

Journal
of
Near-Death Studies

Editor's Foreword • *Bruce Greyson, M.D.*

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Rationale and Considerations for Proposed Near-Death Research in the Hospital Setting • *Janice Miner Holden, Ed.D.*

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Book Review: *The Final Choice: Playing the Survival Game* by Michael Grosso • *F. Gordon Greene*

Letters to the Editor

Volume 7, Number 1, Fall 1988



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

THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR NEAR-DEATH STUDIES (IANDS) is a world-wide organization of scientists, scholars, near-death experiencers, and the general public, dedicated to the exploration of near-death experiences (NDEs) and their implications. Incorporated as a nonprofit educational and research organization in 1981, IANDS' objectives are to encourage and support research into NDEs and related phenomena; to disseminate knowledge concerning NDEs and their implications; to further the utilization of near-death research by health care and counseling professionals; to form local chapters of near-death experiences and interested others; to sponsor symposia and conferences on NDEs and related phenomena; and to maintain a library and archives of near-death-related material. Friends of IANDS chapters are affiliated support groups in many cities for NDErs and their families and for health care and counseling professionals to network locally. Information about membership in IANDS can be obtained by writing to IANDS, Department of Psychiatry, University of Connecticut Health Center, Farmington, CT 06032.

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Editor's Foreword

Six years ago we published in this journal an article by social psychologist and consciousness researcher Kenneth Ring, in which he described the prophetic visions reported by some near-death experiencers. Ring had found remarkable uniformity in those visions, predicting global catastrophe, most commonly anticipated for 1988. As 1988 now draws to a close, we include in this issue Ring's reassessment of those prophetic visions, and his retrospective interpretation of what those visions meant—and may still mean—for our species and our planet.

This issue also contains a varied collection of articles reflective of the diversity of near-death studies. Educational counselor Janice Miner Holden details a rationale and proposal for studying NDEs prospectively in a hospital setting. Clinical psychologist Stephen Slade Tien proposes a phase theory of psychological transition, and uses that theory to analyze a near-death-related transformation. Australian researchers Harvey Irwin and Barbara Bramwell describe a uniquely instructive NDE with both "heavenly" and "hellish" elements.

We also include a review by Gordon Greene of Michael Grosso's ambitious and provocative work, *The Final Choice*; and exchanges of letters on counseling after an NDE and on the value of out-of-body experiences as evidence for survival

Bruce Greyson, M.D.
Editor

Prophetic Visions in 1988: A Critical Reappraisal

Kenneth Ring, Ph.D.
University of Connecticut

ABSTRACT: This paper reviews the research into a specific aspect of near-death experiences (NDEs): the prophetic vision (PV). PVs are subjectively compelling flashforwards of planetary-wide cataclysms and eventual regeneration that sometimes occur during or in the immediate aftermath of an NDE. Previous research has shown that the most frequently mentioned year for the culmination of the geophysical calamities foreseen in PVs was 1988. I argue that PVs should be understood as manifestations of a collective prophetic impulse that historically tends to arise during periods of cultural crisis. PVs are thus expressions of the felt need for cultural renewal and therefore should not be taken literally as prognostic of drastic physical changes on Earth.

Ever since I first published my findings on prophetic visions (PVs) in the pages of this journal (Ring, 1982), I have repeatedly been asked whether I truly believed that their dark forecast for the planet would be our fate by the year 1988. Not surprisingly, the number of such inquiries increased after the release of my book *Heading Toward Omega* (Ring, 1984), in which I presented a more extended treatment of these disquieting phenomena.

As we entered 1988, the most frequently cited year for the culmination of the events in PVs, the issue of these PVs naturally reached another peak of salience for many persons who are familiar with the literature and lore of near-death experiences (NDEs). Accordingly, it now seems timely and appropriate for me to summarize the present state of our knowledge about PVs and to try to reassess their signifi-

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cance for our immediate future. This article, then, written in May 1988, constitutes a lengthy reply of sorts to all those persons who have solicited from me my own private interpretation of this perplexing and troubling body of data.

Before exploring this matter in any depth, however, I must first review some of the basic features of PVs. To best appreciate the nature of PVs, it is useful to introduce them by making reference to an already well known aspect of NDEs to which PVs are clearly related, namely, *the life review*.

Everyone familiar with NDEs will recall that one of their common components is the panoramic life review in which, typically, the individual will report seeing in a series of extremely vivid and rapidly shifting images scenes depicting various events of his or her life extending back to very early childhood. Such impressions are extremely realistic, so much so that the individual may feel that he or she has in some very profound sense been enabled to "relive that life" so as to understand it from an entirely new perspective. All this is of course quite well known even to persons who have only a casual acquaintance with NDEs. What isn't nearly so widely understood, however, is the fact that sometimes persons experiencing a life review in connection with an NDE will also report having an apparent *preview* of their future. Appropriating a cinematic expression, I have labelled such apparent previews *flashforwards*. In such cases, it is as though the individual is lifted out of the on-going daily stream of mundane life and, for one moment outside of time, sees something like a life trajectory, extending in either direction from the present.

To illustrate these flashforwards here, I'll briefly recount the case of a woman who had a powerful NDE in 1972 while she was recovering from surgery. At one point during her NDE, she found herself facing what she described as an "enormous television screen." On the screen she was shown—in vivid color—various scenes from her life in a very rapid sequence of realistic images. Following that display, the screen disappeared but was followed by a second screen. That one, however, was dark and the images—in black and white this time—were much murkier and more difficult to discern. Nevertheless, she remembers being shown, among other events, the deaths of two members of her family (who were not ill at the time of this woman's NDE) and told that she would play a special role in caring for these persons during their terminal illnesses. This NDEr has averred to me that these events, apparently disclosed during her flashforwards, did indeed come to pass. The same sincere avowals have been made by other NDErs I have interviewed who have also related their flashforwards to me (see Ring,

1982, 1984), and I have furthermore provided some evidence suggestive of independent corroboration for such claims. In any case, such flashforwards do seem to represent a genuine precognitive aspect of NDEs and merit further study.

Now as it happens not all of these NDE-related flashforwards pertain solely to the personal future of the individuals who experience them. Some of them instead have a planetary focus and seem to picture something of the earth's future. It is that type of flashforward I have called the prophetic vision, and it is that phenomenon to which this article is addressed.

What, then, do we now know about these PVs?

First, they are usually reported to occur during or in the immediate aftermath of an NDE and take the form of a distinct vision. That is, the events comprising a PV are typically beheld by the experiencer.

Second, PVs are apparently disclosed only in a relatively small proportion of cases involving NDEs, generally those that entail an unusually deep NDE as measured, say, by the Weighted Core Experience Index (Ring, 1980) or an extended period of clinical death. In my own investigations, for example, I have so far encountered only about two dozen persons who have described in some detail their PVs to me, either in personal interviews, lengthy letters or cassette tape recordings. That number of course represents only a tiny fraction—certainly less than 5 percent—of all the NDEs I have had contact with since I began my research in 1977.¹

Third, PVs have been investigated and reported by a number of other researchers besides myself including Raymond Moody (personal communication, February, 1988),² John Audette (1981), and Margot Grey (1985) whose work on this subject I will examine below.

Finally, and most important of all, PVs tend to follow a single, common scenario. That is, just as NDEs themselves seem to reflect a prototypic pattern, so also do PVs. Indeed, I personally have so far not found even a single obvious exception to the general pattern to be described next and, to the best of my knowledge, neither have other researchers.

What is the general scenario of these PVs? The summary I originally gave in my 1982 article still holds and is reproduced below:

There is, first of all, a sense of having total knowledge, but specifically one is aware of seeing the entirety of the earth's evolution and history, from the beginning to the end of time. The future scenario, however, is usually of short duration, seldom extending much beyond the beginning of the twenty-first century. The individual reports that in this decade there will be an increasing incidence of earthquakes, volcanic

activity and generally massive geophysical changes. There will be resultant disturbances in weather patterns and food supplies. The world economic system will collapse, and the possibility of nuclear war or accident is very great (respondents are not agreed on *whether* a nuclear catastrophe will occur). All of these events are transitional rather than ultimate, however, and they will be followed by a new era in human history, marked by human brotherhood, universal love and world peace. Though many will die, the earth will live. While agreeing that the dates for these events are not fixed, most individuals feel that they are likely to take place during the 1980s. (Ring, 1982, pp. 55-56)

To exemplify this scenario in general terms, I'll cite a written account furnished to me by a woman I originally interviewed in California. Reinee Pasarow was seventeen when she had her NDE in 1967.

The vision of the future I received during my near-death experience was one of tremendous upheaval in the world as a result of our general ignorance of "true" reality. I was informed that mankind was breaking the laws of the universe, and as a result of this would suffer. This suffering was not due to the vengeance of an indignant God, but rather like the pain one might suffer as a result of arrogantly defying the law of gravity. It was to be an inevitable educational cleansing of the earth that would creep up upon its inhabitants, who would try to hide blindly in the institutions of law, science, and religion. Mankind, I was told, was being consumed by the cancers of arrogance, materialism, racism, chauvinism, and separatist thinking. I saw sense turning to nonsense, and calamity, in the end, turning to providence. At the end of this general period of transition, mankind was to be "born anew," with a new sense of his place in the universe. The birth process, however, as in all the kingdoms, was exquisitely painful. Mankind would emerge humbled yet educated, peaceful, and, at last, unified. (Ring, 1982, p. 56)

As I have indicated, my own work on PVs was published between 1982 and 1984. During that period, an English psychologist, Margot Grey, was quietly collecting her own data on PVs, which she published in her book on NDEs, *Return from Death*, in 1985. Since her research is not well known in this country, but represents the most recent compilation of PV cases, it will be useful to summarize it here to round out the empirical portion of this paper.

