Stevenson's cases were better educated. Unusual behavior was equally common in both sets of children, but it persisted longer in Stevenson's cases, although the researchers noted that his cases were collected at an earlier time than Pasricha's and so could be followed up for a longer period of time. Stevenson interviewed his cases sooner after the two families met (18 months versus 83 months), his children were older at the time of the latest interview, and his cases were more thoroughly investigated.

Stevenson's cases involved a greater distance between the homes of the child and the previous personality (45 versus 8 kilometers), more often had a previous personality of higher socioeconomic status, more often reported evidence of extrasensory perception and more often had an "adult attitude."

Pasricha and Stevenson were impressed by the 44 similarities, and they attributed this to the accuracy of the data and the genuineness of the phenomenon. They felt that the role of interviewer bias was slight.

Attempts by other researchers to replicate Stevenson's results have been inadequate. Mills (1989) investigated ten cases of reincarnation in India, and Keil (1991) investigated 23 cases in Burma, Thailand and Turkey. The investigators were not present at the time when the children first recalled the previous life, and so they had to rely on the unreliable recollections of the relatives and friends concerning what the children said or did. Mills acknowledges that the informants sometimes disagreed about the facts of the case. The researchers could not converse directly with the people involved, but had to rely on interpreters. They did not make full recordings of the interviews, the interviews were typically brief, and the facts reported by the child not reliably checked. In all the cases, the reincarnated person was quite old at the time of the interview, and so was recalling and retelling a childhood experience. Mills's report is better in this last respect, but Mills had to rely on others for verification of the facts. In one of Mills's cases, it appears that the previous personality may well have died eight months *after* the child in whom he was reincarnated was born.

Mills argues that conscious deceit was unlikely in her cases. She thought that unconscious construction as a result of personal and family dynamics resulting in psychiatric disturbance (in particular, dissociation and multiple personality) was unlikely. Unconscious construction on the part of the child to gain attention was possible, but in eight of her ten cases, the parents tried to make their child forget or at least stop talking of the previous life. Unconscious construction as a result of cultural interpretation of natural childhood fantasies was more likely. The child's statements were interpreted by parents as relating to a past life, and the parents often tried to elicit further information from the child so they could check its veracity. This may have encouraged the children to generate more recollections. The parents made efforts to identify and trace the previous personality, actions which would be less likely in a Western society. The children may have been given subtle hints about whom they were supposed to be and, since Mills was not present at these early times, she could not rule this possibility out. Mills also suggests that the children may have

acquired facts by paranormal means (such as extrasensory perception) from others.

All in all, these attempts at replication indicate that cases of reincarnation need to be studied by an objective observer from the moment that the child first makes relevant statements. The objective observer must also speak the language of the society fluently. Since so many cases are reported in India, and since there are several Indian investigators, in addition to many Indian psychologists and psychiatrists, it is surprising that no case of reincarnation has been reported in a family known to or belonging to such a scholar. Such a case could be recorded and investigated more fully that those reported here.

Alternative Explanations of Reincarnation Phenomena

1. Stevenson et al. (1974) reviewed 105 cases of reincarnation in India and examined the major interpretations of the cases. They admitted that, when the two families involved had met, the cases provided little of value.[7]

In cases where the families are separated and have not met, the family of the child who claims to remember a previous life may embellish a few statements that the child makes. If a written record (or video recording) had been made of the child's comments, their accuracy could have been checked later. Less satisfactorily, in some cases there are numerous witnesses to the child's statements. Schouten and Stevenson (1998) compared the accuracy of statements made by children in India and Sri Lanka who remembered previous lives as a function of whether the statements made by the children were recorded before or after the families (present family and previous family) had met. There was no difference in the accuracy of the statements made by the two groups of children (77 percent versus 78 percent, respectively). Thus, there was no evidence that there is a process of creating more and more correct statements after the families meet.

2. Stevenson admitted that some fraudulent cases exist. Most of the fraudulent cases involve adolescents or adults remembering previous lives. In fraudulent cases, the previous personality is usually famous, and the person uses the status of the previous personality to influence others in his world. These are not similar to the cases typically investigated by Stevenson.

3. Perhaps the child acquires the information about the previous life honestly but has forgotten the source—cryptomnesia. When the two families are widely separated and not known to each other, this seems unlikely. However, it is difficult to prove objectively that the information was never

available to the child. The investigator has to rely on the word of the parents.

4. The child might acquire the information by extrasensory perception. If so, one would expect that the information acquired could be extensive. There remains the question of why the target family was chosen. Stevenson found that the children in some cases did appear to show extrasensory abilities, but this was rare. Extrasensory perception would not account for the child showing the behavioral traits and skills of the previous personality. The "personation" of the child, in which he seemed to "be" the previous person, was sometimes so strong as to resemble multiple personality. Finally, there is typically no motive apparent for the children to engage in this behavior.

5. Possession is sometimes proposed as an explanation, but in cases where there are birthmarks on the child's body which relate to the previous personality, possession is an inadequate explanation. However, cases with birthmarks are not very common. Stevenson noted that he has found occasional cases where the previous personality died after the birth of the child, and these cases cannot be explained by reincarnation. Possession would fit these cases better.

6. Perhaps the culture shapes the nature of the reports made by children. Pasricha (1990) surveyed Indians who had had no direct contact with a case of reincarnation and found that they overestimated the age at which children first report the memories of a previous life and the age when they stop speaking spontaneously about the past life. They were correct, however, on the proportion of violent deaths in the past lives. Pasricha focused on the significant differences, but it is impressive that the respondents knew that the reincarnation reports came from children and that they did stop talking about their past lives. Their conjectures fitted the Indian reincarnation reports rather than those reported in the West.

Evidence Supporting Reincarnation

Stevenson (1974b) has pointed to several phenomena that argue against alternative explanations of reincarnation cases.

1. If the child recognizes people and places from the previous existence, and if the child has never been to the place of the previous incarnation, then this eliminates cryptomnesia as an explanation.

2. The fact that the children report *memories* is inconsistent with ESP as an explanation. ESP, if it exists, results in knowledge, not memories.

3. The research on birthmarks and phobias reviewed above is inconsistent with ESP as an explanation of reincarnation cases. Similarly, the presence of skills in the child and the child having the same personality as the previous incarnation is inconsistent with an ESP explanation.

4. The fact that the child chooses a particular person as the previous incarnation also argues against ESP as an explanation.

However, Stevenson admitted that it is hard to distinguish between reincarnation, possession and parental influence as explanations of the reincarnation cases.

11

Reincarnation and Hypnosis

Hypnosis is a phenomenon about which there is great debate. Is it really an altered state of consciousness in which people can be persuaded to act against their wills, recall unconscious thoughts or even remember previous lives? Or is it simply a very suggestible state in which the hypnotist enhances the positive motivation and expectations of the person, as Spanos (1987–1988) has suggested? It appears that nonhypnotized people who are encouraged to do their best respond just as well as do hypnotized subjects to suggestions that they will not feel pain, will forget events or will regress to earlier ages.

It has been demonstrated that hypnotized subjects can have false memories created, memories that they later believe to be of real events (Baker, 1988). This is similar to confabulation, a process in which people confuse fact with fiction and report events that they imagined as real events. Hilgard (1981) implanted false memories into one subject on two separate occasions, memories of events that took place at the same time but in two different places. Subsequently, the person gave very convincing accounts of both events, even though he could not have possibly experienced both events.

The debate has had an impact on research into multiple personality. In multiple personality, an individual has two or more different personalities, but the defining characteristic is that there must be some amnesia between some of the personalities. For example, personality B must not have any memories of events that take place when the individual is in personality A. In many popular stories and movies about multiple personalities, one or more of the personalities is also psychiatrically disturbed in its own right, and this tends to confuse the definition of the syndrome of multiple personality for readers and listeners.

Most of the early cases of multiple personality were hypnotized by the one studying the case. Indeed, it is has been documented that, in some cases, the names of the personalities were suggested by the hypnotist and not given by the subject. Thus, modern researchers discount these cases.

Stevenson (1994) has noted that many of the hypnotists who try to demonstrate regression to past lives are "obviously uneducated and behave little better than circus shills" (189). Stevenson noted too how easy it is to manipulate by means of suggestions both the occurrence and the content of the past lives recalled under hypnosis.

Thus, regarding the question of reincarnation, skeptical researchers would not approve of the use of hypnosis to help people remember past lives. Many of the most famous cases, however, were hypnotized. Perhaps the dangers in hypnotic regression can be illustrated with a case from Kline (1952) who regressed a 23-year-old woman to a "stage in life found only in your early ancestors," whereupon she acted like a chimpanzee. It would appear that she was trying very hard to please the hypnotist.

It must also be emphasized that many, if not all, of the well-known cases of hypnotic age-regression do not stand up to modern scrutiny. Even if this kind of evidence was permitted, it must be collected in an approved manner (today, of course, a videotape of the entire process would be required), with reputable witnesses present, and with a methodologically sound study of the accuracy of the information.

For example, the famous case of Bridey Murphy (Bernstein, 1956), mentioned in Chapter nine, involved a Colorado housewife named Virginia Tighe (but called Ruth Simmons in the book) who was hypnotically regressed and who then described her life as Bridey Murphy in Cork, Ireland. Gardner (1957) found a woman who had lived across the street from Virginia who was from Ireland and who had told Virginia many tales of her childhood — and whose maiden name was Bridey Murphy. and Virginia had an Irish aunt who told her stories, too. In high school, Virginia had memorized and recited many Irish monologues. Furthermore, Ready (1956), an Irishman, argued that the answers given by Bridey did not resemble those of an Irish girl and that some of the information given by the subject was incorrect. On the other hand, other commentators such as Ducasse (1960) identified many errors made by the critics of the case, including their claims that the information given by Bridey Murphy was false. Ducasse concluded that the case could not be rejected as evidence for reincarnation or paranormal perception. There have been, therefore, exposures of the alleged exposures of the case, and there may eventually be exposures of alleged exposures of the alleged exposures of the case! It becomes impossible in the end to trust the reports of these kinds of cases.

Similarly, Harris (1986) investigated two famous cases of hypnotic regression to past lives in Great Britain. Both were taped by the hypnotist involved, Arnall Bloxham (Iverson, 1977) aired on television there. In one case, that of Janet Evans, who recalled six past lives from Roman times on, Harris tracked down novels containing all of the details recalled by Mrs. Evans. He showed that where Mrs. Evans' details deviated from historical records, they conformed to the novels.

The problem with these cases is that the initial information is obtained by the hypnotist himself, who usually believes in reincarnation. Even if the sessions are recorded, the interview is usually biased. The investigations of the cases are usually carried out by journalists, and the background of the person who has recalled the past lives is poorly examined and the given details poorly investigated. What is required for sound scientific studies is that a team of experts in research issues be present at the first contact with the subject and participate in all of the subsequent sessions, the investigations into the subject's life, and the research of the information given about the past lives.

Explanations for Past Lives Recalled During Hypnotic Regression

Marriott (1984) noted that hypnotic regression to previous existences can have several explanations. The first, of course, is fraud. However, she noted a dilemma here. If there is no record of the previous existence, then there is no way to check on the accuracy of the material produced by the person about this previous existence. However, if there is a written or oral record of this previous existence, then there is always the possibility that the person somehow read or heard the record and is, therefore, merely repeating the information from memory.

A second explanation of hypnotic regression into a previous existence is that the material comes from a dissociated part of the mind, as in multiple personality. Details of a past life are obtained either through learning (and the experience and process of learning may be forgotten by the person) or are spontaneously generated by the mind. These thoughts become unconscious but appear during hypnosis in much the same way as alternative personalities appear.

A third possibility is that spirits are able to remain in the world and that some people are influenced or contacted by these free-floating spirits, producing memories of past lives.

Spanos (1987–1988) argued that hypnotized people use their imagi-

nation and their acting skills to become absorbed in make-believe scenarios. When they are regressed to previous existences, they behave the way they think that they ought to behave.

Baker (1988) argued that cueing plays a role in these phenomena, that is, the hypnotists' beliefs and what they say affects the reincarnation memories of the subject. Hypnotists who believe more strongly in reincarnation more often have subjects who recall past lives (Wilson, 1981). Hypnotists who tell their subjects to expect to recall past lives have subjects who are more likely to recall past lives.

Furthermore, there are fantasy-prone individuals, that is, people who fantasize for a greater proportion of time than the average person and who seem to have strong sensory impressions (by seeing or hearing, for example) of what they imagine. It has been suggested that their fantasies of reincarnation reaffirm for them the fact of human existence, giving them hope and establishing them in the continuity of human existence. They believe that they have lived before and will live on in the future, and this is reassuring for them.

Wilson and Barber (1982) compared a group of women who were good subjects for hypnosis with a group who were not. The good subjects were more likely to experience their fantasies as real, to have vivid personal memories. (sometimes with bodily accompaniments such as nausea), to report telepathic and precognitive experiences (that is, ESP experiences), to have out-of-body experiences, and to be able to heal others. This fantasy-prone syndrome appears to have characterized the famous mediums of old times, such as Eileen Garrett and Mrs. Leonard. Wilson and Barber thought that individuals with this syndrome would find hypnotic age regression to be an easy task and, therefore, report vivid "memories" when asked to do so. Wilson and Barber stressed that their subjects were as well adjusted as the comparison group, so this syndrome is not associated with psychiatric disturbance.

Zolik (1958, 1962a) showed how the memory of previous lives (Zolik called them *progignomatic* fantasies, from the Greek meaning "having been born before") had psychodynamic roots. In one, a young man recalled being a British soldier in Ireland, killed in 1892 after a fall from his horse. Later questioning under hypnosis ascertained that this "life" was based on a story told to him when he was six by his foster grandfather. Zolik showed how the memory of the past life was based on his identification with the grandfather and his ambivalence toward him. The grandfather had never liked the subject as much as he did other children, and he had scolded him once for riding a horse without permission. The grandfather had died when the subject was 12, too soon for the subject to resolve the relationship.

Thus, reincarnation memories can be interpreted using a Freudian perspective in much the same way as dreams are.

A second subject's "memory" of a previous life turned out to be based on a movie he had seen three years before that symbolized the conflicts he had experienced and continued to experience.

Kampmann and Hirvenoja (1978) reported similar occurrences. In one case, a 15-year-old girl was hypnotized and regressed to earlier times, and she recalled five previous lives. When she was regressed under hypnosis seven years later, the previous lives recalled were completely different from those uncovered in the earlier session seven years previously. Furthermore, under hypnosis a third time, she remembered the origin of one of her previous "lives"—it was based on a book she had read.

In a second case, a 19-year-old girl was regressed under hypnosis to previous lives and again seven years later. For her, the previous lives recalled the second time were the same as those from the earlier time, but new personalities emerged. In one of these, the woman spoke a different language, perhaps medieval English. Under hypnosis a third time, she recalled seeing the pages of a book with those words on it when she was 13, and she recalled seeing details of that life when she was a little girl.

Parejko (1975b) presented a case of a female college undergraduate whom he hypnotized. She gave evidence as if from a previous existence in India, in which a boy named Michael had fallen into a hole, an only child who had run away from home. She could describe crudely the home he lived in: a hut made of mud and stone, with an earthen floor. The images ended with a man peering down the hole, and she anticipated Michael being rescued.

Parejko noted that the woman had been asked permission to try a regression into a previous life, so she had known what to expect. Before being hypnotized she had done well on several tests of the ability to hallucinate. She paused a great deal while recounting the story and left many gaps. Her behavior could be seen as motivated by efforts to satisfy the hypnotist.

Parejko doubted that she invented the story purposefully to fool the hypnotist. She was too vague and unsure of details. She was consistent in seeing something unfold and consistent in the use of the present tense. The story was disjointed, and gaps remained. For example, she was uncertain of the outcome. She did not seem to be trying to impress the hypnotist. Finally, when she listened to the tape, she showed a strong emotional reaction to the story, unlike a storyteller who wants the audience to react.

Parejko felt, however, that the experience could be explained as the efforts of a subject, one with a good ability to hallucinate and imagine,

responding to the expectations of a hypnotist who gives her a triggering idea. The trance (or relaxed state) created by hypnotic induction permitted these images to come forth, probably from her past experiences (both personal and those encountered in dreams, daydreams, literature, television and film), and she reported them as they unfolded. The challenge for those who wish to prove reincarnation is to eliminate the possibility of such an explanation.

Research on Hypnosis and Reincarnation

Kampmann (1976) hypnotized susceptible Finnish students, and 41 percent were able to create personalities of the reincarnation type. The successful students showed better tolerance of stress, less guilt, less psychiatric disturbance and less confusion between their self-concepts and their awareness of how others perceived them (that is, less identity confusion).

Parejko (1975a; Parejko et al., 1975) hypnotized 100 people and asked them to recall past lives. He found that they were most likely to do this in the lighter trances, and he had to vary the technique with each subject in order to get information. Sometimes he mentioned particular centuries or asked the subjects to produce automatic writing.

In 40 percent of the cases, subjects first reported outdoor scenes, usually three-dimensional and in color. Sound was absent, and the experience seemed like a silent movie over which they had no control. Others reported vague images or distorted still-life pictures, but these reports became more detailed during the session. The subjects kept their sex, but frequently changed ethnicity. Some subjects reported being animals, with eagles, wolves and panthers the most common.

Most subjects had difficulty giving specific information, such as dates, ages and places. When pressed they said, "It looks like…." They found it hard to provide names of the persons with whom they were identifying. They appeared to be ignorant or evasive. They could describe the scene well, but not the currency used, language spoken or the rulers at the time. They all spoke in English.

The stories they recounted were fragmented but convincing, and there was little overview of the situation. The experiences were visual, but not emotional. No prominent or famous figures from the time were encountered. The subjects experienced humdrum lives, mostly happy, although a few reported wars and earthquakes. The weather was warm, the season spring or fall, and the setting tranquil. The situations did not involve

embarrassment, but a few of the scenes did arouse strong emotions. The subjects reported mostly floating above the scenes, and could move about at the hypnotist's command without any apparent means of locomotion. Nothing bizarre or magical occurred (as sometimes occurs in dreams, such as walking through walls) and there were no anachronisms (such as having a car in a time before cars were invented).[1]

Parejko observed that indirect techniques were most productive, although the subjects seemed eager to comply and on many occasions interpreted Parejko's questions as commands. The question "Can you read the name on the tombstone?" was responded to as if he had said "Read the name" Or "Come up with a name."

Kampmann and Hirvenoja (1972) found that about seven percent of subjects could be regressed under hypnosis to recall a previous life, and Kampmann (1973) found that these subjects were psychologically healthier than those who could not recall previous lives under hypnosis. Kampmann felt that people free from psychological conflicts could more easily follow the hypnotist's suggestions when in hypnotic trances and create secondary personalities as the hypnotist demanded.