Although Grey does not report the exact number of NDErs she interviewed who furnished accounts of PVs, her respondents' statements seemingly mirrored my own, even down to small specific points. This similarity can be appreciated if I simply pair one of Grey's representative quotations with one from my own respondents in order to

illustrate some of the principal features that together comprise the typical prophetic vision.

Earthquakes

There are going to be a lot of upheavals such as earthquakes and volcanoes occurring in the next few years, which are going to get increasingly worse. I was given to understand that these activities are a reflection of all the social upheaval and violence that is going on all over the world at the moment. (Grey, 1985, p. 125)

The seismic activity is going to increase terribly and the United States is going to start suffering some great seismic problems. (Ring, 1984, p. 199)

Volcanoes

Among the many volcanic eruptions that are going to occur, I saw the one that just occurred in Hawaii. As I saw the pictures on the television, it was really quite uncanny, as I had already seen it taking place during the vision I had seen at the time of my near-death experience. (Grey, 1985, p. 125)

I was shown Mt. St. Helen's eruption. . . . I was also shown other volcanoes. . . . I was shown Mt. St. Helen's . . . and on May 18, Mt. St. Helen's really erupted its heaviest. I turned to my husband and said, "Mt. St. Helen's just blew its top," and the people there just laughed at me. Later that night we were watching TV and the very scenes that I had seen in my mind were shown on the TV and no one continued to laugh at me then. (Ring, 1984, p. 200)

Geographical changes

The poles are going to shift. I saw the earth stretching and groaning while giving birth to a new consciousness. I saw that every so often in the history of the world this happens and is inevitable in order for the earth to bring forth a new state of evolution. (Grey, 1985, p. 126)

There may be a pole shift . . . there are going to be polar changes . . . it's not going to kill all the races off, but we're going to have to start again from square one. . . . There's going to be a larger land mass. (Ring, 1984, p. 200)

Meteorological changes

There are going to be very severe droughts in many countries. Others are going to suffer from freak storms that will cause tidal waves or

flooding to happen as a result of unnaturally heavy rainfalls. . . . All in all, the weather is going to be very unpredictable from now on, in fact these disturbances in the weather patterns have already started. (Grey, 1985, p. 127)

Oh, my God, that's going to be terrible. The weather is going to go crazy. We're just as likely to have snow in the middle of the summer nowadays as one hundred degree weather. . . . I see droughts in other countries. (Ring, 1984, p. 201)

Food shortages

There are going to be serious food shortages around the world due to droughts in many places. This will push the price of food up so that many people will have to start going without things that they have always taken for granted. (Grey, 1985, p. 127)

We'll start getting more droughts, which will bring about shortages in crops and the shortage in crops will cause food prices to rise, which will cause a strain on the economic situation, which is already going downhill. Also at the same time . . . because of the shortage of food and the failing economy, I see a strengthening of arms which causes tension. . . . These kinds of hostilities and (increasing) inflation start more hostilities. (Ring, 1984, p. 201)

This period of cataclysmic destruction will, according to the PV scenario, be followed by a new social order imbued with the ethos of a Golden Age. On this matter, too, Grey's respondents appear to agree with mine:

After the darkest hour had passed away, during which time all the former things of this world had disintegrated and decayed, I saw a new consciousness emerging and mankind evolving in a new form. Thereafter I beheld a Golden Age in which people would live in love and harmony with each other and all of nature. (Grey, 1985, p. 133)

At the end of this general period of transition, mankind was to be "born anew," with a new sense of his place in the universe. The birth process, however, as in all the kingdoms, was exquisitely painful. Mankind would emerge humbled yet educated, peaceful, and, at last, unified. (Ring, 1984, p. 198)

As to when all of this is to take place, my earlier findings—when respondents were able to specify a particular year—tended to converge on a single date: 1988. That is, this was the modal year mentioned as being the critical time.

What do Grey's respondents have to say on this point? In speaking

specifically of some sort of nuclear disaster or new world war, we have these representative statements:

I think towards the end of this decade there is a very grave danger that we will become involved in a Third World War. I would say 1988 is the most likely year for it all to happen. (Grey, 1985, p. 130)

As time does not exist in the dimension where it is possible for this information to be given and received, it's very difficult to be accurate on this point. But the impression I gained was that the most difficult time was going to be around 1988. (Grey, 1985, p. 130)

I think the most likely year for the events I can see arising to take place will be in 1988. (Grey, 1985, p. 131)

Again, a most remarkable—if highly alarming—convergence of impressions. For whatever reason, 1988 was perceived by PVerS on both sides of the Atlantic as being the year when the most catastrophic aspects of the vision were most likely to become evident.

That, then, summarizes the data we have on NDE-related PVerS. Although the samples of PVerS are to be sure very small, the degree of congruence among these independent respondents is impressive and, for that reason alone, deeply disturbing.

The crucial question, obviously, is just what are we to make of these data—in this possibly fateful if not fatal year of 1988?

Let's move directly then to the matter of possible *interpretations* of these findings.

Are these PVerS indeed prognostic of our immediate planetary future, or do they signify something else? And, in any case, how can we know?

Interpretations of PVerS

In *Heading Toward Omega*, I considered a set of six interpretative possibilities for PVerS, ranging from the psychological to the literal. There is no need for me to repeat these here, but, again primarily for those who are not familiar with my previous work on PVerS, perhaps it would be useful to outline just a few of these possibilities before probing this issue more deeply.

One explanation would have it that because the NDE itself involves an obvious death-and-rebirth motif, PVerS might psychologically inflate their experience and project it onto the world stage, as it were. That is, the imagery associated with their PVerS should really be construed as representing the symbolic accompaniment to their own near-death dramas, extended to global dimensions. Stanislav Grof (1975,

1988), for example, has shown that the imagery of world cataclysm often occurs in conjunction with ego-death processes in psychedelic visions; perhaps something analogous takes place in NDEs but in that context tends to be interpreted literally because of the crisis of possible imminent physical demise.

Another interpretative alternative would point to the role of contemporary cultural factors, namely, the *Zeitgeist* of apocalyptic expectation. After all, we are within a dozen years of the end of our millennium and images of planetary death-throes are plentiful. We have only to think of Christian eschatology, the Hopi prophecies or the dark utterances of famous psychics of past and present, such as Nostradamus, Edgar Cayce, or Ruth Montgomery, in order to realize how abundant these notions are in our popular culture these days. Perhaps, then, some NDErs, being in an altered state of consciousness, are especially likely to tap into these apocalyptic visions that abound in our collective psychic field but misinterpret them as their personal visions.

Still another explanatory candidate is that there may be various *alternative* futures for our planet's destiny, and PVer have happened to zero in on one single track of possible but not inevitable futures. In this case, they have superimposed onto their glimpse of a *possible* future an interpretation of its certainty.

And lastly—the most dreaded option of all—perhaps these PVer have really been vouchsafed a vision of what is literally going to happen soon. In this case, their sightings would have predictive significance for what is actually in store for us before the end of this decade.

These are some of the interpretative possibilities that have occurred to me; doubtless you could generate further explanatory notions of your own. The urgent question, however, is how can we decide among such alternatives? Clearly, if we take these data seriously—and I, for one, do—it is of the utmost importance for our sanity to determine how we should relate to these visions.

Needless to say, I am not going to pretend that the answer can be known with absolute certainty—much less that I happen to be in possession of it—but I believe I *can* offer a few helpful considerations here that will at least bring a measure of clarity to the interpretation of these images of planetary devastation and rebirth.

The first helpful hint was actually provided to me several years ago by a correspondent who had read my first article on PVs. She sent me some information on an NDE-induced PV she had learned about. And, sure enough, it did indeed conform to the familiar scenario that I have already outlined here. The gentleman who experienced this PV also

felt that the transitional period of the earth's upheaval was imminent. In fact, there was only one feature of this PV that was in any way atypical, and that was when it had occurred. In this case, it had taken place nearly a century ago: 1892!

Now, clearly, either this individual was considerably ahead of his time or there is a much greater historical relativity to these PVs than we might at first have supposed.

And, indeed, if one begins to look into the historical aspect just a little, one can find ample evidence that PVs are by no means restricted to modern times at all. Instead, as John Perry, among others, has recently shown in his cogently argued book, *The Heart of History* (Perry, 1987), many such PVs can be found throughout history, particularly in sensitive individuals whose cultures were undergoing a period of deep crisis.

Just to take one illustrative case to show the typical features of many of these historical PVs, consider that of Handsome Lake, a member of the Seneca—an Iroquois tribe—who lived in the early nineteenth century. During that period, the Seneca were already a people whose cultural integrity was nearly destroyed and Handsome Lake himself was deeply demoralized and despairing. According to Perry, he appears eventually to have sunk into a death-like coma and began to experience visions in which angels told him how his people could be saved. At one point, he found himself travelling along a bright road, sensed that he was following in the tracks of dead souls and ultimately encountered a brilliant light of the kind by now so familiar to students of the NDE. Following that, he had a vision of world destruction and great widespread sickness, but was given to understand that his mission was to prevent the catastrophe with the help of his angels and the Great Spirit.

Following his visionary revelation, Handsome Lake was charged with a tremendous zeal for reform and did in fact play an instrumental role in the regeneration of the Seneca nation, as history shows.

Now, of course, not all recipients of PVs have been as effective as Handsome Lake in following such social imperatives, but that is hardly the point. The central lesson for us instead is that history establishes the proposition that such *prophets arise during times of cultural crisis and that they bring a messianic message of the need for cultural renewal*. Again, to draw on Perry's insightful comments here:

The horrific vision of world destruction is part and parcel of the mythic imagery of rapid culture change and world views in transition.
 . . . Beholding the world coming to its end amid storm, earthquake,

flood and fire we have found to be a *typical* [italics added] experience of a prophet whose psyche is registering the emotional impact of the end of an era. The ensuing world regeneration is then the picture of the ushering in of a new age, meaning by this an innovative cultural effort whose configuration is outlined in a fresh myth. . . . This pattern of transformation is basic to . . . revitalization movements throughout history. (Perry, 1987, p. 192)

In other words, what we appear to have in modern NDE-inspired PVs is not the literal forecast of planetary doom, but rather the foreshadowing of the need for a new myth of cultural regeneration.

What I am asserting is that whereas PVs are indeed prophetic utterances, they should not, in my opinion, be regarded as truly precognitive or taken literally. Rather they seem to be reflections of the collective psyche of our time, which is generating its own images of planetary death and regeneration for which the sensitive souls of our era serve as carriers. Therefore, in my view it is important to avoid making what, to paraphrase Carl Jung, we could call *the concretistic fallacy*: taking an image of the psyche as representing literal fact rather than meaningful symbol. NDE-related PVs, then, tell us more about our collective psyche now than the probable state of our material world tomorrow, but they also contain the elements that point to the emergence of a new messianic movement in our time, one that is planetary in scope and for which the NDE phenomenon itself is pivotal.

But just here, having claimed for the NDE a special cultural role, we need once again to enlarge our angle of vision in order to encompass a wider view of the PV horizon. Just as these experiences are hardly limited to the modern era, so they obviously do not only occur with the onset of a deep NDE. Other persons who, like the NDEr, have had unusual psychospiritual experiences that transcend the boundaries of time and space likewise sometimes share the same prophetic revelations reported by NDErs.

Perhaps the most salient exemplar of such insights, besides the NDEr, in the waning years of the 1980s, is the individual who has had some kind of profoundly life-altering "UFO encounter."³

That is, I believe, quite evident in both the recent spate of UFO-related literature as well as that which goes back to the heyday of the so-called "contactees" of the 1950s. For instance, no one who reads *Communion* (Strieber, 1987), the best-selling recent book detailing one man's extraordinary experiences with otherworldly visitors, can fail to note its tone of urgency and prophetic significance. And what the

author—who has since become the most celebrated, if controversial, figure in the UFO movement of the past decade—found latent in his own private experiences can be discovered at large in the UFO encounter reports of the past. As Strieber himself commented:

Throughout the literature of [UFO] abduction, there is a frequent message of apocalypse . . . a general expectation of catastrophe. (p. 288)

My own reading of some of the professional literature in the field (e.g., Jacobs, 1975; Andrews, 1986; Davis, 1988; Sprinkle, 1982) and informal conversations with many of those—investigators and experiencers alike—active in UFO studies today have convinced me that Strieber is correct in his assessment. There is little doubt in my mind that one finds among many UFOers—if I may adopt the term—a heightened concern with the prospect of global catastrophe and the need for planetary transformation. In that respect, the views of such persons and NDErs appear to represent an intriguing pattern of similarity whose significance will not be lost on present-day cultural historians.

At this level, obviously, we are no longer dealing with NDErs and UFO encounters merely as fascinating psychospiritual experiences possibly pointing to a transcendental dimension of life. Instead, we are beginning to see them—with their prophetic implications—in their collective and mythic aspect and to discern in them the power to function as social forces in the service of planetary transformation.

PVs and the Voices of Prophecy

In discussing NDEs and UFO encounters in light of their collective, sociological meaning and in the context of their prophetic import, I mean to suggest something new and specific about the prophetic impulse in our own time. Historically—and biblically for that matter—we are accustomed to the notion of the individual prophet and his or her message of the need for regenerative transformation. The instance of Handsome Lake, for example, can stand for the special role of the lone prophet as the agent of the forces of renewal in the prophet's own culture.

Similarly, we are all familiar with the idea that certain gifted individuals—the artist or poet—can also serve a prophetic function for their

contemporaries. Here, for example, we may profitably recall Shelley's words:

Poets are the hierophants of an unappreciated inspiration; the mirrors of the gigantic shadows which futurity casts upon the present. (Woodman, 1964, p. 71, citing Shelley's "Defense of Poetry" [cited in Perry, 1987])

What is true in our own time, I submit, is that this prophetic function is becoming democratized: ordinary men and women in increasingly great numbers are being gifted with profound soul-opening experiences that carry the charge of prophetic revelation. I am speaking of course of NDErs and UFOers, among others, those millions of persons who have been "tapped" by higher energies to be the carriers of this message of renewal to the planet as a whole.

These persons, I believe, are the true visionaries of our time, the bearers of the emerging myth of the twenty-first century calling us to a cosmic-centered view of our place in creation, a myth that has the power to ignite the fires of worldwide planetary regeneration and thus to save us from the icy blasts of Thanatos's nuclear winter.

The question naturally arises: How and why is this happening?

Any answer with pretensions to definitiveness would of course be the height of presumption, but many before me have suggested that it has something to do with the unprecedented peril that the earth has faced for the last 40 years, ever since the dawning of the Nuclear Age and the simultaneous emergence of UFOs as a planetary phenomenon. And a number of thinkers have in this connection invoked the concept of something like a planetary mind that is not separate from yet is more than the sum of our individual minds and that seems to serve as the controlling agency mediating all this. Jung, of course, would call that "the collective unconscious"; Terence McKenna, one of the most original visionary thinkers of our own day, speaks of "The Overmind" (McKenna, 1983); ufologist Jenny Randles prefers "The Species Mind" (Randles, 1987); but the formulation I like best is that of Michael Grosso, who has proposed we revive Aldous Huxley's serviceable phrase "Mind at Large" (Grosso, 1985).

Rather than try to describe Grosso's ideas at this point, let me simply refer you to his brilliant and compelling book, *The Final Choice* (Grosso, 1985), or, failing that, to my extensive review of it (Ring, 1988). Suffice it to say that I endorse his formulation especially because he is one of the few who has so far made the explicit connection,

as I have tried to do here, between NDEs and UFO encounters in terms of their collective prophetic function—all orchestrated by Mind at Large. Instead of trying to summarize his argument here, I'd like just to quote a few passages from the concluding portion of his book. These will be sufficient to help draw together into one tight knot the few remaining loose threads of the thesis I've been fashioning in this essay.

The collective unconscious of humankind is in a state of unrest. The Bomb is causing Mind at Large to reverberate with monitions of disaster and visions of a new earth.

Let us then examine three types of prophetic visionary experience: near-death visions—especially the “prophetic” subset; UFO “contactee” cults; and visions of the Blessed Virgin Mary. All follow a common pattern and stem, I conjecture, from the same adaptive mechanism of the collective unconscious: they are part of the configuration called the archetype of death and enlightenment. What might this mean for the evolution of human consciousness? Are there indeed evolutionary stirrings in the collective psyche at the present time? Comparing these visionary experiences, perhaps the reader will be persuaded that there are. (Grosso, 1985, p. 303)

After reviewing these three types of prophetic experiences, Grosso goes on to ask:

What is the function of these extraordinary experiences? The answer is clear. In all, it is to warn and to transform. Apocalyptic visions deal in futures. Eschatology is probabilistic, catastrophe is conditional. The ultimate message: it's up to us; a bright and multi-colored flag, against a dark horizon, waves us on to action.

Images of ruin rise up from the misty deeps of the world soul; the rough beast slouches toward Bethlehem to be born. In an age foreshadowing nuclear winter, we are all summoned to be magi, to form a network of magi, to hazard the desert and follow where strange stars lead. These lights that flash from the heaven of Mind at Large inspire us to say farewell to the old, the life-denying self. They give us glimpses of where we could go and charge us with the energy to go there. The function of the visions is pretty much the same: to grant courage to change in heart and soul, to sacrifice the gift of ourselves to the infant god of our own higher future. They help us to make the final choice, to take the leap beyond death to new life. (Grosso, 1985, pp. 313-314)

In the last heartbeat before eternity, the soul sends up its messages of guidance and consolation. The universal adaptive mechanism of the archetype of death and enlightenment is awakened in life-threatening situations. This is clear in near-death visions. In very deep near-death visions, the adaptive information goes beyond the personal; it addresses the transpersonal and takes the form a general apocalypse.

UFO revelations entered a new phase in 1947 in the wake of the first atomic bombings, events bound to cause a stir in the collective consciousness. UFO revelations, in my view, are part of the response to the increasing risk of nuclear war. They register perturbations in the collective psyche.

UFO and near-death visionaries are clear on this: their visions are given to assist humanity at large in the transition to new forms of life. The earth itself is in need of transformation; we need to learn to adapt to a new earth because the old earth is passing away. Churned out by the collective unconscious, the vision is a map of global near-death and inner transformation. It is also a response to a life-threatening situation. The species, not just the individual, is on the threshold of near-death. Indeed, all species of life are threatened; hence, catastrophe is pictured in geologic imagery. Person and planet are at risk; this type of prophetic imagery is "designed," it would appear, to provide a perspective with survival value. (Grosso, 1985, pp. 314-315)

Clearly this reading of the significance of PVs does not lead to fatalism but to action. Rather than taking these images literally, we must see them as harbingers of hope that point to the possibilities of human regeneration and planetary transformation. Despite our difficulties, we can take heart that millions of people have apparently been recruited by Mind at Large to help actualize through their own being and behavior this emerging myth; they are today's messengers of hope (Parrish-Harra, 1983), the voices of prophecy.

It seems appropriate to conclude this article with one final quote from a PVer whose reflections on her experience match exactly my own convictions concerning the hortatory significance of the PVs we've considered here:

During my experience . . . I was also shown events that are likely to happen in the near future, but was made to understand that nothing is absolutely fixed and that everything depends on how we choose to use our own free will, that even those events that are already predestined can be changed or modified by a change in our own way of relating to them. (Grey, 1985, p. 123)

Our task, then, is to defuse these images by de-literalizing them. By thus robbing them of their power to freeze us into postures of passive fear, we may reap their mythic potential for planetary transformation as we head into the new millenium that awaits us.