Venn (1986) found that reports of how common it is to induce memories of previous lives through hypnosis range from seven percent to 90 percent of the subjects. He noted that many of the behaviors exhibited in past-life regressions, such as alterations in speech and identity, can be shown by people in hypnotized states without regression.

Venn noted that many reports of past lives identified through hypnosis employed amateur rather than professional hypnotists, were not published in professional journals in which methodology is reviewed, and ignored contemporary knowledge about hypnosis such as role playing, dissociation and loss of inhibition. Furthermore, often no research is conducted to verify the information obtained. Some case reports show little knowledge of statistics and research methods, ignore and fail to report negative data, and are based on superficial contact with the person.

Venn reported a case of a man in Oklahoma who was regressed under hypnosis to a previous life as a French pilot in World War One. The information he gave was broken down into discrete elements. For information available in common records, he was correct on 53 percent of 30 items. For information available only in obscure records, he was correct on zero percent of 17 items. Thus, the case did not pass muster for Venn.

Spanos et al. (1991) explored how hypnotically-induced memories of past lives can be affected by the instructions given to the subjects. In the first study, 32 percent of college students who were hypnotized and regressed reported a past life.[2] Eighty-three percent of those reporting a

past life gave the person a name and the majority also specified a date, place, age and gender. The most common past lives were from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, were from North America or England, had common names and had a mean age of 21. Thus, the students chose cultural contexts with which they were familiar. When asked for details about the place and time of the past life, almost every student gave incorrect information.

In a second study, some of the students were given the suggestion that their previous lives would be of the opposite gender, unrelated to their families and from a distant region. These students were more likely to incorporate these three suggestions into their reports. In a third study, some of the students were given the suggestion that their past lives had involved child abuse, and these students reported higher levels of abuse than the other students. Finally, in a fourth study, some of the students were told that scientific study had shown that hypnotic age regression did reveal past lives and that traumatic events were often uncovered; the other students were told that the whole experience was simply fantasy role playing. Those students told that the study of reincarnation by hypnotic age regression was scientifically supported felt that their experiences were much more credible.

In all of these studies, the students who reported past lives were more susceptible to hypnosis and were more likely to believe in reincarnation and life after death. Hypnotizability also predicted the subjective intensity of the past-life accounts, as did tests of magical thinking and a proclivity for engaging in fantasy and imagery activities.

Thus, Spanos concluded that what appears to be recovery of the memory of past lives is simply a rule-governed construction placed on a subject's experience and given a particular context during an interpersonal situation with a hypnotist. The memory is drawn from the subject's experiences and is shaped by what the hypnotist tells the person before the so-called hypnotic regression. In particular, the memories reported by Spanos' subjects were almost totally incorrect. For example, one subject who reported being Julius Caesar gave the date incorrectly (Caesar was already dead at the time reported by the subject) and employed a style of dating not in use at Caesar's time (since Jesus Christ had not yet been born, dates in Caeser's time were not given as B.C. [Before Christ], the style used by the subject). After the experiment, this subject did report that he was studying Caesar at the present time in a history course at the university.

Baker (1982) found a similar result: students who were told to expect to recall past lives did so under hypnosis much more often than students who were told that the notion of past-life regression was a silly idea.

Is Therapy Using Past Lives Useful?

Several hypnotherapists have noted that the technique of hypnotic age regression to previous incarnations may be useful in helping people regardless of whether or not the experiences constitute proof of reincarnation.

For example, Marriott (1984) gave an example of a client who was an alcoholic. When asked for the source of the problem while hypnotized, he claimed that in a previous life he died of thirst in the desert. It was as if his unconscious mind was making sure that he did not die of thirst in this life. Marriott noted that this information might motivate him to seek treatment to stop drinking and to start the therapeutic process. It does not matter whether the information is true. What matters is whether the client understands the message; for some clients, a message phrased in terms of a previous life may be easier to accept.

Landers (1986) noted that clients who seemed to benefit from past-lives therapy had typically (1) tried other therapists and modalities without obtaining any help, (2) found that their symptoms persisted, and (3) felt helpless. Landers felt that these clients tended to reject suggestions from the therapist (and were often viewed as bad or difficult clients), but could accept suggestions from their own minds. Landers viewed memories of previous lives as similar to messages passed on to the client through dreams. In each case, the message is best viewed as a metaphor created by the client's own unconscious. The advantage of the previous-life metaphor is that it enables clients to blame others for their misfortunes rather than accepting responsibility themselves.

Solovitch (1991) noted that some therapists who utilize past-life therapy do not necessarily believe that they are helping patients recover previous reincarnations. They see hypnotic regression to previous lives as a way of tricking the unconscious of the patient into behaving better, and they see the story of reincarnation as a symbolic story created by the patient's unconscious to help the patient gain insight into a problem. For example, Solovitch reported a case from Norma Shealy of a paralyzed woman with no clear recollection of how she became paralyzed, who remembered being Anne Boleyn under hypnosis, the wife Henry the Eighth of England had beheaded. Solovitch concluded that this was a screen memory of an incident in which the woman's husband shot and wounded her.

Conclusions

It is clear from this review that the use of hypnosis to help people recall supposed previous lives has provided no good evidence for the existence of reincarnation.

12

Phenomena That the Theory of Reincarnation Can Explain

There are many phenomena that the theory of reincarnation can explain, phenomena which are quite disparate and seemingly unconnected.

Abnormal Appetites During Pregnancy

Many pregnant women have abnormal appetites during pregnancy, often for very surprising foods. This may be a result of a food preference (or aversion) from the fetus's previous incarnation, and Stevenson (1977c) reported several such cases.

Unusual Skills

Sometimes children possess a skill that they have not learned; this could be a skill developed in the previous incarnation. In Stevenson's cases, the children showed skills such as knowledge of marine engines, Bengali songs and dances, sewing machines, and weaving coconut leaves for roofing thatch.

Unusual Interests

Similarly, children who report previous existences sometimes show interests and appetites that can be related to their previous existence.

Stevenson found cases of children who showed an interest in religion, for example, for whom it was later found that their previous alleged incarnation was very religious. Stevenson also reported cases in which the interests were not socially acceptable in children, such as an appetite for alcohol or a desire to smoke cigarettes or *bhang*, an intoxicant.

The interest may show up in their play, as in two cases where the children liked to play shop and another case where the child had a favorite doll to which she gave the name of the daughter she had had in a previous existence. Other cases were reported by Stevenson where the child showed sexual interest in a partner of the previous incarnation, and in these cases the previous incarnation usually had died at a young age during a time of sexual activity.

Child Prodigies

Child prodigies could be explained by the same idea; that is, they had some remarkable skill in a previous incarnation, which carries over to the present reincarnation. However, Stevenson found no cases of child prodigies among his sample of reincarnation reports.

Birthmarks

Birthmarks might be the result of injuries sustained in the previous existence, as might congenital deformities and diseases. Children who remember previous incarnations sometimes have scars on their bodies related to injuries received in the previous life. Although Stevenson was often unable to tell by examination whether the marks had been inflicted during the present life, in almost all cases the parents denied that possibility. Stevenson also found cases where the child had acne, bronchitis, and myopia of the same form as the previous incarnation.

Stevenson found cases where the child had a mole in the same place as the previous incarnation. In most cases where murder had occurred in the previous existence, the deformity occurred on the reincarnation of the murder *victim*, who was mutilated or injured in some way. However, in a few rare cases, the deformity occurred on the reincarnation of the murderer, which could be seen as a form of retribution.

Stevenson located medical records in 17 cases in which he could verify that the supposed previous incarnation did indeed have the birthmark, deformity or disease claimed.

Phobias of Childhood

Stevenson reported that many cases of reincarnation have childhood phobias that the parents cannot attribute to any trauma the children have suffered, but which can be related to aspects of the previous existence. Stevenson found several cases of phobias of water in children who had been drowned in a previous life. In other cases, the children were afraid of particular places associated with their violent deaths in previous lives. Not all deaths in previous existences, however, result in phobias in the reincarnated children, and Stevenson has not reported research designed to explore differences between those children with and without phobias.

Differences Between Identical Twins

It is found that identical twins, although remarkably similar in most cases and in most ways, often do differ in some ways, even conjoined twins. Stevenson suggested that the differences may be a result of the twins having different previous incarnations. In one case, Burmese female twins, recalled existences as their own grandparents and, indeed, the twin who allegedly had been the grandfather was more heavily built and muscular than the other twin.

Inequities in Fortune

Although Eastern religions often claim that future existences will involve retribution for bad behavior in present existences, Stevenson found no cases that fit this idea of retributive karma. However, personality traits do appear to carry over, fitting the idea of developmental karma.

Gender Dysphoria

In some cases where the previous incarnation was of the opposite sex to the present reincarnation, Stevenson found incidences of gender dysphoria and homosexuality. In one case (discussed in Chapter 11), a Burmese girl recalled existence as a Japanese soldier stationed in Burma during the Second World War who was killed in battle. She remained resolutely masculine in outlook into adulthood and had no intentions of marrying a woman and having children.

Tucker and Keil (2001) reported the case of a boy in Thailand who was thought by his mother to be the reincarnation of his grandmother. He himself did not recall a previous existence, but he accepted his mother's story and, as a child, adopted feminine traits, such as sitting to urinate and wearing makeup and female clothes. This gender dysphoria was clearly induced by the beliefs of his mother and not a reincarnation memory.

The Excessive Births of Boys After Wars

Stevenson (1974) noted that the proportion of boy babies after wars is often greater than at other times. Perhaps nature compensates for the loss of men in battle, or perhaps a higher incidence of delayed marriages account for this excess. On the other hand, the existence of reincarnation would mean that more male spirits than female spirits are available for reincarnation after wars.

Child-Parent Relationships

Often children reject their parents, dislike them or feel alienated from them. Stevenson (1977c) encountered reincarnation cases where these frictions were found primarily because the children claimed that their biological parents were not their real parents. Stevenson viewed the claims made by these children that they were from wealthier families in previous lives or members of a superior caste as ways of distancing themselves from their present families. Stevenson speculated that cases of autism, a form a psychosis similar to schizophrenia but evident in children from birth on, may be a result of the children being affected by memories of previous existences and distancing themselves from their parents.

Vendettas and Bellicose Nationalism

Stevenson noted that a large proportion of his cases of reincarnation involved violent deaths in the previous life. In the different cultures from which he obtained his cases, the percentage of violent deaths ranged from 29 percent in the Haida of Alaska and British Columbia to 78 percent in Lebanon and Syria. The majority of the violent deaths were homicides. Many of the children who recalled these deaths talked of revenge.

Stevenson suggested, therefore, that the occurrence of blood feuds

between families and warfare between cultures might be a result of murders and other violent incidents in previous lives affecting the reincarnated people in later times.

Déjà Vu

Déjà vu is French phrase meaning "already seen." A definition by Neppe (1983) is "Any subjectively inappropriate impression of familiarity of a present experience with an undefined past." Déjà vu must be distinguished from such phenomena as flashbacks, cryptomnesia, precognition which has come to pass, and simple vivid memory. Sno and Linszen (1990) reviewed research on déjà vu and found that reported rates varied from 30 percent to 96 percent in different surveys—the median was 51 percent. There is a tendency for déjà vu to be more common in younger adults.

Scholars have distinguished between normal déjà vu and a pathological form that is prolonged and impairs the reality testing of the individual. According to Sno and Linszen, the pathological form appears to be associated with temporal lobe and psychomotor epilepsy, depersonalization, anxiety, dissociative symptoms (such as amnesia), mood disorders (such as depression), personality disorders and schizophrenia—in fact, it seems to appear in any and all psychiatric disorders. However, even the normal form is more common in states of fatigue, stress and illness.

Déjà vu has been viewed as a disorder of memory (when you have forgotten the source of the similar experience), a disorder of perception (when you have misperceived the present scene), and a disorder of the sense of time. Theories have included a lack of synchrony between the two hemispheres of the brain, so that a sensation registers earlier in one hemisphere than in the other, and a psychoanalytic process in which the conscious mind is reminded of a repressed fantasy.

But, of course, those who believe in reincarnation see déjà vu as the perception of a scene in your current incarnation that reminds you of a scene in a previous incarnation.

Schizophrenic Hallucinations

Schizophrenia, a severe psychosis, is characterized by a cluster of symptoms including hallucinations. The hallucinations of schizophrenics are primarily voices. Van Dusen (1974) asked a sample of schizophrenics about the nature and content of their hallucinations, and he noted that

they all disliked the term "hallucination." Indeed, the majority thought that they were in contact with another realm, and they often coined a term to describe this realm — the Eavesdroppers, the Others, etc.

Van Dusen noted that psychologists would view these voices as coming from detached or, to use a technical term, dissociated parts of the person's mind. But he also raised the possibility that the voices were those from the spirit world — that schizophrenics are, in some sense, excellent mediums.

This raises an interesting possibility. What if a schizophrenic youngster who hears voices grew up in a family that believed in spiritualism? Rather than being labeled schizophrenic and being placed in a mental hospital, might the youngster be raised to become a leading medium?

The voice heard by schizophrenics could also be voices generated inside their own minds from previous incarnations.

Multiple Personality

Multiple personality is a phenomenon in which a person has two or more distinct personalities. The critical component in the definition of multiple personality, however, is that there must be amnesia, at least for one or more of the personalities, about what transpires when the individual is in one of the other personalities. Thus, multiple personality is a dissociative disorder, that is, a disorder involving psychologically-caused amnesia.

From the point of view of reincarnation, however, multiple personality may result from possession of the individual by a spirit or from the individual unconsciously recalling and entering into a previous incarnations.

Comment

One criteria for a good theory is that it makes useful predictions about human behaviors. A good theory makes few assumptions; that is, it is parsimonious. In this respect, the notion of reincarnation is excellent since it provides explanations, without requiring further assumptions, about many phenomena. This ability does not, however, prove the validity of reincarnation. A theory can be "good," yet false!

13

Conclusions About Reincarnation

Does the research on reincarnation support the conclusion that there is life after death?

Problems with the Cases

The problems with accounts of reincarnation are illustrated by a case reported by Pasricha and Barker (1981). They described the case of a five-year-old boy in 1974 in India who recognized a man (a bus driver) from another town about 160 miles away, a town he and his family had never visited. Eventually, the boy gave enough information to identify his previous incarnation as a man named Bithal Das, born in 1922, who died in 1955 by accidental electrocution. The boy's father took him to the town of his previous incarnation, where the boy made several correct identifications. For example, he reported having been a carpenter, told of his death from electrocution, and described the house where he had lived with some correct details. Barker and Pasricha investigated the case in 1976-1979, visiting the region and talking to the participants.

Barker and Pasricha discussed the case separately and came to different conclusions. Barker regretted that there was no written record of the initial statements made by the boy. Thus, the case depended on the memory of the informants. Barker also noted that the members of both families (the boy's and that of the previous incarnation) had a deep emotional investment in viewing the boy as the reincarnation of Bithal Das. This throws doubt on the accuracy of their memory of what transpired for, as

has been well demonstrated by psychological research, memory is often faulty and is best viewed as a reconstruction in the present of what happened in the past, shaped by emotions and desires.

Barker noted that the case was full of discrepancies and contradictions. The witnesses could not agree on whether the boy mentioned the name of Bithal Das before he went to the town or only after people in the town recalled a carpenter who had died from electrocution. He described the house incorrectly, placed it in the wrong part of town, and he couldn't locate it himself in the town. He named Bithal's wife incorrectly at first, and may have misstated the number and sex of his children.

Barker noted that the accuracy of the boy's account of his previous incarnation improved dramatically over time, and so Barker concluded that boy came to identify with the person Bithal Das, particularly because the people around him supported him in this and rewarded him for this identification. Barker noted, however, that the recognition of the driver initially, along with the fact that the boy gave this man sufficient information to suggest whom the previous incarnation might have been, cannot be explained by this interpretation, and Barker suggested that ESP might account for this.

In contrast, Pasricha felt that the boy had been quite accurate in his account of his previous incarnation, but Pasricha too could not accept a reincarnation hypothesis as the correct explanation for the case, preferring instead to suggest that the boy had extremely well-developed ESP, which had provided him with the accurate information.

This case indicates what is needed in order to be more convinced that reincarnation has occurred:

1. The investigators must be present from the start. A case is required in which, when a child begins to recall a previous existence, the words that he says are recorded right from the beginning.
2. The record should involve videos of the child, or at least auditory recordings, permitting verbatim transcripts and observations of whether coaching or prompting of the child took place.
3. Preferably, the investigators must be present continuously from this point on so that they can monitor what the child is told by his or her parents, relatives, friends of the family, and acquaintances.
4. The desires of parents and others for the reincarnation to be valid interfere with the case. The results that the experimenter wants can influence how he reacts to the subject, how he communicates with the subject, and the inadvertent errors he makes in recording and analyzing the information (this is called experimenter bias). Parents, relatives, friends

and the investigators can influence the results to fall in line with their hypothesis and their desires. Thus, the investigators should include believers and skeptics, and they should take care to minimize the influence of parents and relatives on the child.

Haraldsson (1991) reported four cases from Sri Lanka that also illustrate problems with these cases. Haraldsson seems to have studied 13 cases, in which only two previous incarnations were identified and examined. This means that 11 children remembered previous lives, but no documentation could be found so that their stories could be checked.

Haraldsson presented four cases, the two for which a previous incarnations were identified and two for which the previous incarnation was not identified. The most obvious difference is that the two cases which remained "unsolved" involved parents who were not interested in the children's stories. The cases that were solved involved parents who were the most interested in the children's stories and took the children to visit the location of the previous personality.

In one of the cases, Haraldsson tried to specify the testable facts given by the child. Of the 17 facts, Haraldsson reckoned that 12 were correct, at least partially, and four were definitely wrong. The four wrong "items" involved the names of people associated with the previous personality. In the second case, a young boy claimed to be have been a monk in a previous life, and a possible deceased abbot was identified. Haraldsson accompanied the boy on later visits to the monastery where this abbot had lived, but he could not reconstruct accurately what the boy had experienced on previous visits. The boy could not reliably identify the abbot in photographs of several monks, and he could not identify the buildings in which the abbot had lived.

Haraldsson noted that this boy's, mother appeared to have embellished the case, especially her son's behavioral traits, which resembled those of a monk. Haraldsson also noted that the boy had seen monks and could easily have modeled some of his behaviors on these monks.

Thus, these two cases are contaminated by the selective choice of which cases to report, supportive parents, a lack of recorded information from the beginning by objective researchers, and previous visits by the boys to the locations of the previous personality. Finally, not all of the facts given by the boys were accurate. What percentage is required for a case to be persuasive? Haraldsson's report suggests two additional necessities for good reincarnation reports:

5. Cases for reporting should not be selected; rather, all cases should be recorded, examined and reported for others to examine.

6. Prior to the arrival of the investigators, the child should not be allowed to visit the place of the previous incarnation or meet people who knew the previous incarnation

Could an ideal case be found? Stevenson et al. (1974) reported on 105 cases from India and noted that very few came to their attention before the two families had met. However, Haraldsson (1991) noted that cases can be found every year of children remembering previous lives. If this is true, then it should be possible to find a case and explore it from the very beginning, so as to prevent contamination by the parents and others, and make sure of getting accurate videotapes of the child's statements.

Alternative Explanations

Before deciding whether reincarnation reports provide evidence for life after death, alternative explanations for the phenomenon must be considered, explanations other than fraud by the parents of the child or by the investigators.

There are several explanations for reincarnation experiences:

1. The person obtains the information through normal means but forgets that the information was acquired in this way (cryptomnesia).

2. The reports of the reincarnation experience are modified (consciously or unconsciously) by the subjects and their friends and relatives to be more true to the facts, and facts that are later discovered are mistakenly attributed to the subjects (paramnesia).

3. The subject acquires the information about a deceased person's life paranormally (by extrasensory perception) and then personifies this information into a secondary personality.

4. In cases where the subject is related to the previous personality, there is the possibility of inherited memory (Irwin, 1999).

Regarding explanation number three above: If it were possible for a person to acquire information about a deceased person's life by extrasensory perception, there is no reason why the life recalled should be of someone who is dead. Extrasensory perception, followed by personification, should be possible — indeed it should be easier — if the other person were still alive. Thus, children should report other lives that are later found to match people still living at the time of the child's report.

5. It may be that the subject having a reincarnation experience has been possessed by the spirit of the deceased person.

Some of these alternative explanations (extrasensory perception plus personification, inherited memory and possession) in some ways seem less credible than in reincarnation. Indeed, reincarnation seems like a more reasonable hypothesis, and there is no evidence to support these alternative explanations whatsoever. However, ruling out cryptomnesia and paramnesia is very difficult, especially if the investigators are called to the scene only *after* the child reports the previous existence.

Logical Problems with Reincarnation

There are many questions that those who believe in reincarnation need to answer.

1. Investigators do not make it clear what they assume is reincarnated. Stevenson (1974a) noted that what reincarnates might include memories (which can provide facts to be checked), emotions (such as fears and phobias), behaviors (such as skills and preferences) and physical features (such as birthmarks) shown by the previous personality. Why do some cases have only some of these features and not all of them?

2. Stevenson admitted that it was a problem that cases of reincarnation are reported more often in societies that believe in the phenomenon than in those that do not. If reincarnation happens, why does the frequency of reports vary from society to society?

3. Stevenson noted that in his best cases, the previous person lived in the same region as the current person. There should be more cases where the previous personality is from a different nation, for there is no reason why deceased spirits should be constrained by space. So far no case involving a previous incarnation from a different country had produced sufficient information that the previous person could be traced. Why do reincarnation reports typically involved deceased people from the same region?

4. Stevenson noted that rarely do subjects report events from between lives. A child in India may recall meeting with Krishna or Lakshmi, or a Tlingit may recall crossing a lake in a canoe and returning across the same lake to be reborn, but such reports are rare. Why are events from the period between lives not remembered?

Thouless (1984) noted that it was not clear whether investigators expect experience to continue between existences or not. Perhaps a stream of consciousness continues between existences or perhaps not. Thouless noted that most religious beliefs involving reincarnation assume a continual stream of consciousness during and between existences.

5. Why doesn't everyone remember a previous life? Stevenson felt it was more pertinent to ask why anyone remembers a previous life.

Becker (1993) illustrates the nonscientific approach to this (and other) questions. He suggested that (A) most people have trouble remembering their childhoods, so it is not suprising that some have difficulty remembering previous lives; (B) the memories of previous lives might have been suppressed because they were traumatic; (C) people need training (such as yoga) in order to remember them; and (D) perhaps not everyone has had a previous life; that is, some people are "new" souls. This approach is nonscientific because none of these explanations are capable of empirical testing (except perhaps point C, if the training succeeded in restoring memories of past lives).[1]

6. Since there is no reason we know for people to be reincarnated only once, why do Stevenson's subjects remember only one previous incarnation rather than many?

7. Why are the well documented cases found only in a limited number of countries (Murphy, 1973)?

8. Why do the memories of the previous life fade away as the person grows older (Murphy, 1973)?

9. Why is memory preserved in reincarnation, but desires and purposes are less often carried over (Murphy, 1973)?

10. Stevenson (1988a) mentions cases in which personalities appear in a new child before the previous incarnation dies. He reported a case in Thailand where a child was born one day before the death of the previous incarnation. Such cases cast doubt on reincarnation as the explanation for these reports.

It is clear, therefore, that researchers who propose reincarnation as an explanation for the cases they report have a great deal of theoretical analysis to do in order to make their explanation convincing.

Some General Points to Ponder

There are a couple of other general points that have been made about reincarnation. Stevenson (1988a) noted that it is not necessarily good to remember previous lives. It may alienate the child from his current parents, and many children who do remember previous lives become happier when they forget these memories as they grow older.

Stevenson (1974a) noted that he had little evidence in his cases for retributive karma, that is, punishment in this life for sins committed in the previous life.

Finally, Stevenson (Kastenbaum, 1993–1994) noted that childhood behavior is typically viewed as caused by genetic factors and by parental treatment of the infant and child. Reincarnation would add an extra input into the etiology of human behavior. It might also cause parents to view children as more responsible for their behavior than they currently do.

Do Reincarnation Reports Provide Evidence for Life After Death?

This review of the research and reports on reincarnation phenomena is unconvincing in providing evidence for life after death. In reviewing the evidence for near-death experiences as evidence for life after death, the cultural variation in the reports was disappointing. Similarly, in reincarnation reports, there are large cultural variations. The characteristics of Stevenson's cases vary significantly from culture to culture, and there is no reason why this should be so. The cultural variation in the reports suggests that the belief system of the culture determines the content of the reports. If a culture believes that sex change does not occur from one life to another, then it does not occur in the reports; if the culture believes that sex change is possible, then it occurs. If reincarnation really occurs, then there should be no cultural variation at all.

Second, in the only cases examined by experts in xenoglossy, the experts indicated clearly that the investigators made errors in their investigation of the cases and that the evidence presented was not convincing. The experts in these cases suggested the way in which such cases should be approached, but no one has yet reported doing such an investigation.

Third, the absence of memories of existence between incarnations is puzzling. Spirits should remember these times as well as times from the previous incarnation. This is particularly important because the evidence for life after death from near-death experiences concerns life in the spirit world. The reports of reincarnation experiences indicate nothing about this spirit world. The two sources of evidence are, apparently, in conflict.

Finally, no adequate case has yet been reported. Many of the investigators are in India, a country where reports of reincarnation experiences appear to be very common, yet no investigator has had a child or close acquaintance report a previous life so that video recordings could be made from the beginning for inspection by others.

It appears that people who report experiences from previous lives are shaped in this behavior by the beliefs of their cultures, their own needs, and the desires of their parents and others. Children in India report pre-

vious existences in nearby towns of recently deceased, ordinary people, just as their parents expect; children in Native American families in the Northwest report existences from the same family line, just as their parents expect; Shirley MacLaine reports previous existences as famous people from bygone eras, just as Westerners expect. The reports conform too closely to cultural expectations.

Part Four

Other Phenomena

14

Apparitions of the Dead

There are three related phenomena, centered around apparitions, that are relevant to the search for life after death. People sometimes experience the presence of another being; this being sometimes seems to be a deceased person (at the moment of death or much later after the death); and occasionally the deceased person may be a loved one. (People sometimes experiences apparitions of the living, but this is not evidence for life after death.)

Hoyt (1980-1981) had a psychotherapy client whose grandfather had died the previous year. One day, the client came to the psychotherapy session and reported an apparition:

> I was sitting in my car, terribly upset and wrought up about the breakup with my wife. We had just been arguing, and I was alone in the car while she went to get some cigarettes. I began to tremor and shake, and felt a kind of "energy" or sense inside my body. It went on for I don't know how long, and my whole body felt shaky and tingly. Suddenly I felt someone behind me, and turned around and, God, it was my grandfather. He was sitting there, perfectly real, and kind of smiled at me. My body felt relaxed, I wasn't shaking any more, and seeing him there was so strange that I wasn't even startled. We just looked at each other, maybe for half a minute, and then he just was gone. I cried for some time, but I felt after that I had made my peace with him. I still missed him, but things were somehow different. I wasn't carrying him around inside of me, he was finally really gone. I don't know how it could be, but I'm sure that he was really there. I don't know how, but his spirit was in me and then left me [Hoyt, 1980-1981, 106].

MacDonald and Oden (1977) reported three cases of teenage Hawaiians who were problem students who had had visions of beloved dead relatives (two saw their grandmothers and one saw a brother). The adolescents

were disturbed by these apparitions, and they could not be calmed using relaxation techniques. In each case, the adolescent was told to confront the apparition and ask what it wanted. For example, in one case, the apparition (the subject's grandmother) said that she was sad because he was behaving badly. After this, the adolescent was less upset, and his behavior improved. Seventy-eight percent of fifth-grade Hawaiian students reported seeing such friendly spirits (called *aumakua*), as compared to only 15 percent of non-Hawaiian students.

Osis (1986) has provided a good example of an apparition. A businessman, Leslie, died in airplane crash in 1982. A distant relative, who had a dream the night before the crash about a plane coming toward her, sought out a picture of Leslie and told him to find his little son who had drowned 18 months earlier and appear to Leslie's mother in order to comfort her. Two nights later, Leslie's mother, Marge, awoke in the night and saw Leslie and his son at the foot of her bed. Leslie's niece, Jenny, six years old, was told of her uncle's death. Several hours prior to Marge's apparition, Jenny awoke and saw Leslie and his son in her room. Jenny learnt a day or so later that Marge had seen Leslie, but Marge did not find out that Jenny had see Leslie until a month later. While Marge did not believe in life after death, Jenny's parents did.

This case is of interest because it was investigated by a reputable scholar in the field and because two people independently saw the same apparition, even though about 100 miles apart. Furthermore, the apparition appeared after a request to do so. Marge later tried to request another appearance by Leslie, but to no avail.[1]

A recent report by Cameron and Roll (1983) was of a person seen by five individuals at different times at their place of work. The descriptions of the apparition were not altogether consistent, but they did vaguely resemble a deceased former employee who was known to two of the witnesses. However, the employee died away from the place of employment from a heart attack after being fired a few months earlier. The descriptions in this case were vague but could be clearly identified with the deceased, and the apparition made no effort to identify himself to the witnesses.

Morse (1994) reported the case of Dr. Frank Oski, a pediatrician at Johns Hopkins University, who went to bed one night thinking about a patient of his who was dying. He was awakened by a bright light and saw a woman with wings on her back who explained to him why it was that children had to die. Angels, however, have received little scholarly attention.

It should be noted in passing that apparitions appear that are not necessarily of the dead. Bennet (1983) has studied the responses of people in

extreme danger, and they occasionally report anomalies of perception including apparitions. For example, Frank Smythe, nearing the summit of Mount Everest in 1933, felt a strong friendly presence. Nick Estcourt, climbing Everest in 1975, saw another climber following him. Ann Davison, crossing the Atlantic Ocean alone in 1954 was aware of two others on board. These apparitions do not necessarily aid the person (as angels do), but they can provide the security of having companions. Rhine (1957) reported that her subjects had apparitions of living people, dying people and dead people. In the case of dead people, some subjects knew the person was dead, while others did not know. In other cases, the subject did not know the person in the apparition.

Rhine (1957) compared visual apparitions of living and dead persons and claimed to find no differences, but she presented very little data. For the only variable for which she presented data, apparitions of the dead were more often realistic than those of the living. Hart (1956), however, compared apparitions of living and dead people for 23 traits and found no differences.

Hart (1956) also found few differences in the overall case features of apparitions of the dead and the living. In both types of case, there was a strong tie between the perceiver and the apparition. In cases where the apparition was of a living person, the living person often showed purpose — that is, had been directing attention to the perceiver. Thus, Hart suggested (by analogy) that apparitions of the dead also may be motivated in part by a sense of purpose in the dead person. In rare cases of apparitions of the living, the person represented by the apparition may recall seeing the receiver in the place where the receiver perceived the apparition — a reciprocity.

Predicting Death and Life

Morse (1994b) presented cases of people who predicted the deaths of their children, particularly from SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome). One woman had two dreams in which a stranger entered her house and killed her baby, the first two weeks before his death from SIDS and the second the night before.

In another case reported by Morse, a women underwent a heart transplant and nearly died during the operation. Her son-in-law awoke at home to see this woman, his mother-in-law, standing at the foot of his bed telling him that she was all right. Later, the mother-in-law reported having a dream that she had left her body during the operation and gone to her son-in-law's home.

Angels

Some people believe in and claim to have seen angels. Angels can play the role of escorting people to their deaths, and they also can appear in order to help people through crises (guardian angels). There have been many popular magazine articles, books, television shows and movies on these themes (for example, "Angels in America," 1997). In one case, a six-year-old girl, Hilary, ran into the sea and was swept away by a riptide. Her parents tried to save her but failed. Then they saw a dark-haired man standing in the surf beyond Hilary who plucked her out of the water and walked to the beach to put her in her mother's arms. They thanked him and he replied, "That's okay." Then he disappeared. All three members of the family saw him clearly. They recall that his skin glistened although the day was cloudy and that he seemed to be only chest deep in the water although it must have been much deeper.

Lange and Houran (1996) examined reports of angels and found that there were two types. In direct encounters, people perceive a being whom they call an angel. In reconstructed encounters, people perceive a stranger (who often helps them in some way), and they later decide that this stranger was an angel. Lange and Houran argued that the reconstructed encounters were with actual people rather than with angels since the results of the data analyses for the reconstructed encounters differed substantially from those for the direct encounters.

Lange and Houran found that these reports resemble those of ghosts and poltergeists in being consistent with the contextual cues that are present at the time, such as cultural beliefs and expectations (e.g., the people believe in angels), the demand characteristics of the situation (a direct or indirect suggestion that the situation will produce the phenomena, such as folklore or religious beliefs), an intense emotional state that increases the chance of misperception, embedded cues in the environment or in the person's memory that can be incorporated into the experience that the person perceives, and metaphorical or symbolic references (e.g., midnight). On the whole, the contextual cues were congruent with the details of the experience.

Reports by Health Care Workers

Kelly (2002)interviewed 90 emergency workers (police officers, firefighters and emergency medical personnel) and found that 17 percent reported experiencing feelings of the presence of, communication from,

or attachment by the deceased victims that they were attending. The reports were of thoughts, ideas, images or feelings, with limited sensory input, but a strong conviction of the contact.

Similarly, Morris and Knafl (2003) interviewed nurses and found that many reported visitations from patients for whom they had cared, some while they were sleeping, while others reported visitations during their own crises from what they described as angels. Others described glowing light around dying patients and visible presences at the patients' bedsides.

How Common Are Apparitions?

Kalish and Reynolds (1973, 1976) surveyed residents of Los Angeles and found that sensing the presence of the dead was most common in African Americans (55 percent reported this experience), followed by Mexican Americans (54 percent), whites (38 percent) and Japanese Americans (29 percent). The encounter was most often in a dream (63 percent), followed by a visitation (25 percent) and a seance (3 percent).[2]

Those who report that they have sensed the presence of another being are also more likely to report having experienced other paranormal phenomena (Persinger and Makarec, 1987). Persinger and Richards (1991) found that such experiences were more common in women than in men.

Palmer (1979) surveyed students and townspeople in Virginia and found that 17 percent of both samples had experienced apparitions. Eight percent of the townspeople and five percent of the students felt that they had communicated with the dead, and eight percent of the townspeople and nine percent of the students reported past-life memories.

Greeley (1975) reported that 27 percent of a nationwide sample of Americans reported having had contact with the dead (whereas 59 percent reported having had déjà vu experiences). Contact with the dead was more common in older people, women, blacks, the poor, widowed and those who believed in life after death. McCready and Greeley (1976) reported that experiences of being in contact with the dead were more common in the elderly than in young adults, in Protestants and Jews than in Catholics, in Episcopalians than in other Protestant denominations.

Ross and Joshi (1992) found that 5.2 percent of a normal population of individuals claimed to have had contact with ghosts, 4.0 percent claimed knowledge of past lives, and 0.6 percent believed they had been possessed by dead spirits. Experience of possession was not associated with the other experiences. Those who had experienced physical or sexual abuse as children reported more of these (and other paranormal) experiences, and expe-

rience of these phenomena was also associated with symptoms of borderline personal disorder and dissociative symptoms (such as amnesia). The experience has been reported in children who were not grossly mentally disturbed (that is, psychotic), and one child experienced the presence of his older brother, who was born dead.

The experience is not limited to Western cultures. Nagel (1988) reported cases of Navajo women who saw or dreamed of their recently deceased loved ones. The women he described found the experience unpleasant and sought treatment from native or Western healers. This phenomenon has also been noted among Hopi women (Matchett, 1972; Shen, 1986).

Perceiving the presence of a loved one who has recently died is a common experience (see chapter 16), with about 27 percent of the general population in one survey reporting this experience (McCready and Greeley, 1976).

Stevenson (1982) examined a sample of cases reported in 1886 and found that more than half involved people who had died violently or suddenly, much as in his own cases of reincarnation (see chapter 11). Stevenson felt that the suddenness of the death could be seen as a factor motivating those who had died to communicate somehow with living people who might be interested in or concerned about them.

Lewis (1987) found that feeling the presence of the dead was common in nurses—in 25 percent of RNs and 44 percent of other nurses. Balk (1983) reported that half of a sample of teenagers had heard or seen a sibling who had recently died.

After-death communications (ADC) have been found to be quite common, occuring in some 20 percent of people according to Guggenheim and Guggenheim (1996). The Guggenheims described 12 types of ADCs:

1. Sentient: feeling the presence of the deceased
2. Auditory: hearing the voice of the deceased
3. Tactile: feeling a physical touch from the deceased
4. Olfactory: smelling a fragrance associated with the deceased
5. Visual: seeing the deceased
6. Visions: involving bright vivid colors
7. Twilight: ADCs occurring as the person is falling asleep or waking up
8. Sleep-state: ADCs while asleep
9. Out-of-body: ADCs while the survivor is in an out-of-body state
10. Telephone ADCs: the deceased calls the survivor on the telephone
11. ADCs involving physical phenomena, such a door being opened or closed

12. Symbolic ADCs such as a rainbow or butterfly that is interpreted as a sign from the deceased

Botkin (2000) reported inducing ADCs by subjecting the recently bereaved to eye-movement desensitization and reprocessing, a process in which the person is made to move the eyes in a specific rhythmic fashion. In one such induced ADC, a man whose unit in Vietnam had killed a woman and child saw the spirits of the woman and her child rise out of their bodies at the moment of death, drift through a tunnel and move toward a bright light, with peaceful looks on their faces and a sense of purpose. Botkin reported on another case of an ADC in a woman who had had a near-death experience, and she was sure that the two experiences were quite different. None of the induced ADCs involved a life review or a being of light, elements found in near-death experiences.