Reference Notes

1. There are two factors, however, that need to be noted here that might have led me (and others) to underestimate the proportion of such cases in the population of

- NDErs. The first is that I personally have not made any special search for PVers since March, 1981; had I been diligently seeking such individuals I suspect I could have found quite a few more. Second, since most researchers who have interviewed NDErs did not interrogate their respondents about this type of experience, it may in fact be more common than we suppose. Moreover, because of the content of the prototypic PV, it would be understandable that some if not most NDErs would be reluctant to mention it, even to a sympathetic interviewer.
2. Moody has never chosen to publish the material he has collected on the subject of PVs, but he has generously shared his findings privately with me and other researchers many times over the years, the most recent occasion being in New York in February, 1988.
 3. I don't want to take the time to discuss the nature of these encounters, which is a subject of high controversy both within and outside of UFO circles. I do want to state, however, that I think the term "UFO encounter" is quite unfortunate since there is in my opinion no persuasive evidence that, despite the subjective reality of these experiences, they have anything to do with "flying objects," much less "extra-terrestrials," as such. Nevertheless, I will bow to the widespread currency of the phrase and use it, although reluctantly, in this context.

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Rationale and Considerations for Proposed Near-Death Research in the Hospital Setting

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ABSTRACT: Further research into the question of veridical perception during the "naturalistic" near-death out-of-body experience (nND OBE), that phase of the near-death experience in which the experiencer seems to be perceiving a normal earthly realm, would be of value to NDErs, their caregivers, and humanity in general. I propose a research procedure that targets visual perception during nND OBEs that occur in the hospital setting. I discuss unresolved issues in the design and implementation of such a procedure, and identify areas for further research.

A fascinating chapter in the history of parapsychological research began to unfold in the mid-1960s. Several years after the mysterious disappearance—and presumed death—of a frugal, reclusive miner of the Southwestern U.S., his will was found. In it, he left an estimated \$174,000 to "research or some scientific proof of a soul of the human body which leaves at death" (Fuller, 1969, pp. 20–21, 23). After a lengthy court battle, including an appeal, the money was awarded to the American Society for Psychical Research and was subsequently shared with the Psychical Research Foundation. Thus was funding provided for some of the most important research on out-of-body experiences (Rogo, 1986, pp. 13–14, 46ff).

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James Kidd's bequest epitomizes the curiosity that most, if not all, humans feel regarding the possible existence of a human soul. This curiosity is peaked, in particular, by out-of-body experiences (OBEs), which "suggest a discreet aspect of self that may be able to exist apart from the physiological body" (Morris, 1978, pp. 11-12). The study of the near-death experience (NDE), which has been considered an extended out-of-body experience (Ring, 1980, p. 221; Sabom, 1982, p. 27), seems central to this question. However, even if evidence existed that the NDE, or portions of it, were "objectively real," the existence of the human soul would not be proved, because the NDErs who provided the evidence would not, in fact, have actually died; the evidence, whatever its nature, could be attributed to some function(s) of the living human body, whether or not those functions had as yet been identified and understood (Krishnan, 1982).

The question of the "objective reality" of the NDE is not, however, a pursuit without value. NDErs report relief at hearing normative information about NDEs (Moody, 1975, pp. 87-88; Oakes, 1981, p. 72; Sabom 1982, p. 139); presumably, information regarding the objective reality of the experience would contribute to such relief. And although NDErs are typically convinced of the objective reality of the NDE based on their own experience (Grey, 1985, p. 34; Jung, 1961, p. 295; Ring, 1980, pp. 82, 94; Ring, 1986; Sabom, 1982, p. 97), at least three cases have been cited in which experiencers wanted to verify that seemingly realistic NDE perceptions actually corresponded to "reality" (Clark, 1984, p. 243; Grey, 1985, pp. 37-38; Ring, 1984a, p. 43).

NDErs could also benefit if a better understanding of the "objective reality" of the NDE were available to those with whom the NDEr subsequently interacts. In a recent article containing guidelines about how best to intervene when one encounters a near-death experiencer, the authors stated that "caregivers should validate the individual's subjective experience in and of itself. However the individual or the caregiver interprets the NDE and its meaning, the experience itself must be recognized as subjectively real and powerful . . ." (Greyson & Harris, 1987, p. 46). In the absence of evidence regarding the objectivity of the experience, the caregiver is, indeed, limited to a phenomenological approach to intervention; this lack of evidence also limits the scope of the "straightforward factual information" (p. 46) the caregiver is encouraged to provide.

In addition, such evidence would probably limit the "biases" that caregivers are admonished to control (Clark, 1984, p. 247). Indeed, negative bias on the part of an interviewer has been detected by at least one NDEr (Sabom, 1982, p. 157), and such biases on the part of

caregivers can have a profoundly negative impact on the NDEr's subsequent adjustment (Ring, 1984a, pp. 92-95). Thus further evidence regarding the "objective reality" of the NDE could enhance the degree to which caregivers can be helpful to NDErs.

Even for those of us who are neither NDErs nor their caregivers, a better understanding of the "objective reality" of the NDE could significantly enhance "our understanding of the death experience in human life" (Lundahl, 1982, p. 238). Such an understanding also bears upon our continued acceptance of the current scientific paradigm (Tart, 1974) as well as our beliefs about the fundamental nature of human beings (Garfield, 1979, p. 47; Ring, 1980, pp. 219-220; Sabom, 1982, p. 181; Tart, 1975; Widdison, 1982). Thus, although a better understanding of the "objective reality" of the NDE cannot prove the existence of the human soul, it nevertheless "touches upon the very essence and meaning of life" (Sabom, 1982, p. xii).

A Review of Veridicality Research

Years of research—and criticism of that research—have been spent on the phenomena of both the NDE and the closely related out-of-body experience. What has been said of NDEs could also be said of OBEs: "Their occurrence, as such, as well as their aftereffects, have now been documented amply and are no longer in doubt. The controversy . . . has continued to be concerned with their interpretation and significance" (Ring, 1984b, p. 6). One expression of this controversy is a division among scholars: some believe that these phenomena involve either clairvoyance or actual perception during a "separation of 'something' . . . from the physical body" (Ring, 1980, p. 221), whereas others believe that these phenomena are the result of very "down to earth" psychological or neurophysiological mechanisms (Irwin, 1985, pp. 219-220). This controversy between the "parapsychological" (Gabbard & Twemlow, 1984, p. 134) and "imaginal" (Irwin, 1985, pp. 219-220) viewpoints continues to rage.

The fundamental issue in this controversy was encapsulated in Russell Noyes' (1979) observation that "those of us who only hear of [near-death experiences] have difficulty accepting these experiences as . . . truth . . ." (p. 86). As John Palmer (1978) so cogently pointed out, "It is essential to make a sharp distinction between the *experience* of being 'out-of-body' . . . and the possible *fact* of such separation. It is logically possible to have the experience of separation without actually separating, i.e., an 'illusory' experience" (p. 19). Despite the fact that "percep-

tual realism is reported in the substantial majority of OBEs" (Irwin, 1985, pp. 92-93) and that the NDE has nearly always been described as subjectively real (Grey, 1985, p. 34; Ring, 1980, pp. 82, 94), "The feeling of being 'out of the body' in itself means little without evidence that such a separation has in fact occurred" (Anderson, 1981, p. 10).

Although this question has been examined in a number of ways, the most common has been the study of veridical perception (Irwin, 1985, p. 59), that is, the extent to which OB perceptions "correspond precisely to the real (physical) world" (Irwin, 1985, p. 104). Such research has focused on the "naturalistic" OBE, in which the experient seems to be perceiving "a normal earthly . . . realm" (Irwin, 1985, p. 7), usually the physical surroundings including and immediately adjacent to the experient's physical body (Irwin, 1985, p. 88; Ring, 1980, pp. 45-53). In the NDE, the naturalistic component seems to correspond to what Ring identified as "Stage Two" (1980, pp. 45ff) and what Sabom labeled the "autosopic experience" (1982, p. 27). Indeed, the naturalistic ND OBE "provide[s] one of the few avenues through which to secure data about NDEs that can be independently corroborated" (Ring, 1984a, p. 41, referring to Sabom, 1982).

Cases in which experients claim to have acquired veridical information during the naturalistic experience have been replete in the literature of both the OBE (Alvarado, 1983, p. 12; Alvarado, 1984, p. 227; Blackmore, 1982a, p. 296; Blackmore, 1984, p. 234; Green, 1968, pp. 120-134) and NDE (Green & Friedman, 1983, pp. 80-81; Grey, 1985, pp. 37-38; Oakes, 1981, p. 69; Moody, 1975, p. 100; Ring, 1980, pp. 50-52). Informal veridicality research initially involved *ex post facto* corroboration of experients' descriptions of physical events during their naturalistic ND OBEs. Convincing anecdotes were cited by Kimberly Clark (1984) and Michael Sabom (1981). Several such anecdotes were also noted by Raymond Moody (1975, p. 99) and Kenneth Ring (1984a, pp. 42, 50), but many could not be corroborated. In those cases in which hospital records were available for comparison, Moody (1975) found that the experients' accounts of events during their NDEs were "borne out" (p. 146). Whereas these observations were not the result of systematic investigation, they "[serve well] to indicate *how in principle* these accounts do lend themselves to external verification" (Ring, 1984a, p. 43).

A more systematic study which, in an *ex post facto* design, compared NDErs' descriptions of their resuscitations (as purportedly viewed while out of body) with the medical records of their resuscitations, yielded strikingly positive results (Sabom, 1982). Nevertheless,

Sabom's study has been criticized (Blackmore, 1985, pp. 79-80; Gabbard & Twemlow, 1984, p. 224; Grosso, 1982, p. 213). And the *ex post facto* nature of the study makes it less scientifically credible than a double-blind study in which some perceivable stimulus could be manipulated, thus rendering the results amenable to statistical analysis.