The Nature of the Experience

Irwin (1999), summarizing the results of earlier surveys, concluded that the duration of the apparition is quite variable, but about half of respondents report that the apparition lasted less than a minute. About two-thirds of apparitions are of the dead.

Haraldsson (1988-89) interviewed Icelanders who had experienced the presence of a dead person while awake. Eighty-four percent had a sensory encounter (visual, auditory, tactile or olfactory), while the others merely felt a presence. Visual experiences were the most common (59 percent) followed by auditory (24 percent), and 33 percent experienced the deceased through more than one sensory modality.

The majority of the experiences lasted only a few moments, but they occurred up to 55 years after the death of the person. Men appeared more than women, and the majority were elderly, related to the person, and had died from diseases, although 23 percent had died a violent death, a higher proportion than in the general population.

Five cases (of the 100) appeared within 12 hours of the death, with the experiencer not knowing of the death. In 43 cases, another person was present during the experience, and one-third of these people also reported the apparition. Haraldsson interviewed all of these additional participants that he could find and confirmed that they had had an experience similar to his initial interviewees.

A woman who had lost her eight-year-old boy in an accident reported, "I was washing the wooden floor in our living room when I looked up a

moment to pause. Then I saw him standing some distance away from me looking towards me. I looked for a while and did not immediately realize that he had died. I ran towards him saying 'My Beggi,' but then he disappeared. He was dressed in the clothes he had on when he drowned" (Haraldsson, 1988-89, 107).

Haraldsson noted that almost half of his sample had the experience in daylight or bright light, so that lack of external stimulation was not necessary for these apparitions. Almost two-thirds were resting or just awakening when they experienced the apparition. The majority of the respondents were no longer grieving when they had the experience, and almost all were medically healthy.

Malinak et al. (1979) reported the case of a man whose father appeared in front of him, asking the man whether he could leave. He later found out that his father died soon after. Experiences like this, in which the apparition of the person appears to someone else *prior* to his or her death, would be extremely important for researchers to study, both in terms of the frequency and characteristics of such experiences and whether the timing of the apparition and the death can be ascertained precisely.

A modern case was reported by Haraldsson (1987), in which an individual lying ill in the hospital saw an apparition of her visitor's grandfather. She told the visitor to go home immediately. The visitor called home and found out that her grandfather had just died. Haraldsson noted that the weak point in this case was that the ill person did not tell the visitor that she had seen an apparition until after the visitor had learned of her grandfather's death. Furthermore, the patient said that the apparition had said to her, "Won't you send my child home?" not his granddaughter.

Apparitions sometimes do not follow the laws of nature — they walk through walls, or disappear suddenly. (Stevenson, 1982). However, they can also show normal physical properties, such being reflected in mirrors and walking around physical objects. In even rarer cases, Stevenson noted, some children recall appearing as apparitions to their prospective mothers before they were born, and in some of these cases the mother also recalled the apparition.

Correlates of This Experience

Datson and Marwit (1997) surveyed a sample of recently bereaved adults (the majority of whom had lost a spouse) and found that 60 percent reported having perceived the presence of the dead person. Half of those reporting this experience said that it was a nonspecific awareness of

the person, 19 percent heard something, 17 percent saw something, ten percent felt something and four percent smelt something. The majority were surprised (76 percent), comforted (86 percent) and desired more similar experiences (79 percent). Age, gender, education, income, the amount of social support received during the bereavement, and religious affiliation were not associated with the frequency of the experience. Datson and Marwit also found that those who had had this experience were more neurotic and more extraverted on psychological tests than those who did not have this experience, but did not differ in whether they felt that they were responsible for events that happened to them (as opposed to other people, chance or fate being responsible).[3]

Imaginary Playmates

Imaginary companions are people, animals or objects that children create in their imaginations to play the role of companion. Child psychologists have studied this phenomenon, and it appears that imaginary playmates are more common in girls than in boys. They also seem to be more common in children with superior intelligence and who experience friction with their parents or siblings. Children who have imaginary playmates are as well adjusted as those who do not, and they do not seems to be characterized by any particular personality traits.

Taylor (1999) believes that having imaginary playmates is a normal type of play engaged in by many children. On the other hand, Hurlock (1972) took the view that having an imaginary playmate may impede personal adjustment, leading to egocentricity and impairing social adjustment, since the child may be less likely to play with others and learn social skills. But Hurlock admitted that studies of college students who had had imaginary playmates showed them to be similar in these skills to those who did have any such playmates.

In contrast, Singer and Singer (1990) saw imaginary playmates (and imaginary worlds or societies, known as paracosms) as a sign of good adjustment and potential creativity. They noted that the phenomenon occurs in children between the ages of roughly two and six.

"Transitional objects" are objects, such as pacifiers and blankets, that ease the loss of the mother's physical presence, her skin and her breast, for the child. Research has shown that children with transitional objects are average on various personality tests and tend to be better adjusted in adolescence (with fewer behavioral problems). Imaginary playmates can be seen as the next step toward independence after transitional objects,

and recent research (more recent than that reviewed by Hurlock and mentioned above) shows children with imaginary playmates to be more verbal and happier. The Singers also concluded that imaginary playmates predicted later creative and intellectual growth. Children with imaginary playmates watched television less, cooperated with peers and adults more, were more imaginative in their play and more creative later in life. In their own research, the Singers found no differences in intelligence between children with and without imaginary playmates. Only children were more likely to have imaginary playmates than children with siblings. They found no gender differences in the occurrence, although girls tended to have imaginary playmates of the opposite sex more often than boys did, whereas boys more often had imaginary animal playmates. About a third of the children named their imaginary playmates after actual people.

Although they reject the notion, Singer and Singer noted that some people believe imaginary playmates to be spirits and, certainly, the concept of spirits could account for the phenomenon of imaginary playmates.

Facilitating Apparitions

Moody (1993) has reported efforts to facilitate apparitions in the bereaved. He has constructed a special room with a large mirror into which the client gazes after a day spent reminiscing and relaxing. Such a place to facilitate communication with spirits is called a psychomanteum. Moody reported that the majority of his clients do indeed "see" someone in the mirror. On occasions it is not the specific person they wanted to see, the apparition may come forth out of the mirror, the client may converse with the apparition, and the apparition may occur later after the client has departed from Moody's establishment. The clients typically view the apparitions as real and not as fantasies or dreams, and they are profoundly affected by the experience.

However, the report by Moody did not contain any tests of the validity of these apparitions as really being spirits of the deceased. For example, Moody was not interested in documenting information given by the apparition or examining whether information was transmitted which was initially known only to the deceased person. Furthermore, even though Moody's clients are not hypnotized, the role of suggestion is so great that these facilitated apparitions are not so convincing for the existence of spirits as are those that occur spontaneously.

Hastings and his colleagues (2002) tried to elicit apparitions of deceased loved ones in 27 subjects, and 13 reported success. Hastings found

that eliciting the apparitions resulted in a significant improvement in the resolution of their grief. Arcangel (1997) found that those who experienced reunions with loved ones were "intuiting" rather than "sensing" types and "feeling" rather than "thinking" types.

Cook and Persinger (2001) reported eliciting the sensation of the presence of other beings in people with temporal lobe sensitivity (that is, people who had experienced complex partial epileptic-like seizures) by applying complex magnetic fields to their heads. Three-quarters of the subjects experienced a presence.

Explanations of the Experience

One explanation of apparitions is that they are spirits of the dead. The occurrence of apparitions of the living would then raise the question of what left the body of the living person and whether the body (or mind) left behind changed in any way. Irwin (1999) noted that apparitions of the dead are often seen dressed appropriately and carrying accessories. Religious beliefs, on the other hand, indicate that the soul leaves the body behind, and so there is no reason why a soul would dress as did the physical person from which it comes or carry the same objects (such as a walking stick or reading glasses). Alternative theories are that apparitions are telepathically mediated hallucinations. The perceiver receives information telepathically, and this information is transformed into a hallucination. If the apparition is of someone who is dead, this would entail telepathic communications from the dead. Apparitions could be simple (or pure) hallucinations of a psychiatric nature or, less pejoratively, "imaginative misinterpretations of natural stimuli in the area around the perceiver."

The grief experience after the death of a loved one frequently involves preoccupation with thoughts of the person and behavior that resembles searching for him, such as wandering through the house, going to the room where he used to sleep and expecting him to be there when the bereaved person comes home. This intense continuing involvement may somehow invoke internal feelings of the dead person's "presence," or alternatively the dead person's spirit or soul may actually be present.

Baker (1988) noted the phenomena of hypnagogic hallucinations (those while falling asleep) and hypnopompic hallucinations (those while waking up), phenomena that are quite common in ordinary people. Baker thought that many accounts of apparitions were these kinds of hallucinations.

Baker noted that a common account is that the person opens his eyes,

but is unable to move. He sees someone standing at the foot of his bed, perhaps a deceased relative, who smiles and says, "Don't worry about me. I'm fine." Thereafter, nothing happens, and the person falls asleep again. These features are common in hypnagogic and hypnopompic hallucinations: being unable to move or floating out of the body, waking up or falling asleep, having a bizarre hallucination, being convinced of the reality of the experience, and afterwards falling asleep. The latter is especially interesting since this would be unexpected if the images were real. If they were real, the person would be expected to become excited and to get up and tell others.

Anderson and Anderson (1982) noted that it was very difficult to distinguish between apparitions and the hallucinations of those who were psychiatrically disturbed. For example, they reported cases obtained from Sedman (1966a, 1966b) such as that of a woman who, after her husband's death, came home tired one day and saw him life-sized and in natural color. All of Sedman's cases, however, were from psychiatric patients and were more likely to be hallucinations than apparitions. Thirty-five percent of Sedman's cases of visual hallucinations in his sample of psychiatric patients were of deceased spouses or relatives. Anderson and Anderson observed that the only way to distinguish between apparitions and hallucinations was to assess the psychiatric status of the perceiver.

We need studies that statistically compare the reports of apparitions by the psychiatrically normal and visual hallucinations of the dead by the psychiatrically disturbed. Anecdotal reports are not sufficient to decide whether apparitions are identical to hallucinations or not.

Anderson and Anderson noted that apparitions seen by two or more people might be more convincing as evidence of survival. However, although these visions might differ from hallucinations, there is a psychiatric syndrome called folie à deux, in which two psychiatrically disturbed people have identical symptoms. Again, a statistical comparison of the content of both types of phenomena is needed to decide whether such apparitions differ from the psychiatric syndrome. However, Thouless (1984) noted that sometimes only two or three people present may see an apparition, while others present do not see it. In these cases, the apparition cannot be a physical object for, if it were, everyone present would see it. In such cases, seeing an apparition must be different from normal seeing. Some writers have suggested that part of seeing an apparition involves extrasensory input from the deceased person, but again this is difficult, if not impossible, to confirm or rule out. If part of the apparition does involve extrasensory input from the deceased person, then this implies that the stream of consciousness of the deceased person persists after death.

Thouless (1984) pointed out that spirits or souls are not material objects and so do not need a material body. Thus, how do living people "see" someone in an apparition? Thouless suggests that perhaps the person constructs the perception, using the extrasensory input that emanates from the spirit together with cognitive schema to form the apparent perception of someone. Thouless noted that people often misperceive things in their normal lives because of the influence of the cognitive schema, a phenomenon well known to psychologists who have conducted studies on the mistakes made by eyewitnesses to events, mistakes that sometimes render testimony in court by eyewitnesses of doubtful value (as when they identify the wrong person as the criminal).

Some scholars have noted a syndrome found in elderly people who have eye disorders, known as the Charles Bonnet syndrome after the man who first described the phenomenon in 1760. Alroe and McIntyre (1983) presented two cases of women who saw their deceased husbands. Both women had had cataract surgery, and the implication is that the eye disorder was the cause of the apparition (which Alroe and McIntyre called a hallucination). However, they did not prove, using methodologically sound research, that the eye disorder caused the apparitions. More recent cases have also been reported (Adair and Keshavan, 1988), and Lefroy (1999) has suggested that the syndrome is a marker for the imminent development of dementia.

Persinger (1993b; Persinger and Schaut, 1988; Schaut and Persinger, 1985) has suggested that paranormal experiences in general may be related to electrical activity in the brain similar to temporal lobe epilepsy. Persinger argued that if this were the case, geomagnetic activity on the earth would disrupt paranormal phenomena because it would affect the electrical activity in the brain. He found support for this hypothesis using paranormal experiences reported in *Fate* magazine, but only for paranormal experiences that occurred on the same day as the geomagnetic activity (such as telepathy) and not for paranormal experiences involving those who had died.[4] Persinger (1985) found a decrease in geomagnetic activity for days on which well-documented telepathic experiences involving death or illness among friends and family members occurred, as compared to neighboring days.

Persinger devised a self-report questionnaire attempted to measure "soft" signs of temporal lobe abnormalities, but soft signs involve mental experiences and do not assess the actual electrical activity of the brain. Thus, the content of the items on such a scale overlap with those to do with sensing the presence of other beings. As might be expected, therefore, Persinger found that those who have felt the presence of beings obtain

higher scores on his temporal lobe activity scale (Persinger and Valliant, 1985; Persinger and Makarec, 1987; Persinger and Richards, 1991).

Cook and Persinger (2001), in a study mentioned above, elicited the sense that others were present in subjects who were prone to temporal lobe epileptic-like seizures by subjecting them to magnetic fields. Persinger (1993a) reported that bereavement apparitions appeared most often after midnight when melatonin levels are low. Thus, Persinger prefers a neurological explanation for apparitions.

However, as noted throughout this book, Persinger, like other researchers, has not obtained samples of reports obtained under these conditions and compared them with reports of apparitions obtained in conventional ways. This is the same criticism made of research on the neurological and other theories of near-death experiences.

Discussion

Stevenson (1982) discussed the contributions of apparitions to the evidence of survival. Stevenson noted, first of all, that cases must be authentic. Mistaken interpretations of the experiences, and even outright fraud, have occurred. Cases must be examined in detail in order to be sure that they are authentic.

The authenticity of the apparitions is made a little more likely if more than one person sees the apparition, although folie à deux or fraud are still possible in these cases. However, in one survey, 56 percent of apparitions were collective, and folie à deux is not likely to be so common (Hart, 1956).

In cases where the apparition is of a living person, then telepathy is a possible explanation of the phenomenon, and even collective apparitions may be explained through telepathy. In some cases, the several perceivers saw the apparition at the same time, making telepathy and suggestion less likely. Even an apparition of someone who has died within minutes or hours of the apparition appearing to someone could be accounted for by telepathy. Stevenson suggested that apparitions of this kind may be more likely if the deceased died suddenly, a circumstance that might motivate the deceased person to communicate the desperate situation to others.

One obvious proof of an apparition of a dead person being "real" would be if the apparition could communicate information to the receiver that was not known to the living. Unfortunately the case most often cited on this is the Chaffin will case, published long ago (in 1926), in which

James Chaffin left a new will that no one knew he had written (Zorab, 1962). Four years after his death, a son had a dream in which his father appeared to him and revealed the whereabouts of the new will, which proved to be true. However, perhaps the dream simply indicated that this son had clairvoyantly acquired information which took a while to surface, in this case in the son's dreams.

Rogo (1979) suggested that those who see an apparition of someone who had died, but whose death they are unaware of, may be using extrasensory perception to ascertain who among friends and relative has recently died, perhaps unconsciously. This hypothesis is, of course, untestable. However, Stevenson (1982) noted that extrasensory perception is unlikely to be involved in the case of apparitions that appear a long time after the person has died. Stevenson also suggested that cases in which the perceiver could have no motive for seeing the apparition or for learning any information that the apparition might communicate are more convincing. The Chaffin will case mentioned above does not meet such a criterion, since the perceiver benefited from the newly discovered will. Stevenson reported a case from the previous century in which a lodger saw the ghost of a man who had died three years earlier and whose widow had died just before the lodger moved into the house. Thus, the person was seen long after his death by someone who never knew him and who had no motive for seeing him. Unfortunately, Stevenson had to rely on an old case to illustrate his point.

One common criticism made in these pages is that most of the cases reported for the various phenomena are old, usually from more than 50 years ago. Some modern reports of apparitions have been reported. For example, Maher and Hansen (1995) reported a case of a ghost seen by 20 witnesses over a period of 57 years. (This apparition provided no information to the witnesses, and their descriptions were not altogether consistent.) Rogo (1990a) presented a case of a person who died and then appeared to a friend after his death. (Again, this apparition provided no information to the witness.) However, neither case was studied using sound research methodology.

Stevenson (1983c) objected to the word "hallucination" to described these experiences, because that word is used in psychiatry to label one type of experience common to schizophrenia — the perception of stimuli that do not exist. Thus, the use of the word hallucination to described experiences with spirits assumes that they do not exist and are, instead, the same as symptoms experienced by crazy people. Stevenson suggested the term "idiosyncratic perceptions" or, better still, *idiophany*, derived from the Greek words for "private" and "appear."

Radin and Rebman (1996) noted that the better cases of apparitions are those in which the experience is shared by two or more people and those in which the same apparition appears to different people at different times, sometimes centuries apart. Osis and McCormick (1982) reported such a case from Pennsylvania in 1978 in which 11 people from one family (including sons-in-law) saw and heard the same things. Every family member saw visual apparitions ranging from shadowy forms to human figures; sounds such as tapping, banging, footsteps, furniture moving and doors opening and closing; and changes in temperature. Some family members also had tactile sensations. However, there was no direct evidence as to who the apparition might be (although a psychic said that it was the man who built the house).

Thouless (1984) pointed out that there was no reason to believe that spirits (which must be presumed to be disembodied) could be seen because there is no reason for (or way in which) disembodied spirits could reflect light and so be visible. A spirit or soul is not a material object. Thus, it seems that the perception of a spirit is, at least in part, the product of the viewer's mind, as is the case in most forms of perception.[5] Furthermore, the fact that, in most cases, only one of a group of people present sees the spirit suggests the involvement of the viewer's own mind. Perceiving a spirit, then, must be different from perceiving a material object. On the other hand, the occurrence of some apparitions at the time of crisis in the deceased person's life would be a remarkable coincidence if it could be confirmed.

Stevenson (1982) has been concerned to rule out extrasensory perception as an explanation for apparitions. He felt extrasensory perception was less plausible as an explanation for collective apparitions (spirits seen by several people in the same place at the same time), reciprocal apparitions (in which a living person is perceived by someone as an apparition, and the apparition afterwards recalls seeing the perceiver at the place where he or she saw the apparition), and some features of the apparitions themselves (such as that some of them are reflected in mirrors, that they adapt to the environment such as by walking around obstacles, and that they may make gestures such as pointing to wounds on their bodies).

Stevenson also noted the similarity of reports of apparitions of the living to those of the dead. Apparitions of the living often display a purpose in appearing to the other, and so the similarity suggests that the dead spirits may also have a purpose in appearing. The purposiveness of the deceased spirit also makes extrasensory perception unlikely as an explanation.

Comment

There has been a fair amount of scholarly research and theorizing on the topic of apparitions but, after reviewing it all, there is no convincing evidence for life after death. Researchers are still trying to determine what apparitions are and how are they caused. It is too soon to expect this research to provide evidence for life after death.

15

Widow Hallucinations

It is common for someone whose husband or wife has died to sense his or her presence after the death. This phenomenon has been called a widow hallucinations, although the term "hallucination" is not appropriate in this context since it implies that those who experience the presence of their deceased spouse are crazy (hallucinations are a symptom of schizophrenia). This is not the case. Experiencing the presence of a deceased spouse is extremely common and may be considered normal from a psychiatric point of view.

Parkes (1970) studied a small group of 22 widows in London and found that 73 percent experienced the presence of the deceased husband in the first month after his death, and 45 percent saw, heard or were touched by him. Marris (1958) interviewed 104 widows in London, ranging in age from 25 to 56, of whom 36 reported illusions of the husbands, most often hearing his voice or footsteps. A few tried actively to cultivate this sense of their husband's presence by such acts as talking to his photograph, clinging to his possessions and visiting places that were special to the couple.

Rees (1971, 1975) found that 47 percent of spouses in a town in Wales who had been bereaved experienced the presence of the deceased wife or husband. The most common experience was "the sense of the person" (81 percent), followed by seeing the spouse (30 percent), hearing the spouse moving around (28 percent), being spoken to by the spouse (25 percent) and being touched by the spouse (6 percent).[1] Twelve percent told Rees that they had spoken to the deceased spouse.

Olson et al. (1985) surveyed widows in nursing homes and found that 61 percent reported sensing the presence of the deceased husband. The majority (86 percent) found these experiences comforting and,

for almost half (46 percent), the experiences continued for long periods of time.

Glick et al. (1974) noted that many widows have a fairly steady sense of their deceased husband's presence. The experience may take a few weeks to develop, but thereafter it does not seems to diminish over time. Most widows found the experience comforting, and they endeavored to develop the ability to deliberately invoke the experience when they needed it. The experience was more common in those widows whose husbands died suddenly and unexpectedly. Unlike the psychotic person, they knew full well that the experience was an illusion.

Blanchard et al. (1976) studied 30 widows under the age of 45, whose husbands had died when they averaged 30 years of age, on the average some seven years before the study. The experience of seeing and hearing the husband declined over time during the first year of bereavement, but stayed steady in frequency thereafter.

Lindstrom (1995) found that 74 percent of a sample of Norwegian widows experienced the husband's presence soon after his death and 67 percent a year later. Only about one-fifth of the widows found the experience unpleasant.

Grimby (1993, 1998) surveyed half of the widows and widowers in a town in Sweden who had been born in 1912 and found that 82 percent had experienced the dead spouse. The majority found the experience pleasant. Fifty-two percent felt the presence of the spouse, 30 percent heard the spouse, 30 percent spoke to the spouse, 26 percent saw the spouse, and six percent were touched by the spouse. The frequency of these hallucinations was associated with marital happiness, subsequent loneliness and severe crying. Yamamoto et al. (1969) studied 20 Japanese widows and found that 90 percent sensed the presence of their deceased husbands in some way.

Who Has This Experience?

Parkes (1970) found that widows who did sense the presence of the deceased husband were also more likely to see or hear him in the first month after his death. They were also more preoccupied with memories of him, had a clearer visual memory of him, and seemed more sad when interviewed by Parkes. However, they were not more upset overall than the widows who did not have this experience.

Rees (1971) found that the experience was equally common in widows and widowers. Widows and widowers who lost a spouse below the

age of 40 were more likely to have this experience, as were those widowed for less than ten years. People whose marriage had been happy and who had children more often had the experience, as did those from the professional and managerial classes. The suddenness of the death was not related to the frequency of the experience in Rees's study, nor was social isolation, the cause of death, the presence of depression or religiosity.[2] These experiences occurred most commonly in the first year after the death, but could occur for many years thereafter. The experiences typically occurred when the person was awake and were pleasant experiences. About three-quarters of the people did not report their experience to others, mostly because of fear of ridicule.

Olson et al. (1985) found that the experience was more common if the widow also dreamed about her deceased spouse, in widows aged 30 to 39 and 70 to 89, in those who had one or two children (rather than none or more than two), if they had been married only once, if their husbands were unskilled laborers, if they took medication at the time of bereavement, and if they reported other hallucinatory experiences.

Grimby (1993) found that women were more likely to have these experiences than men, and the experience was more common in widows and widowers who were lonely and depressed and who had memory problems. Yamamoto et al. (1969) found that the experience was not associated with the religion or the religiosity of the Japanese widows studied.

Some researchers have found that these experiences are more common in those who have a relatively more intense grief reaction and who have greater difficulty coping with bereavement. For example, Simon-Buller et al. (1988–89) surveyed 294 widows in Arizona over the age of 65. The "sensers" had a more liberal religious orientation, attended church more frequently, worried more after their husband's death than before, experienced more difficulties with concentrating, sleeping, fatigue, feeling useless, loneliness and restlessness, and reported more problems adjusting to bereavement than the widows who never sensed the husband's presence. The sensers were less financially secure but received more help from neighbors.

Lindstrom (1995) found that widows who found the sensing of their dead husband extremely positive or extremely negative adjusted less well (on the basis of a range of psychological tests measuring such traits as anxiety, general well-being and mood) than those who found the experience neutral or slightly positive or who did not have the experience.

Comment

Interesting though this phenomenon is, modern researchers have lost interest in it, and it provides little evidence for life after death. Widow hallucinations are almost certainly sensations created by the mind of the widow or widower.

16

Deathbed Visions

Patients who are dying often report to those visiting them that they can see people (and sometimes landscapes) that others cannot perceive. These are known as deathbed visions. Since these visions typically appear immediately prior to death, they are also called deathbed escorts. Morse (1990) reported the case of a woman who had this type of apparition when she was feeling quite well, drinking a cup of coffee in her kitchen. She died a few hours later in her sleep when her pacemaker failed.

Hoyt (1980–1981) reported the case of a 65-year-old man in the hospital recovering from gallstone surgery. Two nights earlier, he had awoken to see his dead mother in his hospital room. He was terrified that she had come to take him away to death. He remembered that, when he was young and present at the death of his father, his father had been in great pain and cried out to his deceased mother to come and take him away to death. The father then changed his expression, looked as if he could see someone, and talked to his deceased mother in relieved tones just before he died.

Osis and Haraldsson have reported many cases such as the following: "'I can't get up,' and she opened her eyes. I raised her up a little bit and she said, 'I see him, I see him. I am coming.' She died immediately afterwards with a radiant face, exulted, elated" [1977b, 34].

Osis (1961) carried out a pilot study of deathbed visions in America. He surveyed physicians and obtained usable replies from 640 who reported 35,540 observations of dying patients. Of these, 1,318 saw apparitions, 884 reported visions and 753 experienced mood elevation shortly before death.

Osis conducted in-depth interviews regarding 150 of the apparition cases. These apparitions were only of a person — the perception of the rest of the surroundings (room and visitors) remained realistic. The apparition was a relative for 83 percent of the cases, and 90 percent of these rel-

atives were from the nuclear family. This is very different from the typical hallucinations of psychotic patients.

Seventy percent of the apparitions were of deceased people, and the major goal of the apparition was to "take the person away," presumably to the afterlife. Those patients who might have had brain disease or another disorder that might lead to hallucinations had visions that were more chaotic and disjointed and that were less often "take-away" apparitions. Those with fevers or on sedation were not more likely to see apparitions. Those who died sooner after seeing the apparition were more likely to have reported that the apparition was a "take-away" type. Forty-six percent of the dying people were calmed by the apparitions, and the percentage was higher in those who were fully conscious.

Osis and Haraldsson (1977a, 1977b) collected a total of 471 reports of deathbed apparitions from physicians and nurses in the United States and in India. The typical apparition was of short duration — about half lasted less than five minutes. A quarter of the patients died within an hour of the apparition, and an additional 20 percent between one and six hours later — overall, 62 percent died within a day.

The apparitions were related to the afterlife in 83 percent of the American apparitions and in 79 percent of the Indian apparitions. Some 65 percent of the apparitions were "take-away" apparitions (excluding apparitions that came merely to comfort the dying person). Seventy-two percent of the patients wanted to follow the apparition, but this willingness was more common in the American than in the Indian patients. Forty-one percent of the patients showed an improvement in mood, 30 percent no mood change, and 29 percent had a negative reaction to the apparition. Positive emotions were equally often elation and peace; negative emotions were most commonly depression, fear and anxiety.

Sixty-one percent of the patients had received no medication, and only nine percent were judged to have been moderately or strongly affected by medication. Fifty-eight percent of the patients had a normal temperature, and only eight percent had fevers of 103 degrees or above. About half of the patients were judged to have a clear state of consciousness, and less than one-fifth were severely impaired. Stroke, brain injury and other diseases that might increase the risk of hallucinations were present in only 12 percent of the patients. Combining these factors, 62 percent of the cases were free of all medically-caused hallucinogenic factors. Patients with brain diseases saw take-away apparitions less often, as did those with impaired consciousness. Thus, medical factors did not appear to be the root cause of these apparitions.

Age and sex were not related to the type of apparition or to the

patient's emotional reaction. The patient's mood the day before the apparition was related to the apparition — those whose mood was normal saw peaceful take-away apparitions more often than those whose mood was positive or negative. However, the patient's expectation of death was not related to the type of apparition. An association between seeing a take-away apparition and dying quickly was found only in the American patients, not in the Indian patients. Patients who resisted the take-away apparition were found primarily among the Indian cases, and this indicates that a wish-fulfillment cause for such apparitions does not fit the data for the Indian patients. Few patients had a desire to see a particular apparition, and persons recently encountered by the patient were rarely perceived.

Osis and Haraldsson found some similarities and differences in the characteristics of the people seen during the near-death experiences. The duration of the apparition was briefer for the American subjects — more often less than five minutes versus more often six minutes or longer for the Indian subjects. The apparition appeared closer in time to death and was more often a religious figure for the Indian subjects. The Indians saw the god of death and his messengers more often whereas the Americans saw the Christian god or Jesus more often. The American patients saw religious figures more in "total hallucinations" whereas the Indian patients saw religious figures more often in their sickrooms; as one Indian doctor said, "Our deities make house calls; yours demand an office visit" (Osis and Haraldsson, 1977b, 107).

Americans more often saw a female apparition, whereas the Indians more often saw a male. The apparition was more often there to help the Americans relive memories whereas it more often appeared to the Indians in order to take them away. The Indians found the experience to be more unpleasant than did the Americans.

While the religious affiliation and religiosity of the American patients had no effect on the apparitional experience, religious Indian patients were more likely to see apparitions. Their level of education played no role for either American or Indian patients.

However, the two groups also differed in medical factors. The Americans had cancer and heart diseases more often than the Indians; the Indians more often had injuries or were recovering from surgery. The Indians had higher body temperature (for example, more often above 100 degrees). Differences in the extent to which medications may have affected consciousness and the clarity of consciousness were smaller.

A small percentage of the American patients appeared to be reliving memories, and a minority of the experiences appeared to be "total" in that

the patients appeared to behave as if they were in a different (typically an afterlife) environment.

Osis and Haraldsson found that some of the patients who saw deathbed visions did not in fact die. Some recovered. Did their deathbed visions differ from the visions of those who died? They did not differ in the type of the apparition or the patient's subsequent mood. However, the visions were longer, and more of the apparitions in those who recovered were of religious figures. These apparitions also more often told the patients to go back to their earthly life. For example, a female accountant in her fifties experienced the following after a heart attack: "She said her father and mother [both deceased] were coming to meet her and take her far away. The three of them were going along a hill when her parents suddenly told her to go back. She turned back and left them. The next morning, approximately six to eight hours after the experience, her condition improved. I [her doctor] had expected her to expire that night. I realized how seriously ill she was, how close to leaving" (Osis and Haraldsson, 1977b, 150).

About half of the patients who recovered had expected to die, and these patients saw more apparitions of dead people than of religious figures. Those who recovered saw more religious figures than dead people. As before, there was no evidence that medical factors were the cause of the visions in the nonterminal patients.

The results of this study indicated that cultural factors affect only a small proportion of the characteristics of the near-death experience and the interpretation given to it by the subject. The American and Indian patients were similar in the duration of the deathbed vision, the otherworldly nature of the visions, the apparitions being close relatives, the purpose of the apparitions being to take away the patient (most of whom were ready to go), the patient being sent back in some nonterminal cases, the emotional reaction to the apparition (mainly happiness and serenity), the occurrence of mood elevation before death, the visions portraying otherworldly environments (mostly expressing beauty and harmony), and the transition to death portrayed as one to gratifying existence. They differed only in the frequency of apparitions being religious figures versus deceased relatives and the frequency of a patient's refusal to go. Osis and Haraldsson concluded that the similarities in the two cultures were so great that they supported the postmortem survival hypothesis—that is, that there is life after death. This afterlife, however, does not appear to conform to religious teachings.

The people who have these death-bed visions do not always know that they are about to die, and the visions typically occur only hours before

death rather than days. Rogo (1979) suggested, however, that the people may have unconscious knowledge of impending death, a possible but untestable hypothesis.

Discussion

Houran and Lange (1997) examined a sample of 49 accounts of deathbed apparitions and found that contextual cues were present, as well as cultural beliefs and expectations, demand characteristics of the situation, emotional and physical states of the person that increase their susceptibility to such experiences (such as any intense emotional states or substance use), embedded cues in the environment itself or in the person's memory that may structure or get incorporated into the experience (such as lavender hues in the room, which might suggest the smell of lilacs), and metaphorical and symbolic references (such as a special day like Easter). They found that reports with more contextual cues had more modalities (e.g., vision and hearing) and more content.

This skeptical analysis, together with the fact that these deathbed visions rarely, if ever, give any information or data that can be verified, shows that it is unlikely that deathbed visions provide evidence for life after death.

17

Possession

Possession is a cultural or subcultural belief system that the person can be possessed by some other "personality" (Bourguignon, 1976). Possession is an idea, a concept, used to explain certain behavior. When people are possessed, according to this belief, they can be said to be an in a possession trance or a possession state (Bourguignon, 1976). This state usually involves changes in consciousness and often affects the behavior of the possessed person.

Depending upon the cultural beliefs, this state can be involuntary, harmful and undesirable, in which case the person or his relatives often turn to a religious specialist in order to exorcize the spirit possessing the individual. However, the possessing entity can be seen as desirable, as in American Pentecostal religious groups, the members of which, after possession by the Holy Ghost, speak in tongues (*glossolalia*); or as in mediums who sometimes become possessed during their sessions (Firth, 1969). Finally, in some societies, the initial possession is viewed as deviant, but efforts are made to control the possession — to domesticate it (Bourguignon, 1976).

Often possession is chaotic and violent, and the troubled spirit possessing the individual must be identified (Kenny, 1981). The spirit can then make its needs known through the mouth of the individual.

The possessing agent can be a god, a devil, an unknown dead spirit, or a known dead spirit. Indeed, several other phenomena can be viewed as special cases of possession. For example, in reincarnation the person could be possessed by a dead soul, except that the dead soul does not compete with the already existing soul, but rather *is* the person.

Ward (1980) distinguished between *ritual possession*, which is voluntary, reversible and short term, supported by cultural beliefs, induced by

engaging in ritual ceremonies and irrelevant to cultural concepts of illness; and *peripheral possession*, which is involuntary and long term, is viewed negatively by the culture, and constitutes a pathological reaction in the individual. Peripheral possession is more common in women who are under stress, and it can be viewed as a form of social protest.

Pattison and Wintrob (1981) saw possession as spanning a continuum from concrete (that is, with a high degree of personification and specification) at one end to abstract (that is, possession by thoughts, impulses, memories or images) at the other. Their taxonomy included (1) trance, an altered state of consciousness which is a culturally-learned pattern of behavior; (2) possession trance, with possession by and impersonation of another being; (3) neurotic possession behavior, a syndrome involving unusual, idiosyncratic, deviant, aberrant or pathological behavior that can be interpreted as the result of possession; and (4) psychotic possession behavior, involving culture-bound syndromes such as amok and wiitiko, involving psychotic behavior.

Pattison and Wintrob gave an example of possession behavior involving culture-conflict resolution:

> A Mexican girl who was engaged, received word that her fiancé had died in an accident. She had not wanted to marry the man and was relieved to escape the marriage but her family had wanted the marriage to solidify village social ties and saw the death as a severe social loss. The girl began to complain of nightmares and nightly visitations by her fiancé, who possessed her. A *brujo* was consulted and he performed a ritual of exorcism. The *brujo* placed each family member in magic circles to protect them. He invited the ghost into the house, explained to him that he was now dead and needed to leave the girl and to go to his proper place with dead people. He explained that the ghost would be missed, but this was the natural order. The ghost was dismissed out the door. The symptoms of the girl rapidly subsided [1981, 16].

Bourguignon (1976) suggested that possession was more common in societies where there was an oppressive social structure and a loss of trust in the effectiveness of social institutions, where protest was dangerous or unacceptable, and where social conflicts are difficult to resolve.

Examples of Primitive Beliefs

Many primitive peoples believe in possession by spirits of deceased individuals. For example, Seltzer (1983) reported cases among the Inuit in northern Canada. One young man with a history of depression, alcohol abuse and suicidal behavior suffered the deaths of his mother and three

other relatives. He came to believe that he was possessed by the spirit of an ancestral woman who had been a bad shaman. The psychiatrist gave him a bear claw and thioridazine (an antipsychotic medication) to fight off the spirit during his sleep. Seltzer felt that Inuit who believed that they were possessed were suffering from anomie as a result of changes in their culture and that the symptoms were a result of the psychoanalytic defense mechanisms of dissociation and projection.