Such research has been pursued in the laboratories of several OBE researchers, yielding both positive and negative results (Osis, 1974, 1975; Palmer & Lieberman, 1985, 1976; Palmer & Yassar, 1974; Tart, 1967, 1968). Upon assessing all the data, scholars of OB veridicality—both in and out of the context of the NDE—have drawn widely disparate conclusions (Gabbard & Twemlow, 1984, pp. 128-136; Irwin, 1985, pp. 219-259). Some have judged claims of veridical perception to be “inconclusive and unconvincing” (Gabbard & Twemlow, 1984, p. 230; see also Blackmore, 1982b, p. 5). Others have concluded that examination of the literature “will suffice . . . to convince all but the most diehard materialists of the reality of out-of-body experiences” (Ring, 1980, p. 222). Yet others have answered the question of OB veridical perception in the qualified affirmative (Rogo, 1984, pp. 35, 38) or very qualified affirmative (Osis, 1974, p. 111). It is fair to say that “today, the issue of whether the OBE is inherently psi-conducive remains a controversial question not only within parapsychology in general, but even among those researchers who have specialized in OBE research” (Rogo, 1984, pp. 29-30).

One potentially significant but as yet unconfirmed factor in the evaluation of past OBE veridicality research involves the issue of spontaneous versus induced OBEs. Most laboratory research has, of necessity, involved OBEs induced through some method such as progressive relaxation, meditation, hypnosis, audio-visual stimulation, and the like (Irwin, 1985, pp. 53ff). Celia Green (1968) first observed that inaccuracies in OB perception, “in common with other perceptual distortions, appear to be more commonly associated with . . . voluntarily induced experiences than with single, spontaneously occurring experiences” (p. 74), that is, those that occur in the absence of any active or passive volition on the part of the experiencer. Green's observation has drawn both criticism (Blackmore, 1985, p. 81; Irwin, 1985, p. 107; Krishnan, 1983, p. 22) and support (Alvarado, 1982, p. 224; Irwin, 1985, pp. 72-73, 107; Smith & Irwin, 1981, p. 4). Green (1968) also observed that the incidence of OB ESP was “particularly common in connection with . . . experiences which occurred at the time of an accident or illness in hospital” (p. 20). Despite the possibility that the spontaneous OBE has been considered more promising in terms of

more strongly evidencing veridical perception, "little has been done to study the phenomenon during spontaneous OBEs" (Alvarado, 1983, p. 11), of which the ND OBE is a form.

Proposed Research Procedures

If further ND OBE veridicality research is to be carried out, several questions must be addressed. What site would be most appropriate? What research design should be followed? What mode of perception should be targeted? How should the stimulus be presented, and what should be its specific content?

Research Site

The spontaneous nature of the NDE is a fundamental consideration in the selection of a research site.

[A] hindrance to NDE research arises from the difficulty of performing deliberate experiments. It is hard to conceive of circumstances that would justify the artificial induction of the physiological states associated with near-death experiences. Investigations of the phenomenon must rely on naturally occurring "experiments" . . . to confirm or disprove their hypotheses. (Bates & Stanley, 1985, p. 543)

Although NDEs occur in practically every setting (Moody, 1975; Ring, 1980; Sabom, 1982), the one location in which they occur frequently enough to be warranted as a research site, and in which research controls are possible, is the hospital. Indeed, "much could be learned if psi investigation could be routinely incorporated into certain medical settings where one might suppose a gold mine of useful data awaits exploration" (Grosso, 1982, pp. 209-210).

The most frequently described location during the naturalistic ND OBE is in the vicinity of the physical body (Moody, 1985, p. 34; Ring, 1980, p. 45; Sabom, 1982, p. 27). The naturalistic component of the NDE appears to occur randomly and cannot, therefore, be predicted (Greyson, 1984, p. 50; Ring, 1980, p. 131; Sabom, 1982, p. 194). Thus the most promising specific research site would be the hospital rooms in which near-death episodes most frequently occur, such as the Emergency Room and rooms of the intensive and cardiac care units.

Research Design

In determining an appropriate research design for a veridicality study, previous research on OBEs provides direction. Historically, laboratory research on OBE veridicality has been conducted using subjects who claim to have OBEs (not associated with a near-death episode), whether spontaneous or induced, at relatively predictable times (Irwin, 1985, pp. 53-75). This research has taken three forms: attempts of the presumably exteriorized "something" to influence the environment, attempts to detect the "something" that leaves the body, and attempts by the OBEr to report targets at a remote location. Because it cannot be predicted whether a person encountering a near-death episode will have an NDE, it would be nearly impossible—and possibly unethical—to coach someone before a potential future NDE to influence the environment in some particular way during the NDE. And since no reliable method has been established to detect the "something" that purportedly leaves the body (Irwin, 1985, pp. 61-66), pursuit of this research design is currently ill advised.

By far the most commonly employed index of phenomenal authenticity is that of veridical perception, or to use a less compromising term, veridical imagery. The experimental subject's . . . experience is less viably regarded as artifactual fantasy if it incorporates substantially accurate imagery of some remote event, provided of course that this imagery cannot reasonably be attributed to such factors as prior knowledge, rational supposition, or direct sensory access. (Irwin, 1985, p. 59)

In order to comply with this last criterion, the design should be "double blind"; that is, the exact content of the stimulus should be unknown to anyone until after the subject's perception of it has ostensibly occurred and the subject's recollection recorded. This enables correct answers to be attributed only to clairvoyance or actual OB perception—whether theoretically attributed to actual exteriorization of "that which perceives" or to some as-yet-unknown physical perceptual process. The double blind procedure also eliminates the possibility that the subject acquired the information through intentional or unintentional communication with others. In addition, the design should eliminate the possibility of the "stacking effect" (Alvarado, 1982, p. 213), in which a single stimulus perceived by a series of subjects may be perceived by later subjects through telepathic communication with previous subjects, rather than from direct perception of the stimulus.

These demands of a double-blind research design suggest some form of stimulus presentation in which combinations of elements are continuously randomly generated. The combinations would be recorded in code, including date and time. Thus decoding would occur only after a given naturalistic ND OBE subject had made a "guess" as to the specific nature of the stimulus. Some aspects of this type of design were pioneered by Charles Tart (1967, 1968) and refined by Karlis Osis (1973, 1975).

Mode of Perception

The next decision involves which, if any, mode of perception would be most promising in ND OBE veridicality research. Because subjects' descriptions of their ND OBEs tend to be predominantly visual (Irwin, 1985, p. 97), vision seems to be the perceptual mode of choice. Another consideration involves how well the stimulus lends itself to double blind research design. Whereas touch stimuli are a possible candidate, the sense of touch seems absent during the ND OBE (Moody, 1975, p. 54; Ring, 1980, p. 92). Stimuli to be heard or smelled would be difficult to isolate from others in the same room. Once again, visual stimuli appear to be most appropriate for this research design.

Therefore, the most promising research procedure would involve remote placement of visual stimuli in hospital rooms in which near-death episodes most frequently occur. The stimuli would best involve continuously generated, random combinations of visual elements, recorded in code as to date, time, and particular element combination. Each patient who survived a near-death episode in one of the targeted rooms would be interviewed as to the nature of the visual stimulus, after which the stimulus record would be decoded and the subject's response evaluated for accuracy. Hypothetically, the responses of those subjects reporting a naturalistic ND OBE would significantly exceed chance accuracy and would be significantly more accurate than responses of other subjects.

Unresolved Issues Regarding Research Design and Implementation

Among the issues that remain to be resolved is the exact placement of the visual stimulus (or stimuli) in the hospital rooms. Obviously, the stimulus should be placed where it is most likely to be seen by the

majority of naturalistic ND OBEs. However, conclusions about the typical naturalistic ND OB "locus of perception" have varied among researchers.

Moody (1975) described the typical subject of an ND OBE as "looking upon his own physical body from a point outside of it" (p. 34). This description did not specify any trend or pattern in the reported locus of perception relative to the physical body. Indeed, experiencers' quotes cited perceived loci of perception ranging from above to beside the physical body, at various heights and distances (pp. 34-50). However, an elevated perspective and, when indoors, a perceived locus of perception at the ceiling or in an elevated corner of the room was the most frequent location in studies by Ring (1980, p. 46) and Margot Grey (1985, p. 34). But neither researcher specified *exactly* how often this locus of perception occurred, nor did either researcher enumerate the variations on this theme. Sabom's (1982) focus on in-hospital naturalistic ND OBEs specified that "the 'self' which had 'separated' from the unconscious physical body was perceived to be situated above the level of the physical body—a point specifically identified as 'ceiling height' in all but three cases [out of 32]" (pp. 27-28). He clarified that in all three exceptions, the individual was *higher* than ceiling height.

If the locus of perception is, indeed, usually at or near the ceiling, a visual stimulus could be placed in such a way as to be visible from only such a vantage point. However, considering the contradictory findings of various researchers regarding locus of perception, this question might best be undertaken in further research before implementation of a veridicality study. Similarly, further research seems warranted regarding two other unresolved issues: the specific content of the stimulus, and whether naturalistic ND OBEs are likely to be able to see and correctly report such a stimulus in numbers adequate to justify the research. Carlos Alvarado's (1982) point that "data on [perceptual organization during the OBE] is scarce and has not been reported systematically" (p. 221) applies equally to the NDE. In particular, although spontaneous reports of some aspects of visual perception have been reported in the literature (Moody, 1875; Ring, 1980; Sabom, 1982), those making complete reference to visual processes during the naturalistic ND OBE are nonexistent.