Alonso and Jeffrey (1988) reported a case of a Cuban American woman who believed herself to be possessed by a dead teacher's spirit. She reported seeing him, as well as saints (which were probably visual hallucinations). She followed the Santería religion, which combines Roman Catholicism, spiritualism and magic and is found in Cubans and Cuban Americans. Normally possession in the Santería religion is by saints, but beliefs can clearly be idiosyncratic and nontraditional. The woman in this case was treated with thioridazine but, after recovery, continued to believe that she had been possessed.

In Haiti, many of the peasants follow the Vodun religion, in which it is believed that gods are able to enter into the person's mind, displacing his soul or consciousness (Ravenscroft, 1965). Gods cannot be compelled to possess a person, but the religious rituals can facilitate the god's taking over. When the god leaves, the person's soul returns, and so the person has no memory of what took place while he was possessed.

In Brazil, a transplanted tradition from the Yoruba in Nigeria is called Candomblé. Each participant of the cult has a guardian spirit or *orixa* which can possess the person during trance states (Csordas, 1987). In Zaire, people who contract the Zebola illness, which is the result of possession, enter the Zebola community and the religious rituals encourage the possessing spirit to help the person rather than harm her (Corin, 1979). In South Kanara in southern India, there is a Siri cult whose members believe that young girls can be possessed by one of five Siri who are the deceased spirits from one family from the past (Claus, 1979). The girl becomes a medium and can be possessed by the spirit when she desires it, rather than the spirit having control over the times of possession. In these three societies, the religious cult gives the participants power over their possessing spirits.

Krippner (1987) also reported on the belief in possession in Brazil, where there are three traditional spiritualism sects: Candomblé, Kardecismo, and Umbanda. Spirit possession is used to explain what people in the West would label obsessive thoughts, multiple personality, epilepsy and schizophrenia.[1] Sometimes, the spirit possessing the person is thought to be one from a previous life of the person, a reincarnated spirit. Kripp-

ner reported a case of a girl who in her teens acted like a tomboy and was upset when she developed a female physique. The explanation of the Brazilian mediums was that she had been a boy in a previous life, and this male personality had taken possession of the girl's mind.

Krippner (1987) reported the case of Sonia, an 18-year-old girl in Brazil who had one-night stands with men, without achieving orgasm. She sometimes fought with these men but had no memory of this afterwards. She had been given medications and electroconvulsive therapy. With the mediums, she began to speak in French and claimed to be a woman named Violetta from the eighteenth century. Violetta was promiscuous and wanted to possess Sonia's body even more completely. The mediums tried to limit Violetta's power and to synthesize her desires with those of Sonia. After six treatments, the personalities were merged, and Sonia was able to have orgasms. Sonia had achieved greater self-awareness and self-control. At that point, another personality emerged, Sarah, a Jewish housewife from the sixteenth century, a personality which was more mature than Sonia or Violetta, followed by Chen, a Chinese male. Sonia recalled "meeting" all three personalities when she was a child and considered them to be her spirit playmates. It took 18 months of treatment to merge these personalities. No effort was made to explore the reality of the existence of the three personalities from earlier times.

Interestingly, Sonia developed spots on her body during her possession by Sarah that corresponded to burns Sarah had received when she was burned (and killed) at the stake. The spots disappeared after two days, and the phenomenon is reminiscent of Stevenson's reports of parallels between birthmarks in reincarnated children and the manner of death of the previous personality (see Chapter ten).

Leon (1975) reported on 12 cases of possession in Colombia, most of whom were women and teenagers. He observed symptoms of anxiety, loss of consciousness, insomnia, crying spells, hallucinations, and homicidal and suicidal impulses, suggesting to him the presence of a psychiatric disorder. Most were triggered by interpersonal conflict, which generated rage, fear and guilt. The existence of a culturally sanctioned syndrome (diabolic spirit possession) provided an avenue of expression for these individuals. Religious and medical intervention was usually unsuccessful in helping the victims, but spiritualistic practices did help most of them. One of the victims had the "actions" of the evil spirit transformed into messages from the spirit world, and she became a gifted medium.

Among groups that believe in possession, it is thought that possessing spirits can be from the person's former life or from someone else's life, can be a nonhuman "low" spirit, or thy can be the spirit of someone still

alive (such as a sorcerer). Sometimes the possessing spirit is encouraged to leave the person (and occasionally is exorcised), while sometimes it is merged with the host personality. Occasionally, a person may retain the spirit that is possessing them and become a medium.

Interestingly, anthropologists (and the mediums they observe) who report such cultural cases are not interested in the truth or possibility of fraud in the spirit presentation (Firth, 1969). They are interested in whether the behaviors produced are consciously produced or unconsciously produced and what cultural function possession serves, such as novelty, an outlet for esthetics (as in dancing), or treatment for those who are sick.

Varma et al. (1981) speculated that cases of possession were similar to cases of multiple personality. They noted that cases of possession were very common in India, whereas cases of multiple personality were rare. Incidents of possession in India last from a few hours to a few weeks, but the people remain conscious of their surroundings and their true identity during the experience. They are also aware of prior possessions when they are back in their normal states; that is, they do not have amnesia. In these respects, possession is very different from multiple personality. Interestingly, possession in India is found not only in Hindus, who believe in reincarnation, but in Muslims, who do not.

Varma et al. (1970) reported an epidemic of possession by gods in a group of villagers in India. The authors attributed it to mass hysteria. In a study of 400 patients with possession syndrome[2], almost all by gods, they found a higher than expected incidence of hysteria and paranoid states in the patients, who were typically married women aged 26 to 30. Freed and Freed (1964) reported cases from a village in northern India, which they also saw as cases of hysteria.

Harper (1963) found that spirit possession in southern Indian Hindus (among the Havik Brahmins) was found only in women, with a lifetime incidence of around 15 percent. The possession appeared after stress, especially that of being a daughter-in-law. The daughters-in-law often refused food, and the relatives reacted to the spirit possession with concern and preferential treatment, before trying an exorcism. Thus, it provided a breathing spell, allowing the daughters-in-law to adapt to their new families.

Teja and his colleagues (1970) described 15 cases of possession in India. Seven were judged to be hysterics, six schizophrenics and two suffering from bipolar affective disorder. One case was an unmarried Hindu girl of 14, who became unconscious and displayed violent bodily movements. When she recovered consciousness, she claimed to be her deceased

brother, who had died before she was born. She was calmed with tranquilizers and later had amnesia regarding the episode. The psychiatrists thought that her episode of possession expressed a wish that she had been born a boy, which would have resulted in better treatment by her parents.

In Sri Lanka, Wijesinghe et al. (1976) found 37 people in a semi-urban population of 7,653 who showed possession trance. They showed alteration in the level of consciousness, behavior for which they did not accept responsibility, and amnesia for the period of the trance. Wijesinghe identified four types of possession: an acute fear reaction, projection of aggression toward onlookers (especially toward those in authority), manipulation of the environment to gain mastery over it, and the explosive release of pent-up emotions (catharsis).

Kua et al. (1986) found possession trances in Malays, Chinese and Indians in Singapore. All of the families saw the syndrome as cases of spirit possession and not indicative of psychiatric illness. In a follow-up five years later, Kua found that none of those located were psychiatrically ill. Furthermore, those who were still having possession trances more than three times a year had become traditional healers, a vocation that required them to go into trances.

Possession in Psychiatric Patients

Goff et al. (1991) noted that possession is often claimed by psychiatric patients. In a sample of 61 patients with chronic psychotic disorders, 41 percent claimed to have been or to be currently possessed. Those claiming possession did not differ in sex or age from those who not make such a claim, but they had more often been sexually abused as children (though not more often physically abused) and were more likely to have used cannabis and to have auditory hallucinations.

Goff did not ask about the identity of the possessing spirit, but the implication of Goff's research is that the belief that one is possessed is a severe psychiatric disorder and is a symptom similar to other dissociative disorders, such as multiple personality and psychologically induced amnesia.

Iida (1989), working in Japan, saw possession as a delusional state and documented its incidence and characteristics in psychiatric patients. He found that 21 percent of the patients in the mental hospitals he studied had this symptom. The most common agent was a god, but possessions by spirits, humans and animals were also reported. Possession was more common in schizophrenic patients and in younger patients.

Whitwell and Barker (1980) described 16 psychiatric patients in Great Britain who claimed to be possessed. Their symptoms included depression, suicidal impulses, hallucinations, insomnia, delusions and anxiety. Although they believed that they were possessed, they did not belong to cultural subgroups that believed in possession, and they did not show the typical behavior of possession — rather, the "possession" was more or less a simple delusion. Nine patients were diagnosed as having an affective disorder, five as schizophrenic and two as neurotic.

Peltzer (1989) described cases of spirit possession (known as Vimbuza) in Malawi (in Africa). He talked to over a hundred patients who had this syndrome and listed the symptoms they reported. Some related to possession, such as being troubled in dreams by ancestral spirits and speaking in different languages that friends did not understand. He found that most of the symptoms were of the kind found in the West in psychiatric disorders known as conversion disorders (involving paralysis of the voluntary muscles and sensory losses) and dissociative disorders (amnesia). He concluded that the patients were suffering from conversion disorders, depression or acute psychosis.

Yap (1960), documenting many cases of possession in Chinese residents of Hong Kong, saw it as a psychiatric disorder. In a study of 66 such patients admitted to a psychiatric hospital, Yap found that the possession patients were less often married than the other psychiatric patients and less well educated. The most common diagnosis was hysteria (48 percent), followed by schizophrenia (24 percent). The complete form of possession (clouding of consciousness, skin anesthesia to pain, changed demeanor and tone of voice, impossibility of recalling patient to reality and subsequent amnesia) was found in only 11 percent of the patients.

Yap felt that the syndrome could serve the purposes of attempts at wish fulfillment, dramatization and working through of guilt conflicts, and manipulation of others. One woman patient had been told by evangelists visiting her in the hospital that her tuberculosis was a result of her sin and that she could be cured only if the Holy Ghost possessed her. She soon became apparently possessed by Jesus and another obscure god and was treated with sedation and psychotherapy.

An illiterate peasant was possessed by spirits of her dead husband and mother. She had recently converted to Catholicism and had difficulty bringing up her two children in the city. Her neighbors had criticized her for neglecting her husband's grave; a fellow worker had proposed marriage to her, but she felt that it was immoral for a widow to remarry; and she had been cheated out of her salary. When her husband possessed her, he argued against remarriage and Christianity. When her mother possessed

her, she also argued against Christianity. Yap diagnosed her as hysteric and treated her with electroconvulsive therapy.

Bull (2001) noted that some patients with multiple personalities occasionally report that some of the personalities are alien to them, and they feel possessed. In these cases, Bull suggested that an exorcism, carried out in the custom of the patient's religion or folk philosophy, can be a useful adjunct to psychotherapy. The exorcism should never be forced on the patient and should be used only for the personality (or personalities) that the patient labels as alien. The remaining personalities can then be integrated into the person's psyche using more traditional therapeutic tactics.

In Zanzibar, where possession by spirits is so common that the island is considered to be the center of spiritual life in east Africa, Onchev (2001) examined six cases in which the patient claimed to be possessed by spirits. Onchev found that the patients suffered from a variety of disorders, including depressive disorders, anxiety disorders, schizophrenia and epilepsy. Possession seems to be a common folk explanation used by patients to explain their symptoms.

Possession and Other Phenomena

Transplants

A recent case appeared in *People* magazine of Claire Sylvia (Sylvia and Novak, 1997) who received a heart and lung transplant in May 1998. Since then, she reported taking on some of the traits of the donor, an 18-year-old man. Her food preferences changed, she developed a taste for beer, and she behaved more confidently and in a more masculine manner. She dreamt that she was with a mysterious man named Tim. After meeting the donor's family, she discovered that his name was Tim, and that her new traits and behaviors matched Tim's.

Transsexuals

Barlow et al. (1977) reported the case of a male transsexual, John, who wanted an operation to turn his body into that of a woman. Although he was eventually granted permission to have the operation, he visited a physician who belonged to a fundamentalist Protestant religion who convinced John that his problem was that he was possessed by evil spirits. The physician exorcized these spirits, and John willingly adopted a male role. Barlow noted that successful "treatment" of transsexuals in order to get

them to accept their anatomical sex is a long-term process and often fails. In contrast, this religious physician "cured" John in a matter of hours.

Explanations

Kenny (1981) noted that some scholars view possession, spirits talking through mediums (particularly those who go into a trance while mediating between the spirit world and our world) and multiple personality (a dissociative disorder) as similar phenomena. Thus, attempts are occasionally made to explain one of the phenomena by viewing it as a case of one of the others. Multiple personalities could be possessed; possession could be a type of multiple personality. Richeport (1992) noted that people with multiple personalities and those possessed by spirits usually make good subjects for hypnosis, and both of these phenomena can, supposedly, be induced by hypnosis (and, it might be added, be faked by the people).

Houran and his colleagues (2002) suggested that those who have anomalous encounters (including possession, encounters with the dead, and encounters with hauntings and poltergeists) would be more likely to have hypochondriacal tendencies and physical symptoms. They found some support in that those reporting such experiences had higher scores on a measure of autonomic sensations, that is, attention to bodily changes in response to environmental stimuli and to proprioception. Houran suggested that a judgment of spirit infestation by an individual may derive from misattribution of internal experiences to external, paranormal sources.

One study has found that possession may be a different neurophysiological state from ordinary consciousness. Kawai et al. (2001) studied dancers in Bali who sometimes enter into possession trances. They drew blood samples 15 minutes before and within six minutes after the dance from dancers who went into possession trances and who did not. Only those who entered into a trance had increases in concentrations of norepinephrine, dopamine and beta-endorphin in their blood, suggesting that catecholamines and opioid peptides are involved in possession trances.

Possession as Evidence for Survival

For possession to provide evidence for survival after death, the person possessed must demonstrate knowledge that could have come only from the spirit of a deceased person. Stevenson et al. (1989) reported the case in northern India of a young married woman, 17 years old, named Sumitra. She

became possessed by a spirit identified as that of Shiva, a married woman who had died violently about two months prior to Sumitra's possession.

Shiva had either been murdered by her in-laws or had committed suicide in May 1985, and her father tried to investigate the circumstances of her death. He heard that a girl living about 100 kilometers distant had become possessed by his deceased daughter and, two months after his daughter's death, he had a friend visit the young girl. He himself visited Sumitra five months after his daughter's death. One of Stevenson's team arrived in the village one month later.

The two families not only were distant from one another, they also differed in caste, education and economic position. Stevenson found no evidence that the two families had ever been in contact with each other before the possession. Reports of Shiva's death had appeared in newspapers in Sumitra's region, but with little information.

Sumitra had recently married and had a son in December 1984. In early 1985, she began to have episodes in which she lost consciousness. Her in-laws consulted local healers. In July 1985, during one of these episodes, Sumitra appeared to die and, when she recovered, she did not recognize her surroundings. She claimed to be Shiva and remained as Shiva except for a few hours one day in late 1986.

Sumitra's statements about Shiva were collected during Stevenson's investigation. Some of them conformed to the newspaper accounts of Shiva's death. Some remain unverified. However, a third group of statements, 19 in all, were not published and were verified by Stevenson's team. These items included the order of birth of Shiva's uncles, one of Shiva's nicknames, the names of two colleges where Shiva had studied, and the pet names of Shiva's two children. She also recognized some of Shiva's family members, but Stevenson's team was not present at the time that these recognitions occurred, and so leading questions and cueing could not be ruled out. Sumitra recognized 12 family members in real life and 15 from photographs.

Stevenson thought that fraud was unlikely in this case. Sumitra was barely literate, and there was no likely suspect for the creator of the fraud. Cryptomnesia was also unlikely, as were paranormal skills, such as extrasensory perception. The most likely explanation was possession by a discarnate spirit.

Comment

Stevenson has rarely investigated cases of possession, and so his data on the phenomenon are not as extensive as his data on reincarnation. The

same problems arise in validating cases of possession as in cases of reincarnation: fraud, the possibility of extrasensory perception, the possibility of cryptomnesia in the subject and coaching by the family. The possibility of bias by the researchers is present and, more importantly, even Stevenson has not yet found a case in which he could be present from the time of the first appearance of the possession state, armed with a videorecorder.

18

Mediums

Spiritualism is a Christian religion, the beliefs of which include the ideas that the spirits of deceased persons move to a spirit world and that it is possible to communicate with them occasionally through living persons called mediums.

Although in movies, mediums often go into trances and speak in the voice of the deceased person and, occasionally, apparitions appear, this is quite uncommon. In Great Britain, where spiritualism is an organized religion with an organized bureaucracy, almost no mediums behave in this way. The medium and visitors typically sit in comfortable chairs, and the medium passes on messages to the visitors while in a normal psychological state. She may say, "I have an Elizabeth here who wants to communicate. Does anyone here know an Elizabeth?" After establishing that the spirit is known, the medium may pass on a message. "She wants me to tell you that…."

Spiritualism has uncodified beliefs, which may vary with the particular sect or group. The British beliefs typically include a negative view of suicide (the spirits of those who commit suicide go into a type of limbo, and mediums advise against it), the notion that those who die suddenly are disoriented on the other side and have to rest for a while before moving on, and that there are several levels in the spirit world ranging from the squalid to the sumptuous. Those who have been evil during their earthly life are sent to the lower realms, a kind of hell.

Some mediums have a spirit with whom the medium regularly communicates, and on occasions this spirit takes over the medium's mind. In this case, the spirit is known as a *control*. In other cases, different spirits bypass the control and take over the medium's mind. Commentators have noted the similarity of this phenomenon to the psychiatric syndrome of

multiple personality. Thus, the "spirit" could be a dissociated part of the medium's own mind. However, it is interesting to note that multiple personality involves amnesia of what takes place during the other personality's domination of the individual's mind. It is not always the case that mediums have amnesia.

What Is a Spirit?

One problem with the word *spirit* is that there is no accurate definition of the term and thus no knowledge of its properties. Do spirits exist? Do they have a memory? Can they possess the mind of someone else (for example, a medium)? Can they communicate telepathically with other people?

Ducasse (1962) suggested framing the question of survival in terms of minds. Once this term is substituted, then the answers to the above questions are easy to answer. Minds do exist, they have memory, and they may well be able to communicate telepathically with other minds. The question then becomes whether minds can survive after death.

This issue raises the problem of how people would recognize a spirit in the life after death. If the spirit is separate from the body, what properties would make it recognizable? In a questionnaire given to several hundred people interested in spiritualism, the vast majority believed in life after death, but they also had no idea as to how they would identify themselves to others in such a life (Schmeidler, 1989).

Fraud

Unfortunately, some mediums have been frauds, and the existence of even one fraud creates doubt about all mediums. For example, a modern medium has been suspected of fraud. Jaroff (2001) reported on John Edward, a medium whose shows appear on cable television. He noted the ways in which Edward might obtain information about the people to whom he gives readings, ranging from clues they give as they respond to his guesses, to information they provide to his assistants prior to shows. One participant saw that the televised show had edited out some guesses that Edward had made and spliced in shots of the participant nodding in agreement to incorrect guesses that he remembered disagreeing with. This participant also suspected that hidden microphones might have picked up clues while the participants were kept waiting for long periods of time.

Extrasensory Perception as an Explanation

Some people find it more easy to believe in extrasensory perception than in life after death. Thus, when a medium communicates information from a supposedly deceased person's spirit, it is possible to argue that the medium is picking up information from living people, present or absent, via extrasensory perception and passing this information on. This seems to be a more parsimonious explanation of the phenomenon. (Some might argue that the medium can also pick up information ["vibrations"] left behind in the atmosphere by the deceased person, but this is far-fetched.)

Ducasse (1962) argued that such an explanation is possible only for cases in which the medium passes on information about the deceased person. However, cases exist of the medium showing scholarly capacities, often idiosyncratic, that were distinctive of the deceased person. Extrasensory perception involves merely perception of particular mental events or states, not imitation of capacities that the deceased had and that the medium does not. If the medium can show a capacity for reasoning, inventing, constructing, understanding and judging (that is, for active thinking) like the deceased person, then extrasensory perception no longer can be a sufficient explanation. The difference here is that between the knowledge *that* and knowledge *how to*. Thouless (1984) called this *identification by recognition*, because people can recognize the deceased spirit by the behavior and personality of the medium who is possessed by the deceased person.

A similar distinction was also made in the discussion of xenoglossy — talking in a language which one has never learned — between *recitation* and *responsivity*. Does the person merely recite words or can he answer questions spontaneously with sentences that he has to construct specially for the purpose of answering? Indeed one way in which mediumship could provide evidence for survival is by the medium showing xenoglossy, that is talking (or writing) in a language unknown to the medium.

Thouless (1984) noted that the information conveyed by the medium must be detailed and specific and not so general that it could apply to anyone. Perhaps the medium can communicate an experience shared by the deceased and the sitter. But to eliminate the possibility of extrasensory perception, someone who did not know the deceased could be a substitute sitter, a sitter by proxy for the interested living person. Thus, no one at the sitting would know of the experience. If the deceased had been tested in some way prior to his death (perhaps by means of a psychological test) and the same test applied to the spirit communicating via the medium, then this would be

more strongly convincing evidence of the identity of the spirit. Of course, these phenomena do not rule out the possibility of "super–ESP" (including super-clairvoyance and super-precognition), but, as has been argued earlier, a belief in super–ESP is harder to sustain than belief in life after death.

Perhaps the deceased could give the same information through two mediums independently, confirming the spirit's identity. In *cross-correspondence*, the spirit would give a part of a particular message to one medium and the other part of the message to a second medium, and the message would not be complete or comprehensible until the two mediums met to combine the message.

Even better would be the spirit communicating some information that was not known to any living person, such as a message that he had locked in a box that has not been opened. The person could set a combination lock and try to communicate the number after his death; or the person could leave a coded message (even quite openly) and communicate the cipher after his death. Incidentally, this type of test has been tried by several investigators, including Thouless himself, but so far the message or cipher has never been communicated successfully.[1] Unfortunately, one of the combination locks left by Thouless (1946–1949) has been broken by a living person without any communication from the now-deceased Thouless (Stevenson, 1996; Irwin, 1999), which makes this test of the possibility of communication from the dead no longer watertight. However, it has not been demonstrated that mediums have any extrasensory perception, let alone of the quality demanded by such situations.

Stevenson (1976b) changed this task by having the subject purchase a combination lock which for which the combination can be reset. For example, random numbers may be used, and a mnemonic fitted to them. The subject then would try to communicate this mnemonic after his death. The combination lock technique makes an explanation based upon extrasensory perception by the medium less likely because, rather than "sensing" a code or a message, the medium would have to "sense" the position of pins and levers in a combination lock. Tests of this with J. Gaither Pratt, who died in 1979, have so far been unsuccessful.

Stevenson noted that one problem with these studies is that the subjects may have trouble remembering the keys to the code and the mnemonics while they are alive. Thouless, in particular, worried that he was forgetting the information he was required to pass on after his death. The problem may be compounded by the memory, attitudes and motives of the spirit of the subject after death (if such spirits exist), who may forget the information or be disinclined to pass it on. Finally, failure may reflect on the abilities of the mediums used rather than the abilities of the spirit.

One major problem with finding evidence for life after death through mediums is that many of the cases are from times long past. These "classic" cases are continually reanalyzed for what they imply, but they were investigated long ago when appropriate controls and statistical tests had not yet been devised. The investigators at the time were believers, and they made no effort to rule out fraud. For example, Ellwood (1968) reanalyzes a case that occurred in 1922.

Modern Cases

Many of the older cases of mediums were investigated by believers without the sophistication of modern researchers. Thus, modern cases are needed in order to evaluate the claims of mediums.

Haraldsson and Stevenson (1974) investigated an Icelandic medium who visited New York City and sat with ten Icelandic citizens, one at a time for about five minutes, five of whom had sat with him before and five of whom had not. He was separated from each by a screen. The sitters wore headphones to prevent their hearing anything he said and did not speak during the sessions. The sessions were recorded.

Afterwards, four of the ten sitters selected the readings actually given for them, a statistically significant effect. Two other sitters ranked their readings second. Each reading mentioned an average of about five deceased people. Many of these deceased people had died violent deaths, paralleling Stevenson's findings about reincarnated personalities. The medium in this experiment was able to give full names, and it was possible to track down nine of these people and showed that they had actually lived in the place specified. One sitter (who had never sat with the medium before) had no knowledge of the people mentioned, but her relatives back in Iceland were able to identify her reading from the names given. This case seems to rule out the medium's using extrasensory perception to ascertain information from the sitter's mind. The specificity of the readings appears also to rule out the possibility that the medium had a vast knowledge of Icelandic names and ancestries and used guesses for his clients. In no case did the medium designate a living person as deceased, even when the sitters thought that the person referred to was alive, again ruling out extrasensory perception.

Drop-In Communicators

Drop-in communicators are spirits who are completely unknown to the medium and the sitters at the time of the communication. Ravaldini

et al. (1990) reported a case that occurred in 1948; it was investigated in 1987 and found to provide evidence for survival. The medium, Luigi Pisano, was born in 1913 in Tuscany and became a trance medium in the 1930s. On November 18, 1948, a drop-in communicator called Giuseppi Riccardi appeared, a priest from Canton, Ohio, who reported having been shot. Ravaldini wrote to Ian Stevenson twice in the 1970s and 1980s, asking him to investigate the case. A personal meeting in 1986 led Stevenson to do so.

Stevenson found out that a Father Riccardi was murdered as stated by the communicator on March 10, 1929, in Canton, Ohio, shot by a woman after he had celebrated mass. Father Riccardi had been born in Sicily, and his family emigrated to the United States where he was educated and became a priest.

The Ohio newspapers reported the murder but did not report upon his place of birth. Ravaldini found a report of his death in the March 12, 1929, edition of *Il Telegrafo*, a newspaper that was received in Tuscany, but the location of the death was stated as Canton, Chio, not Ohio. The death was also reported in *L'Avenire d'Italia*, where the location of the death was noted as Canton, with no country mentioned.

Ravaldini suggests that this case is unlikely to be fraudulent, because the drop-in communicator did not appear to the medium until 19 years after the priest's death and the case was not verified until 60 years later. Thus there was no immediate gain from the proof of survival.

Furthermore, the location of Canton was either not specified or specified incorrectly, and anyone reading the Italian reports of the death in 1929 would probably have assumed that the death occurred in Canton, China, since presumably very few people in Italy know that there is a Canton in Ohio. The misprint probably rules out cryptomnesia, too.

Other cases of drop-in communicators have been reported (for example, Haraldsson and Stevenson, 1975), but all of these cases relate to incidents that happened in the past, 30 years ago or more. Thus, the evidence was collected a long time after the incident, and the incidents occurred before tape recordings and video recordings were possible. Given that people like Ian Stevenson are so interested in these phenomena, it is odd that they cannot find current incidents or cases to explore.

Comment

It is surprising, given the research on near-death experiences and the thousands of cases collected by Stevenson relevant to reincarnation, that

so little research has been done on mediums. Many of the cases reported are from early in the twentieth century, and only occasional cases from the last few years have been reported. Further compounding the problem, these recent cases have not been studied by sophisticated researchers who know how to detect fraud and verify information accurately. Thus, the evidence for life after death from mediums is still weak.

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Poltergeists

Poltergeist is a German word that refers to a noisy and troubling spirit or ghost. Poltergeists typically cause objects to move and break, create noises, set fires, create water inundations, and bite and scratch people (Irwin, 1999). Some poltergeists are associated with specific places (as in haunted houses), while others are associated with specific people.

Betty (1984) reported a case of a poltergeist in Bakersfield, California, that provided some evidence relevant to survival. A house had remained empty since its owner died five years earlier. For two months after the new owner moved in, doors opened, dresser drawers opened, and pictures which she hung on the walls were found neatly on the floor leaning against the walls in the morning — except for one picture. The previous owner's son-in-law said that the odd picture was similar to and hung in the same place as one the previous owner had had. There were noises, and the new owner's dog acted sometimes as if someone were present. Lights were turned on, but replacing the switches eliminated this. The sewer backed up and the garage door opener broke, but both of these could have been due to needed repairs.

The poltergeist phenomena were stronger when the new owner made changes to the house. The author of the report visited the house with a "sensitive" who established contact with two spirits, the previous owner and her husband, and persuaded them to leave. Betty felt that fraud was unlikely, as were hallucinations. (The previous owner's son-in-law also witnessed the phenomena.) The drawers never fell out of the dressers, and the pictures had not fallen to the floors but were placed carefully. The moving versus nonmoving objects did not seem to differ in how far they were from the new owner; the phenomena appeared when the new owner was both in and out of the house; and there was no adolescent present. The

exorcism worked, and so Betty concluded that the case appeared to be valid.

Poltergeist phenomena are more reliable when viewed by more than one person. In a case reported by Palmer (1974), objects moved in the presence of a ten-year-old boy in the rural South. The objects that moved were typically within five feet of the boy and moved toward him rather away from him. Two other individuals witnessed some of the incidents at the same time.

Pierce (1973) reported on poltergeist phenomena in a house in Pittsburgh in 1971 which were observed by members of two families. Lights turned on, radios were reset, and there were noises, moving saltshakers, childlike laughter and childlike apparitions. The only possible spirit connection was that the former owner of the house had a son who died in an institution before she moved into the house.

Alvarado and Zingrone (1995) compared house-centered hauntings with and without human apparitions. Most of the cases were from nineteenth century England Those with human apparitions had more detail and more reliable testimony than those without. However, contrary to expectations, those with human apparitions did not show more signs of intelligence and intention. Of 62 comparisons, only two were statistically significant: the cases with human apparitions more often had doors and windows that moved and hands that were seen or felt.

Houran (1997) noted that no clear explanation presently exists for poltergeist phenomena, but Irwin (1999) noted that explanations for poltergeists include (1) fraud by those involved, (2) misinterpretation of natural events by nervous individuals, (3) the intervention of the spirits of deceased persons, and (4) psychokinesis induced by the conscious or unconscious minds of living individuals involved in the phenomena. What is of interest is the third explanation, that of the intervention of the spirits of deceased people.

Some poltergeist phenomena do appear to be directed at particular individuals, and sometimes the noises made have been interpreted as meaningful communications. Sometimes apparitions accompany the poltergeist phenomena. However, no case has been reported that provides evidence of the kind produced in cases of reincarnation, evidence that can be checked against historical records and confirmed, even after taking into account all of the precautions and safeguards that Ian Stevenson employed to verify the evidence in his cases of reincarnation (see Chapter Ten).

However, even many parapsychologists do not believe that poltergeists provide evidence of life after death. For example, based on the finding than many people involved in poltergeist phenomena are found to

be suffering from epilepsy, Roll (1978) argued that poltergeist phenomena are simply a result of electrical energy occurring in the central nervous system of a person, energy that has an impact outside of the person rather than confining its effects to the brain. Some commentators find Roll's evidence unconvincing (e.g., Taboas and Alvarado, 1981). Others see the phenomenon as an expression of repressed tension and anger in one or more of the witnesses.

Lange and Houran (2001) have analyzed cases of poltergeists and of hauntings (and conducted some studies themselves) to show that both of these phenomena can be explained as a result of several factors. First, the vague perceptions that witnesses report are often indirect and hazy, and the interpretation given to them is affected by the contextual variables in the environment, the demand characteristics of the situation and characteristics of the percipient. Second, attention plays an important role. In one of their studies of a nonhaunted house, Lange and Houran found that the couple who lived there reported 22 anomalous events in a 30-day period, and the pattern of the reports was similar to those reported by people living in supposedly haunted houses. In another study, Lange and Houran (1997) found that subjects who were told that a house was haunted perceived more anomalous events than subjects who were not told that the house was haunted. The expectations of the people played a role in their perceptions. Perceiving stimuli was associated with sex and age (more were perceived by young women) and an intolerance of ambiguity. Houran and Thalbourne (2001) have argued that there is an "encounter-prone personality trait" that is stronger in some people at times of need.

For anomalies that have been photographed by observers, Lange and Houran found that they could predict the type of anomaly by the film media used (e.g., Polaroid versus infrared photographs). In one case, an anomaly in a photograph of a house was reported to be a ghost, while the same anomaly appearing in a photograph of a road was reported to be a UFO, indicating the role of contextual cues. Lange and Houran concluded that hauntings and poltergeists are delusions created by contextual variables, attentional biases and problem-solving processes in people who have a low tolerance for ambiguous stimuli when standard explanations for the events are lacking.

On the other hand, Wiseman et al. (2003) sent people through two places in Great Britain that have a reputation for being haunted (Hampton Court Palace in England and the South Bridge Vaults in Scotland) and had them report unusual experiences. Those who knew the places had a reputation for being haunted did not report more unusual experiences than those who did not know of their reputation. Both groups reported

more unusual experiences in some locations than in others. A study of these locations found that they had a greater variations both in lighting and in local magnetic fields. This study suggests, therefore, that some places may be more likely to generate unusual stimuli that an encounter-prone personality could sense and interpret as evidence of haunting.

Houran and Brugger (2000) stressed the need for investigators to control for such variables in research on hauntings and poltergeists, variables that are almost never taken into account by those who report such phenomena. Thus, unless researchers into these phenomena get skeptics such as Houran to participate in their research design, they are not going to convince skeptics that the phenomena are real.

Therefore, at the present time, the phenomenon of poltergeists does not provide evidence for life after death.

Part Five

Conclusions

20

Is There Life After Death?

The clear and logical thinking of some of the writers on the issue of whether there is life after death has been impressive, especially those that tend to believe in life after death, such as Robert Thouless and Ian Stevenson, whose work has been cited extensively in this book. These writers have explored the issues and implications in exacting detail, and the present book owes much to these pioneers in the field.

Before drawing some conclusions from the research reviewed in this book, there are some logical problems involved in the existence of life after death to discuss.

Logical Problems

Although it may seem that several different lines of evidence have been presented that there is life after death, the different sources of information are inconsistent. For example, the evidence from apparitions suggests that people survive after death as the same personalities and with the same bodies that they had in life. After all, apparitions are recognizable to the survivors. The evidence from mediums also suggests that people survive after death as the same personalities as they were in life, although nothing can be said about the nature of the vessel containing their personalities, if any.

On the other hand, the evidence from reincarnation suggests two conclusions. First, people who are reincarnated appear to remember nothing about the periods between life on this earth. Thus, there may be no existence between earthly manifestations. Second, when a person returns as a reincarnation, it is as a different person, even though there are occasion-

ally some similarities to the previous person. Thus, the question here is What survives? The person did not survive; rather, the person was metamorphosed into a new mind and body.

Indeed, reincarnation suggests that, if a spirit existed between incarnations, people would not recognize it, because there would no reason for the spirit to have the appearance of any particular body that it had inhabited in the past.

We are left with the question: In what form and in what place does the spirit exist, and why do people not have memories of this time? In this in-between period, is the spirit disembodied or does it have a body and, if it does have a body, which body — the last one, the penultimate one, or another? The notion of resurrection (as in the case of Jesus) entails a period of disembodied existence for the spirit, after which it returns to the former body for the one and only time — a form of *terminal revival* (Thouless, 1984). The alternative hypothesis, that the spirit does not exist between embodiments (it is in abeyance), has been held by some groups, such as Seventh Day Adventists.

Other questions occur to us. Did the spirit exist before its first incarnation or did it come into existence only at the time of its first incarnation? As the population of the world grows, where do the extra spirits come from? Adam and Eve, even as metaphors for the beginning of human existence, required only two spirits. The world now requires several billion.

Of course, it might be argued that life after death can take many forms and, therefore, all of the above are possible. Some spirits stay in the spirit world as the previous "person" while others go through a brief period of oblivion to be reincarnated as a new mind-body combination. This possibility seems extremely unlikely.

Incidentally, there are no scholarly references to previous incarnations on other planets. This suggests that there is no life elsewhere in the universe!

There are many interesting issues, questions and puzzles about possible life after death. For example, Schmeidler (1989) wondered how people will be recognized and be reunited with their loved ones after death. This is a major problem. If people survive after death, in what form will they be, and how will others recognize this form? If people have the appearance that they had at death, then loved ones from 50 years earlier will not recognize them. If a person's father died when the person was only a child, how will he recognize his "child" when the "child" dies at the age of 80?

If people have more nebulous (nonphysical) forms, how will they recognize each other? Will there be some form of communication so that everyone will know everything automatically?

Schmeidler raised other issues. If consciousness survives, call it a "self" rather than a spirit or soul, how did this self begin, how and when did it enter the body, how does it affect the body, can it leave the body while people are alive, and where does it go after they die?

All of these are fascinating issues, and some writers have speculated what the answers might be. But none of these questions have any significance unless evidence can be produced that there is life after death. If there is no life after death, then such questions do not have to be considered.

As for near-death experiences, although they are presented by scholars as possible evidence for life after death, they provide no information or clues as to the nature of this existence. Some near-death experiences include other persons and beings of light, while others have a landscape rather like the earth's. But, because they are transitions, they provide few clues as to the final state. Occasionally people recognize the people they see during their near-death experience, and this supports the nature of life after death implicit in the evidence from apparitions and mediums.