Furthermore, based on research into other altered states of consciousness, systematic inquiry into perceptual phenomena and processes yields very different results than those gleaned from spontaneous reports alone (Kahn, Dement, Fisher, & Barmack, 1962). When systematic research on OB visual perception has been undertaken, the samples sometimes included ND OBEs but did not usually analyze

them separately (Blackmore, 1984; Green, 1968). Nevertheless, recent research has established that "certain features are . . . significantly more often associated with NDEs than with other OBEs" (Gabbard & Twemlow, 1984, p. 136), indicating that separate analysis might be appropriate. In addition, those attempts at systematic study of perceptual processes during the NDE (Greyson, 1984; Noyes & Slymen, 1978-9), while providing direction, were not intended to study the phenomena in the depth necessary to resolve the issues discussed herein. Thus, a thorough study of visual perception during the naturalistic ND OBE seems warranted to resolve certain aspects of implementation of a hospital veridicality study.

An unresolved issue of another sort concerns the proposed stimulus that meets all the criteria for the "ideal" double-blind design. Development of a machine that would randomly select some combination of stimuli and would record that selection and the time of the selection in some codified form, would require some expertise in electronics. In addition, considering both that area of expertise *and* the need to produce enough of the machines to "cover" several rooms in each of a few hospitals, some considerable funding would be required.

A potential problem of yet another sort is the willingness of NDErs to be interviewed. Not only would this issue strongly influence the duration of the research study, it would also be an important factor in sampling bias. This issue has been touched on in the NDE literature (Ring, 1980), but has not been studied systematically.

A final concern involves location of a cooperating hospital or hospitals. "In order to substantiate . . . claims of ND-related paranormal OB perception, it will be necessary in the future to obtain the cooperation of medical professionals. Obviously this will not be an easy task, given the stringent duties of physicians and nurses on the job" (Grosso, 1982, pp. 209-210)—not to speak of the possible skepticism, suspicion, or even contempt, with which a research proposal of the type described above might be met. Apparently, "efforts to conduct scientific research in the area of near-death are difficult, at best. Researchers not only fail to receive support from colleagues, but actually are pressured to abandon such research" (Widdison, 1982). This difficulty might be exacerbated if the researcher is seeking to conduct the study in a hospital in which he or she is not known professionally.

It is anticipated that these and other problems potentially associated with the suggested research described herein will be addressed by either this or another researcher.

Summary

The question of veridical perception during the naturalistic ND OBE is deserving of further study. Such research promises to benefit NDErs, their caregivers, and those with whom they will interact subsequent to the NDE. In addition, the question of human perceptual ability that transcends the usual concept of physical limitation is central to beliefs held by humankind in general, about the nature of humans: are we limited to perception based on relatively *known* physical processes, or are we capable of as yet *unknown* physical or paranormal perceptual processes? "The possibility of verifying a large number of empirical claims stemming from the [naturalistic OB] part of the near-death experience provides the strongest argument for [a paranormal] interpretation [of the NDE] . . ." (Woodhouse, 1983, p. 71)—or for an interpretation involving unknown physical perceptual processes. Conversely, the failure to achieve such a verification could argue strongly *against* such interpretations. Avenues of empirical research into this question have not been exhausted. To this end, suggestions regarding a research design have been described and proposed herein, and problems in its refinement and implementation have been discussed. It is hoped that, as a result of this discussion, the proposed research will ultimately be pursued.

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Thanatoperience

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ABSTRACT: Near-death experiences (NDEs) can be seen as special cases of psychological transition. They often involve a deep transformation in the sense of self. I examine the NDE as such, according to my phase theory of transition, and I analyze an NDE with the help of that theory. I conclude that the study of NDEs may provide insight into the general psychology of transition.

Near-death experiences (NDEs) are generally accompanied by a "forced" breakdown in the normal sense of self (Grof & Halifax, 1977; Noyes & Kletti, 1976). This dissolution of ego parallels the "dying to self" that is a central theme in mystery rites, mysticism and Eastern philosophies and religions (Campbell, 1951; Eliade, 1958). Somewhat analogously, the point has been made that the process of psychotherapy necessitates a death of the self in order for growth and health to take place (Fingarette, 1965; Hillman, 1979). Similarly, psychedelics, major illnesses, accidents, crises of life or other powerful experiences may generate a sense that the old self has passed away and that a new one has been born (Henderson & Oakes, 1963; Jung, 1956; Siegel, 1980). It is in this vein that NDEs offer a unique opportunity to study the processes involved in major psychological change. Specifically, they reveal the phases of self-renewal—the "rebirth" of the self within the lifetime of the individual.

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Phase Theory

In this article it is my intention to examine NDEs using a phase theory I have recently developed. What the theory offers is a psychological analysis of the problem of transition or transformation in the sense of self. The phases of renewal, derived from the Latin, are *immanence, obstruence, descendance, experience, ascendance, emergence and transcendence*. Each phase describes an ontological condition of the self or, in other words, a psychological state that colors the person's sense of being. These states of being of the self are related to a particular phase of transformation as follows:

- Immanence = Being in.
- Obstruence = Being stuck.
- Descendance = Being down.
- Experience = Being through.
- Ascendance = Being up.
- Emergence = Being out.
- Transcendence = Being beyond.

Although I have listed each phase as a discrete condition or situation of the self, it is important to note that they actually refer to an ongoing, dynamic psychological process. An NDE, as with other types of major transformation experiences, is not a static series of encounters but a moving, living and constantly changing experience. It is the process of such an experience that the phases finally seek to address rather than the parts. Therefore, the phases "reduce" the experience with the purpose of understanding the whole of it more fully thereafter. The following NDE in a college student will provide the point of entry into this form of analysis.

A Thanatoperience

I was 18 years old when I died without dying. I had a *thanatoperience*, my word for a death venture or dying experience. It happened on a freezing winter night when I was under the influence of a well known psychedelic drug. At first, everything was fine that evening. The only thing remarkable was a funny feeling I had that something incredible was about to happen. I felt destined for some long overdue rendezvous. Wild with anticipation I began running as fast as I could down an icy road. Suddenly, thinking that I saw some friends of mine riding in a car, I darted into the road and was struck down. What happened after

that was almost otherworldly. I saw all the impressive events of my life flash before me in a kind of time-lapse photography. Many things I had completely repressed. Other things I just barely remembered. I saw the beautiful as well as the traumatic moments. Most amazing of all, perhaps, I seemed to see my future life as well. Always, the replayed scenes were full of the pure emotion I felt when they had first happened. Then I realized that my consciousness was free of my physical being. My mind seemed to move with quickness and purpose. Soon I began merging with an intense, radiant light that filled my entire vision. The light was paradoxical in quality. It was hot but not burning, blinding yet allowed me to see. I could still look right at it. In fact, I could see nothing else. A feeling of almost unbearable ecstasy came over me. I was one with all things. The road, meanwhile, felt like my warm mother—even Mother Earth. It was all like a return to some long forgotten yet ultimately important place. Then I felt as though I were inside some “cosmic” place back at the origin of things. At first the space was empty yet seemed full of meaning. Soon, however, I felt my body forming and moving down an ever-narrowing tunnel. As I approached its end I felt that I was in my mother’s birth canal. The passageway had become a fleshy, blood-filled entrance back into the world. I felt both pain and pleasure in this labor. Birth would necessitate desire and struggle—an incredible effort. Somehow, in spite of my condition, the life urge had overwhelmed my “dying.” I felt that I had to be born. Finally, after a great effort, I sensed that I was almost back, that is, back to the world I thought I had left behind. When I had “emerged” I was amazed at how clear and beautiful the world appeared. It seemed utterly benevolent and free of bad feeling. I, in turn, felt like the first man on Earth—the dawn of awareness itself—simple and innocent. A love towards all things suffused my being. Soon, I found myself standing at the side of a road. I looked at the scene unfolding before me. I had no idea how much time had passed. It could have been a moment or an eternity. An ambulance was at the scene, its lights rotating and flashing red in the darkness of the night. Curious, I watched as the medics bent over the figure lying in the road. I noticed that they were wildly gesticulating and frantically scurrying about attending to the body that lay there. Suddenly, I felt a stab of recognition. It was my body that lay there in the middle of the road—apparently dead—even as “I” stood at the side of the road watching! Then, as soon as the medics picked up the stretcher, my consciousness seemed to fly through the air and land in this—my body. Back inside, my consciousness again seemed to come from somewhere between my eyes. Yet, I knew beyond a doubt that it was the same one that only moments before had been a distant observer. Later, I remember waking up briefly in the ambulance and then again much later on when I was in the emergency room at the hospital. Today, I feel that the experience has provided me with a heightened sense of intuition and calmness about life. Often I have had a sense of *deja vu* about the world. Like the experience, which seems in retrospect to have had an ageless, awe-ful quality about it, I feel that a part of me—my soul, perhaps— has been “here” a countless

number of times before and that in some way it will be here again and again until I reach a state of pure consciousness; until then forever dying and being reborn.

Analysis

The NDE includes many of the classic features noted by Raymond Moody (1975), Karlis Osis and Erlendur Haraldsson (1977), Kenneth Ring (1980), Michael Sabom (1982), and others. Encounters with light, the tunnel, the life review, feelings of peace and calm, out-of-body experiences, and so forth, have been noted by many researchers. In addition, this particular NDE may be amplified due to the additive influence of the psychedelic (Pahnke, 1969). For the purposes of my theory, moreover, this NDE presents the clear phenomenology of a self undergoing deep change within a relatively short period of time.

In the beginning of his experience (I will refer to him as T.) everything is rather ordinary. Even though he is high and excited his experience is still quite normal. He is involved with the world around him more or less on his own terms. This is immanence, a being-into or being-with. This phase and condition of the self is precursory to periods of transition. It describes a sort of mental status quo, a psychological state of the self engaged with the ongoing, everyday flow of life.

An NDE, of course, quickly becomes something quite other than ordinary. To the self, it is an immediate crisis. T. is hit by a car and nearly killed. From out of nowhere to be suddenly face to face with death is to experience a feeling of extreme danger for one's sense of being. This sets up a psychological condition of obstruction, or being-stuck. The self has reached the limits of ordinary psychological being. T.'s consciousness simply cannot remain static. The self is trapped yet must escape its awful predicament.