Beyerstein (1987–1988) raised several interesting puzzles from neurophysiology. First, if there is a spirit, why does splitting the brain by surgery (an operation done to prevent seizures in some patients) result in two mental systems? Each hemisphere appears to have independent memories, perceptions and desires, coexisting in the same brain. Why does the mind not maintain a unity of consciousness? In this case, after the death of the person, do two separate spirits move into the spirit world? If so, then the brain surgery has created an extra spirit. Second, after brain damage, why cannot the spirit compensate for lost functions?

Thouless (1984) argued that, if there is life after death, then extraordinary and excessive prolongation of bodily life by modern medical technology is inappropriate. If physical life is robbed of meaningfulness, then there is no need to delay the transition to spiritual life. The possibility of life after death makes "dying with dignity" a more rational approach.

Kastenbaum (1998) has suggested that death may not be the same for everyone — that death could be pluralistic. Rather than the answer to whether there is life after death being yes or no, perhaps the answer is "For some people." After all, some religions have held that the quality of life after death may differ for people — the old distinction between heaven and hell. Perhaps some people do have a life after death while others do not. Indeed, some Eastern theories of reincarnation propose that eventually some people stop being reincarnated when they have evolved into higher spirits or when they have learned all that they need to learn or atoned for all of their transgressions in previous lives.

Why Are So Many of the Reports from Earlier Times?

I have noted that many of the reports that might be relevant to the issue of whether there is life after death come from previous centuries. Why are there so few reports and so little research from the present time? This objection is critical because modern researchers do not trust these earlier reports. Investigators then were more easily misled by fraudulent cases, and they lacked the knowledge about research design and statistical analyses that is basic today in social science research.

Stevenson (1990b) noted that perhaps these phenomena are less common these days or, alternatively, that investigators have less interest in the topic. The latter is unlikely, given the amount of anecdotal writing on the topic, although there may be less interest by skilled researchers whose reputations would not be enhanced by working in this field. Indeed, their chances of promotion, pay raises and tenure in academia would probably be seriously harmed if they did so. Furthermore, their colleagues in other disciplines would look upon them with disfavor. Even those who are interested in researching these topics have failed to work together but instead have split into separate, rival groups. There is a group that studies near-death experiences, another that studies mystical and religious experiences, another that studies unusual healing, and so on.

Surveys indicate that a good proportion of the general population believe in the phenomena that are relevant to the issue of whether there is life after death, and Stevenson felt that, despite the possibility of reduced interest in the topic by skilled researchers, there really has been a decline in the frequency of the relevant phenomena. Why might this be so?

Stevenson suggested several reasons:

1. There has been an increase in electronic interference from all of the wires and electronic equipment in the environment. This might mask or eliminate paranormal phenomena.

2. There has been an increase in normal communication now that there is good postal mail, the telephone, and most recently the Internet. As normal communication becomes easier, the need for paranormal communication may decrease. Stevenson noted that the frequency of sudden death in the phenomena related to life after death (reincarnation and near-death experiences in particular) supports this possibility for, in the past, those people who died suddenly had little chance to engage in normal communication before they died. However, sudden death is less common today because of the improvement in emergency (and nonemergency) medicine. There may

also be less need to communicate because people may have become more selfish and less loving and caring than those living in earlier times.

3. There has been an increase in philosophical materialism in the last 100 years, and this may lead people today to dismiss paranormal experiences as just coincidences or hallucinations. This materialism may also have had a direct impact on the frequency of paranormal phenomena, since an atmosphere of belief appears to facilitate the appearance of these phenomena. Like Tinker Bell in *Peter Pan*, in order for these phenomena to exist, someone has to believe in them.

Stevenson felt that these paranormal phenomena might be found more frequently in regions where life still resembles more the life lived a hundred years ago, such as in parts of Africa and Asia. In his studies of reincarnation, Stevenson has found many more cases of children remembering past lives in these regions of the world than in the industrialized nations. The belief in reincarnation is much stronger in Africa and Asia, and this may promote the recall and reporting of previous lives. The people living in these regions also view as normal the phenomena called paranormal.

Stevenson noted also that the few individuals in the industrialized world who might have paranormal abilities are tempted to enter the world of entertainment and mass media rather than the world of academic research studies. They go, of course, where the money is.

The Evidence from Apparitions, Poltergeists, Ghosts and Angels

There are several problems with the reports of apparitions, haunting, angels, and other related phenomena as evidence of life after death. First, too many of the reports are old. Reports are needed from contemporary times. Second, many of the reports are memories of experiences that happened earlier in the people's lives. Reports are needed of experiences that occurred "today" or "yesterday" rather than ten or 20 years ago.

Third, the reports should be collected by a team that includes experts in research methods and by skeptics as well as believers. The questions asked by the interviewers may be biased, and those with no skills in research will omit important controls. Lange and Houran (1997) sent 22 observers into an ordinary house, telling only 11 that it was "haunted." These 11 reported more intense perceptual experiences, thereby illustrating the important role that expectations play. In their series of papers, Lange and Houran have suggested many other controls that are required in this research.

Fourth, the reports of these phenomena rarely provide any information that could serve as evidence of life after death. For example, suppose that today a report is recorded of a person who saw a ghost yesterday. Clear evidence is needed that this ghost is of a specific person who died. Also some information is needed from the ghost that could be examined for its accuracy. Mediums who pass on information from deceased souls and those who recall previous incarnations or existences provide evidence that can be checked against historical records. Ghosts, poltergeists and apparitions typically do not. Furthermore, a large sample of such reports is required, not just one or two reports from people who saw ghosts yesterday, so that they can be compared with appropriate controls.

In a good summary of their explanation, Lange and Houran (1998) said that personal variables (such as tolerance of ambiguity and fear of paranormal phenomena) and beliefs about and experiences of paranormal phenomena interact with stimuli from the environment to produce an apparent perception of a so-called paranormal phenomenon such as a ghost, an angel or a poltergeist.

In the literature on these phenomena, there were several excellent reports of research that argued against the phenomena as evidence for life after death. There were no research reports that provided support for the phenomena as evidence for life after death.[1]

I am convinced, therefore, by Houran and Lange's hypothesis that these phenomena are the results of (1) objective manifestions of ambiguous stimuli, which are frequent in the environment, (2) interpretation of these stimuli being affected by contextual factors, (3) both of the above being affected by the individual's personality (such as tolerance for ambiguity), attitudes (such as belief in ghosts or angels) and desires (such missing deceased loved ones), and (4) possible contagion effects if others are present.

Rival Explanations

For the phenomena described in this book, there are of course many rival explanations other than survival after death (Irwin, 1999). Let briefly list these.

Explanations for reincarnation:

- fraud
- cryptomnesia
- extrasensory perception

- possession
- survival

Explanations for apparitions:

- fraud
- psychotic hallucinations
- experiences resulting from extrasensory perception
- survival

Explanations for mediums:

- fraud
- super-extrasensory perception
- survival

Explanations for poltergeists:

- fraud
- misinterpretation of natural events by nervous and overimaginative people
- psychokinesis by living people
- survival

The most common explanations are, clearly, fraud, extrasensory perception and survival. Fraud can perhaps never be completely ruled out unless the whole incident occurs in the laboratory under experimental control. But some cases reviewed in this book seem less open to an explanation of fraud.

Using extrasensory perception as an explanation means using as an explanation one disputed phenomenon instead of an alternative disputed phenomenon (survival after death). The skeptic will be unconvinced, especially since the extrasensory perception required has to be *super*-extrasensory perception, far beyond even the extrasensory perception purported to have been demonstrated by believers in it. Alvarado and Martinez-Taboas (1983) noted that super-extrasensoryperception (or the super-psi hypothesis, as it is also called) requires unlimited capacity for information gathering by the people concerned—from conscious and unconscious thought, from books and letters, and from future events. They also noted that the super-extrasensory perception hypothesis is unscientific in that it is untestable. It postulates a omniscient and omnipotent capacity that can-

not be falsified by the scientific method. The hypothesis makes no predictions; it merely explains events post hoc. Alvarado and Martinez-Taboas classify the super-extrasensory perception hypothesis as an *existential statement* – specifying the existence of something without specifying its limitations or characteristics. It is not an empirical statement and so has no value as an explanatory concept.

This leaves survival after death as the remaining common explanation, and this at least meets the scientific criterion for parsimony in theories.

Is There Life After Death?

The two major sources of research evidence bearing on the question of whether there is life after death are from near-death experiences and reincarnation. In Chapters nine and 14 conclusions were presented about the usefulness of the evidence from these two sources, both sceptical. Both phenomena appear to be affected to a large extent by cultural factors, and both sets of research were on experiences investigated a long time after the event. Both of these drawbacks seriously weaken the results of the studies as evidence for life after death.

For near-death experiences, a number of findings were mentioned, such as the impact of the medical condition of the patient on the nature of the near-death experience; this weakens the idea that the phenomenon provides evidence for a life after death.

In summary, then, the research reviewed in this book fails to be convincing that there is a life after death.

Notes

Preface

1. I need to be able to refer to what other authors have written on the topic of life after death. One way is to use footnotes, but the simpler way is to place the date of publication after each author's name and to list all of the articles and books at the end of this book. I am using this latter tactic.

2. Some writers use the word "souls" only for spirits inhabiting live bodies. "Spirits" have left the body. Incidentally, animism (which is derived from the Latin *anima*, meaning breath or soul) is a doctrine that proposes the existence of spirits or souls, not only for humans, but also for natural objects, natural phenomena and even the universe.

Chapter 2

1. Duncan et al. (1992) found that students who believed in reincarnation were more likely to be Roman Catholics than Protestants and saw religion as less important.

2. Wilson and Frank (1990) found that 42 percent of a sample of college students believed in ghosts.

3. Incidentally, 64 percent reported having experienced déjà vu, and this experience was more common in the younger and more educated respondents.

4. Thalbourne also described groups who were agnostics (those who were uncertain or doubters) and others who had alternative beliefs.

Chapter 3

1. This field of study has been called *circumthanatology*. Tien (1988) has suggested calling the psychological transition from life to death *thanatoperience* while Roedding (1991) called near-death experiences *perithanatic experiences*.

2. Stevenson et al. (1989–1990)

3. Greyson and Stevenson (1980)

4. Sutherland (1989)

5. Ring and Franklin (1981–1982)

6. In good research, investigators know precisely how many subjects they interviewed, and do not report "rough" estimates.

Chapter 4

1. Morse (1990) later increased the comparison group to 121 seriously ill children and 37 children treated with mind-altering medications, and none of these reported a near-death experience.
2. He reported the experience by indicating "yes" and "no" to questions and so could have been easily biased by the questions he was asked.
3. The experiences are almost diametrically opposite—for example, near-death experiences are usually positive experiences while the alien encounters are negative.
4. Psychologists traditionally call the people they test "subjects."
5. Kohr (1983) also found that NDEers had more psychic experiences after the near-death experience than those who were close to death but who did not have a near-death experience. However, this latter group had more psychic experiences than people who had not even been close to death.
6. Davis (1988) also studied a group of people who had experienced encounters with aliens and found similar changes—such as an increased appreciation of life and an increased concern for others, spiritual growth and an increase in psychic experiences. However, the changes in her group were not as great as those in Ring's group of NDEers.
7. A type of dissociative disorder in which the individual has several personalities and in which there is amnesia between the personalities; that is, one personality knows nothing about the others
8. Incidentally, Sabom (1998) found no differences between people who had near-death experiences with and without out-of-body components in whether they were participants or observers in their ordinary dreams.
9. In the first report, Pasricha identified 26 people in a community who had "died" and been revived, and 16 of these reported near-death experiences.

Chapter 5

1. Several of the people had had several near-death incidents and near-death experiences. In total, there were 42 near-death experiences in 156 near-death incidents (27 percent).

Chapter 6

1. In an objective study, however, Durlak (1990) found that having had a near-death experience was not associated with the current fear of death in a small sample of college students.
2. Noyes objected to the label "near-death experiences," which is given to such experiences. Given their impact on people, Noyes suggested that *death-rebirth experiences* or *experiences of survival* would be better labels.
3. He used a reliable and valid psychological test rather than simple questions.
4. The near-death experiencers were older and more often married.
5. Using a reliable and valid psychological test rather than simple questions.
6. Those who had had the near-death experience were more likely to be females and Protestants or Roman Catholics, and to have had the experience more recently (17 years previous versus 24 years).
7. Holden (1996) had six near-death experiencers relive the experience under hypnosis, and they reported feeling fine about the experience. I do not know why this might be useful to these people.
8. Noyes misleadingly entitled his paper as a study of near-death experiences but makes it clear in his opening paragraph that his subjects were chosen because they had been in life-threatening danger.

Chapter 7

1. For example, the depth and length of the coma, or the time for which the heart stopped beating.

2. Rogo commented that both ketamine-induced experiences and near-death experiences could be organically-based hallucinations, that ketamine (like other anesthetics) may induce a genuine out-of-body experience, that ketamine may release an archetypal memory, or that the ketamine-induced experience is a result of the hospital setting and medical illness (since recreational users of the chemical do not typically report out-of-body experiences when using the chemical).

3. Sabom (1998) also reported research indicating that experiences resulting from epilepsy are not at all like near-death experiences.

4. Saavedra-Aguilar and Gomez-Jeria (1989) suggested a similar hypothesis, again without any empirical data to indicate its validity.

5. LSD and ketamine could also create emotional stress.

6. Again, he did not produce any statistical evidence for this suggestion.

7. Textbooks or abnormal psychology described a syndrome called *depersonalization syndrome* whose major symptom is the experience of feeling detached from one's body or mental process (Holmes, 1997).

8. Ring views "guardian angels" as manifestations of this higher self.

9. Twemlow and Gabbard concluded that the impact is quite limited!

10. A factor analysis of these limited data indicates that the near-death experience is the opposite of the depersonalization experience, but somewhat similar to the other three experiences.

11. However, Sabom (1998) reported research indicating that experiences resulting from artificially induced cerebral anoxia are not like near-death experiences at all.

12. Blackmore does make predictions from her theories. For example, she speculated that the color of the "light at the end of the tunnel" ought to be white or yellow, and she claimed, without conducting an empirical study, that this was so.

Chapter 9

1. The sample included only reports that were independently verified by Stevenson or his staff, where the previous incarnation was identified and investigated thoroughly, and in which the previous incarnation died before the child was born.

2. Pasricha (1998) reported cases from India where the reincarnation involved a change in religion (Hindu to Muslim or vice versa).

3. Research using hypnosis to study reincarnation will be reviewed in chapter 12.

4. Commentators still disagree on whether the facts revealed in this case could have been learned by Virginia Tighe in the course of her life.

5. Jung's collective unconscious might be a set of semantic memories; that is, the person remembers the themes but forgets where he or she learned them.

Chapter 10

1. It should be remembered that Stevenson obtains each account firsthand from the informant if possible. For the Turkish sample, Stevenson saw, and interviewed where possible, every case.

2. Stevenson did not report their ages but implies that almost all of the cases, if not all, were children.

3. Stevenson (1973) reported on a larger sample from Sri Lanka, of 40 cases. In this larger sample, 52 percent of the cases were male and 57 percent remained unidentified. In the typical cases, the two personalities came from villages separated by many miles (sometimes more

than 100 miles). The median interval between incarnations was 24 months, with a maximum of 82 years. The median age at death of the previous incarnation was 30 years, but may have been about 13 if Stevenson had included cases without the exact ages made explicit. Twenty-seven of the previous deaths were violent, and 10 percent had birth marks or deformities related to the previous personality. Only three of the subjects had memories from between incarnations, only three were born into the same family, and only three changed sex (all from female to male). Six subjects claimed that the previous incarnation was from a different country (three English, one Indian, one Chinese and one American). Eight subjects changed religion. In ten cases, the subject changed social class (seven moved down and three moved up). One subject claimed to have lived as an animal in a previous life.

4. Membership in a Tlingit family comes through one's mother, and so this relationship is very important.

5. More cases can be found in Stevenson (1974b).

6. Wilson (1987) investigated one case of Stevenson's, that of an American woman who spoke Swedish after hypnotic regression. Wilson claimed that he exposed the case as fraudulent but did not provide the evidence he found because of legal complications.

7. Matlock (1989) found that, in cases in which the child met a person involved in the previous incarnation or in which the child visited the place of the previous incarnation, the children were older when they first reported their previous life than in cases where there was no stimulus from the past incarnation. These "stimulus" cases suggest the possibility of parental coaching and suggestion.

Chapter 11

1. Others have noted that clients under hypnotic regression who recall previous lives fall into two groups: those who relive the experience and those who report it passively.

2. Reporters and nonreporters did not differ in depression, self-esteem, schizophrenic tendencies, or magical thinking.

Chapter 13

1. Becker's explanation of how the hypothesis of reincarnation can be compatible with the growing population presents similar problems to a scientist. Where do all the required previous souls come from? Becker suggested (i) nonhumans may be reborn as humans, (ii) new souls can be created from scratch, (iii) the process uses souls from other solar systems, and (iv) there were a large number of souls created in the beginning, and many of them have been waiting to find a fetus to inhabit. Again, none of these proposed explanations is capable of empirical testing.

Chapter 14

1. Cases in which more than one person sees an apparition at the same time and place would be of special interest to study, especially as compared to situations where one person sees an apparition whereas others at the same time and place do not. Also, cases where an animal (such as a dog) senses a presence and humans present at the same time and place either do or do not sense a presence would be of interest. However, the studies should be conducted by competent investigators such as James Houran, whose research is mentioned later in this chapter. Reports of old cases, not subjected to rigorous research methodology, are not sufficient to provide evidence for or against any explanation.

2. Ten percent were coded as "other."

3. That is, they did not differ in belief in locus of control.

4. Indeed, there was some evidence of a slight increase in geomagnetic activity on the days on which people experienced apparitions of the dead.

5. For example, consider two lights, side by side, flashing on and off at slightly different times. At the right distant from these two lights, people perceive the motion of one light from one place to another. The motion is the creation of the viewer's mind, since no light is actually moving—two lights are merely flashing on and off.

Chapter 15

1. Parkes (1972) has noted that some widows occasionally sense their deceased husbands *within* their own bodies. This would resemble possession.
2. These are reports of factors that were associated with simply having the experience or not. The particular type of experience also varied with some of these factors.

Chapter 17

1. Van Dusen (1974) communicated with the hallucinatory voices of his American schizophrenic patients, accepting them as objective realities that were possessing the patients.
2. Out of some 43,000 patients admitted

Chapter 18

1. However, one form of extrasensory perception is precognition, knowing events before they occur, and precognition could explain a medium knowing the message locked away in a box.

Chapter 20

1. Nickell (2001) has also provided suggestions and guidelines for conducting sound research on these phenomena.

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