The phase of descendance follows quickly. It is the beginning of transition proper. In descendance, which is being-down, the self falls apart or breaks away. T.'s consciousness surrenders to the chaos or cosmos (order) surrounding him—even if only for a matter of moments. It "takes over" his sense of being (Noyes & Kletti, 1976). There are two related phenomena here. One, he sees his life pass before him, and two, he seems to leave his painful body behind. Thus, the phase of descendance is a kind of psychological falling out. A deadly and impossible situation "in person" is given up and the self flees into the freedom of a consciousness detached from its physique. And, in a way, it leaves

nothing behind. It takes all its memories with it. The consciousness of the near-dead person gathers itself together and exits. What is interesting is where it goes. It is not that the consciousness goes to some unknown geographical point but that it enters a different state or condition of being. First, it seems to burst its boundaries completely, allowing itself to exist as energy without form (Ring, 1980). Then, from its condition of brilliance, the consciousness begins to contract simultaneously and return to a new beginning or point of formation.

This leads to the phase of experience. At this point the broken or fallen self gradually comes together again through inner work. The self passes out, passes through, and gives form to itself. It really involves a kind of death-rebirth (Grosso, 1983). That is, the passage of T. through "the tunnel" is a condition of focusing and centering of the self in response to its breaking out from its normal location in the body. This reformation of the self is possible, however, only because it has left its deadening boundaries, gathered itself, become freshly energized and then newly shaped again. The tunnel as birth canal is the passageway out from and back to the world—as well as a place of heroic labor (a *laborintus*, hence labyrinth) that is in the service of finding, saving and transforming the self (Arnold, 1979).

All this reintegration of the self is a building up, a process of ascendance in contrast to the breakdown of the self that occurred earlier. In the latter phases of transformation the self is restructured. As such, T. begins to seek the world and his body again. The self desires forms and boundaries to construct itself anew (Evans-Wentz, 1957).

Eventually, the self is psychologically ready to come out. This being-out is the period of emergence. For T., emergence was like seeing the world for the first time. It seemed transformed, rather like him. His consciousness encountered things both simply and directly. In a psychological sense he really was somewhat like a newborn child—only he had delivered himself—with the help of that whole world around him, which acted like a womb. Ironically, however, his emergence did not end with an escape out-from, but with a return to the confines of his body. But although his body was more or less the same, his consciousness and sense of self were changed as a result of his experience.

The final phase is transcendence. In his NDE T. went beyond death to return to life. His ecstasy (ex-stasis) was in his renewed mental state, not in his leaving behind the boundaries of life. Thus, in NDEs the self goes out from the fear of death towards a psychological state that energizes and gives it form in order that it may transcend death. This process, in turn, affords the self a new immanence or being-into everyday life and reality.

Conclusion

As Flynn (1982), Grof & Halifax (1977), Ring (1980) and others have noted, the NDE is a transforming experience. The self that emerges from the other side of a death encounter is one changed. The person's values, attitudes, beliefs and purposes can be quite radically altered. Simply stated, the normal human consciousness cannot help being powerfully affected by NDE phenomena. In this paper I have tried to demonstrate the phases that the NDE self goes through in its confrontation with its mortality and immortality. My conclusion is that the NDE is a powerful phenomenological laboratory. Within a relatively brief period of time the self that undergoes it demonstrates the basic psychology of transformation and renewal.

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The Devil in Heaven: A Near-Death Experience with both Positive and Negative Facets

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ABSTRACT: Although the considerable majority of reported near-death experiences (NDEs) are associated with positive affect, there are occasional cases of so-called negative NDEs that are dominated by fear and anguish. The phenomenological status of the negative experiences and their relationship to the more typical positive NDEs have been the subject of increasing speculation. In that light, the NDE described in this paper is of interest because it began to unfold as a positive experience but then changed course to become a negatively toned one. We present the details of this case and note its principal theoretical implications.

Surveys of the near-death experience (NDE) in different countries consistently confirm the overriding positive affect associated with the experience. Most notable in this respect are feelings of tranquility and well-being at the onset of the NDE and a sense of reassurance induced by ostensible contact with a transcendental or "heavenly" realm. The experient (NDEr) may express disappointment, even anger, at having to return to an earthly life but even in such cases the NDE is appreciated as a positive experience.

There is nevertheless a handful of reported cases of NDEs dominated by fear and anguish. Instances of these so-called *negative near-death*

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experiences were brought to the notice of researchers by Maurice Rawlings (1978), and although there initially were doubts about the phenomenological legitimacy of these experiences (e.g., Ring, 1980, p. 194) subsequent evidence from more scientific studies (Grey, 1985) indicated that the negative NDE is an authentic experience occasionally encountered during a close confrontation with death.

The relative rarity of negative NDEs (Gallup, 1982, p. 76) has been a major impediment to their investigation and it is clear there is much yet to be learned about these experiences. Despite the lack of an adequate data base NDE researchers nevertheless are beginning to draw some comparisons between negative and other ("positive," or "core") experiences. Kimberly Clark (cited in Flynn, 1986, pp. 83–86) has implied that whereas positive NDEs enhance religiosity in a universal or nonsectarian sense, negative NDEs tend to convert the experient to a strict Bible-based Christianity; the latter effect might spring from the contact with a hellish environment in many of the negative experiences. Further, Bruce Greyson (personal communication, June 6, 1988) and others already are speculating that positive and negative NDEs have different origins, that is, they may be quite distinct experiences.

At the same time the gross phenomenological parallelism between positive and negative NDEs is substantial. Like positive experiences, the negative NDE can incorporate impressions of being out of the body (Grey, 1985, pp. 63–64), moving through a dark void or tunnel (Grey, 1985, p. 69; Sutherland, 1988, p. 20), contact with a being of light (Grey, 1985, p. 66), and entry into a transcendental realm where deceased acquaintances and religious identities may be met (Grey, 1985, p. 69; Rawlings, 1978). But within this gross parallelism the two categories of NDE can differ in specific details. For example, the affective quality is distinct in each experience; this of course is the criterion on which positive and negative NDEs are differentiated. There is also an element of judgment associated with negative NDEs. In positive experiences the NDEr feels loved unconditionally by God, and all aspects of one's past life, both good and bad, seem acceptable; in negative NDEs, on the other hand, the experient reports being judged for past deeds either implicitly or explicitly (Grey, 1985, pp. 66–67). Progression through the dark void or tunnel may be disparate too: negative NDErs commonly report the movement to be in a downward direction (Grey, 1985, p. 70; Lindley, Bryan & Conley, 1981, p. 114; Sutherland, 1988, p. 20), and that is not found in other NDEs. The most dramatic distinction, however, would seem to be in regard to the transcendental realm that may be encountered in the experience. This

realm in the positive NDE generally is described as a "heavenly" or pastoral setting of preternatural beauty (Irwin, 1987). Negative NDEs on the other hand, typically report the transcendental environment to be a hellish place, a dark, dank, misty cave or a lake of fire and brimstone, for example (Crookall, 1966; Grey, 1985, pp. 68-72; Rawlings, 1978, Ch 7); the devil or other menacing demonic figures may be met in this setting (Lindley et al., 1981, p. 114).

The case reported in this paper is of particular interest in that it appears to incorporate elements of both positive and negative NDEs. The experience begins to unfold as a stereotypically positive, Moody-type case: the experient initially is emotionally detached despite the traumatic state of her physical body; the physical setting is perceived in an out-of-body perspective; and the self moves upward through a tunnel-like structure to the conventional pastoral realm. But within this tranquil pastoral environment there then is an unexpected encounter with the devil and the NDE thenceforth is marked by the affective tone of a negative experience.

The case study was undertaken in April, 1987, as a student project by BAB under the supervision of HJI. The NDE occurred in the context of a road accident in April, 1981. Vera, the experient, was aged 50 years at the time of the experience and is a divorcée. She attended secondary school education until the age of 15. Vera reported that as a child she had no religious inclinations; in her early twenties she became a Roman Catholic but even then she never really observed the practice of that faith. Following the NDE Vera has shown an interest in spiritualism and also has attended Salvation Army meetings because she finds them "homely." She still does not embrace any one religious creed but rather has a universal spirituality: there is "just God and love and tolerance." Prior to the accident Vera had no knowledge of NDEs. She has discussed her own experience only with a few close friends.

Vera was interviewed by BAB within the broad guidelines of Kenneth Ring's (1980, pp. 265-268) interview schedule. She also completed two questionnaires, the *Death Perspectives Scales* (Spilka, Minton, Sizemore & Stout, 1977) and Ring's (1984, pp. 276-279) *Life Changes Questionnaire*. For the sake of completeness the principal data on these instruments may be cited briefly at this point. As an indication of the way in which Vera now views death, her scores on the individual dimensions of the *Death Perspectives Scales* were as follows (higher scores signify greater concurrence): Death as Pain and Loneliness, 2.7; Death as an Afterlife-of-Reward, 5.8; Indifference Toward Death, 2.8; Death as Unknown, 5.2; Death as Forsaking Dependents Plus Guilt, 2.4; Death as Courage, 3.8; Death as Failure, 3.4; Death as a Natural

End, 4.8. In the *Life Changes Questionnaire* the greatest change Vera evidenced in her post-NDE life was an increased spiritual orientation and a decreased materialism; she also indicated increased concern for others and a quest for life's meaning. Like both positive and negative NDEs (Irwin, 1988) Vera's experience therefore had a fundamental impact on her beliefs and her attitudes to life and death.

The following account of Vera's experience was compiled from a transcript of the tape-recorded interview with her.

The accident happened on 5th April, 1981. I had been out and I was driving a friend home. It was a very bad night, the weather was really bad and it was raining very hard. I had dropped him off at his home and I made a U-turn to go back up to a main street to go back into town. I did the usual things—looked to see if there were any cars coming—and as I got over the road, halfway across the road, to make another right hand turn . . . I never saw any [car] lights but I had the feeling something clipped me and I spun. Being a very rainy night the car had spun and kept spinning, and I can remember trying to put my foot out to stop the car from spinning, but that didn't happen. The car spun and it hit one lamppost and then wrapped around another one. The car was very badly smashed and I was told later it took about an hour to get me out. But I don't remember any of that. I don't remember the police or the ambulance being there.

I had this feeling that I was being lifted up into the air, and I was going up and up and then I heard a voice saying "It's too late." I turned and I could see an ambulance down there and another car, and I could see all this commotion going on and yet I couldn't hear anything. I just thought, "Oh, what's happening down there?" Anyway, I just kept going higher and higher and I couldn't see the commotion down there at all. And then I came to a place. It was like a very big tunnel I was going through, a very large tunnel because it took my whole body length-ways. I floated up the tunnel in a spiral fashion. When I got to the top I came to something that looked like a football field, and it was all very bright and there seemed to be a lot of sandstone, little pebbles and things. It was all *light* and a very blue sky, and right on the edge of the boundaries there were green trees, very green trees, everything was very green. I thought, "Where am I? What am I doing here? I've been here before." When I was a little girl I used to play in a sort of little round field thing; it wasn't a football field but it was made of white sandstone stuff, and so when I got to this place I thought I was a little girl again.

I looked around and right in the distance I could see a building. I had the feeling that it was a church, but I couldn't see a steeple on it. I thought that as it was the only thing I could see I should start walking towards it. When I got near to it, [I could see] it had big church doors and there were about seven steps going up to it. I walked very slowly up the steps and the door was just ajar—it wasn't closed and it wasn't wide open. I thought I had better go inside. Inside it seemed so long and

there was a red carpet all the way down. It was a church, and yet it wasn't a church. [It reminded her of a monastery she had seen in a television program.] I started walking down and I was frightened. There were so many pews on each side, and each pew was filled with people wearing black robes with hoods. I couldn't see their faces but if I turned my eyes I could see the inside of the hoods were lined with red. There was no sound at all. I kept walking and walking and then came to three steps which I went up, then walked a little further. I then saw what looked like an altar on which were six silver goblets and a big silver jug. I stood there wondering where I was and what I was doing there, when a door opened to the right of the altar and out came the devil. He came over to the altar, looked me straight in the eye and told me to pick up a goblet. I picked up a goblet and he picked up the big silver jug and started pouring. I saw that what he was pouring from the jug was *fire*, and I screamed, dropped the goblet and started to run. I just ran and ran. I didn't know where I was running to. And then I saw a big fence, a stone fence, and the gates opened and I passed through. Then I came to another fence made out of iron bars, and that just opened, and again I ran through. All the time I was getting warmer and warmer and brighter and brighter.

And that was it. I woke up and there was a [nursing] sister sitting beside me; she was dressed in dark blue with a white cap and I later learnt that she had been with me all night.

Like other negative NDErs, Vera believes the confrontation with the devil denoted God's judgment of her life, although this impression seems largely *a posteriori*. She believes the good and the bad in her life before the accident were of equal weight and that she was being asked to suffer a drink from the goblet of fire in order to make the balance favorable. By refusing to comply with the devil's demand she was fated to suffer by way of compensation the physical disabilities that resulted from her car accident. In her own words, she was sent back by God "to drink the cup of fire" before she can return to "that beautiful place."

Further questioning confirmed that during the NDE Vera had felt only calm and peace, free of any worry about the physical trauma of the accident or anything else, until the point when she became aware of the figures in the church and then came face to face with the devil. The case thus had qualities of a positive NDE until the episode in the church, after which the tone of the experience became negative.

In this regard the case study could be instructive for the development of theories about negative NDEs. For example, Vera's experience would not sit well with the notion that positive NDEs and negative NDEs differ so much in their origins that the two types of experience represent fundamentally distinct phenomena. Perhaps the most that could be hoped for within that broad framework would be to develop

the idea that different *phases* of NDEs have distinct sets of determinants; under that view certain specific factors might engender a positive tone in some parts of the NDE and other factors might be responsible for negative affect elsewhere in the experience. On the other hand, although such a multicausal approach to the NDE warrants further consideration it must be remembered that the phenomenon does have a strikingly holistic quality. Theoretical accounts therefore must accommodate not only the possibly contrasting phases of the NDE but also the intrinsic coherence of the experience.

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BOOK REVIEW

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Book Review: *The Final Choice: Playing the Survival Game*, by Michael Grosso. Walpole, NH: Stillpoint Press, 1985. 348 pp., \$10.95.

In this highly ambitious, beautifully written, and continually thought-provoking book, Michael Grosso, a scholar who has emerged as one of our day's leading parapsychological philosophers, comes close to formulating a world view big enough to make sense of these tumultuous times. Grosso's work embodies as credible a New Age metaphysics as I have yet to encounter, linking the confluence of events shaping the latter half of the twentieth century with what may lie ahead. In philosophical orientation and range of vision, Grosso's book most closely resembles Kenneth Ring's recent work, *Heading Toward Omega* (1984), thus qualifying it as an addition to the "new literature of hope" of which Grosso (1985) himself has spoken.

With an eye on synoptic as opposed to analytic thinking (p. 6), Grosso packs the pages of this volume full with provocative facts and tantalizing insights on an impressive array of subjects. That emphasis enables him to pose intriguing conjectures on possible interrelationships between the usual focal points of parapsychologically oriented near-death research—that is, survivalistically inclined analyses of out-of-body experiences (OBEs), near-death experiences (NDEs), and seemingly related, ostensibly paranormal phenomena—and a host of additional weighty topics.

A partial list of these additional topics includes Darwinian natural

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selection and other variations on evolutionary theory, theories of evolution in personal and species-wide human consciousness, purportedly miraculous events and associated religious relics, visions of historical religious personages and other apparitional figures, UFO encounters, and conflicts within today's collective human psyche terrorized by the mounting threat of worldwide nuclear annihilation.

To comprehend the meaning of this rather expansive subject matter, Grosso draws upon the metaphysical and psychological thought of Freud and Jung and borrows other ideas from transpersonal psychology, parapsychology and other sources. Out of these ideas Grosso fashions the notion of "Mind at Large," which is the overriding theoretical construct of the book. Metaphysically aligned with such earlier concepts as Frederic W. H. Myers's (1903) *Subliminal Self*, Henri Bergson's (1911/1970) *Creative Evolution*, Carl Jung's (1959) *Objective Psyche*, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's (1959) *Noosphere* and Kenneth Ring's (1984) recent speculations on NDEs, evolution and higher consciousness, Mind at Large is conceived to possess emergent as well as transcendent properties. Mind at Large, in other words, possesses properties that emerge from matter under the influence of physical evolution and other properties that exist outside of space, time, and matter, i.e., in eternity. Through the mediary of psi, Grosso proposes, Mind at Large bridges eternity and the physical universe, subtly guiding the course of planetary evolution and the growth of human consciousness.

In Grosso's analysis of the contemporary human condition, humanity has arrived, in the latter half of the twentieth century, at a critical juncture in history. Burdened by the evolutionary acquisition of an intellect whose powers have far outstripped any accompanying evolutionary capacity to control its lower animal passions, humankind lies precariously positioned upon a lofty precipice, which it has scaled on its evolutionary climb. Confronted by a final choice, humanity's next step will decide whether the human species shall slip and fall to be dashed upon the rocky shoals of nuclear devastation below, or overcome the remaining obstacles and ascend to a new high ground above. In the actualization of the latter scenario humanity will have fulfilled long-dormant psychic and spiritual evolutionary potentials and in the process will have transmuted into a new and higher species, a species termed *Homo noeticus* by the New Age theorist John White (1981). Backing down off these New Age slopes just a bit, I cannot help but wonder how appropriate it actually is to look upon today's nuclear crisis within the context of a choice, final or otherwise. But before attending to Grosso's reasons for so framing our planet's present nu-

clear predicament, let us first review in more detail the particulars of this truly challenging work.

Grosso's text is divided into six sections, ranging from two to five chapters each. An impressive organizational feature of the book, further improving its readability, is the additional division of chapters into sections ranging from half a page to several pages in length, each of which is offset by thematically relevant headings.

The first section compares, contrasts, and summarizes religious and other beliefs and attitudes on death and dying from the classical Greek, early to medieval Christian, Tibetan Buddhist, and modern Western religious and secular societies. Sifting through these beliefs and attitudes, Grosso culls a number of ideas that he feels would be valuable in the construction of a modern craft for dying. Information gleaned from contemporary parapsychology, near-death studies, and thanatology would play crucial roles in that deathcraft. As Grosso sees it, that deathcraft would fill a spiritual vacuum present throughout much of the contemporary Western world.

In the next section Grosso discourses upon certain of the essential features he sees in the relationships among evolution, human consciousness, and the paranormal. Overall, I found this section to be the strongest, most eloquently delivered portion of the book. The current of opinion Grosso sets in motion pertaining to possible evolutionary constraints on psi in the physical universe deserves, in my view, the serious scrutiny of experimental parapsychologists the world over.

Grosso accepts that the principle of natural selection must play some role in the evolution of life (p. 59). However, he observes that there are a myriad of gaps in the empirical data upon which Darwin's theory is founded. He speculates that Mind at Large, through the mediary of psi, "intervenes at critical junctures . . . [e.g., at] the origin of life, the development of a new and higher species, instances of 'paranormal healing' and in other circumstances where we observe psi at work" (p. 62).

In Grosso's view, however, psi does not act directly upon the behavior or gradual development of planetary life forms. The presence of exceptionally potent psi powers within the animal kingdom would, perhaps, upset the food cycle as preyed-upon species might evade their predators too successfully, thereby upsetting Nature's ecological balance. Grosso also ponders the potentially horrifying consequences for humanity if powerful, physically efficient psi abilities were ever to come into the possession of highly motivated, intelligent but unscrupulous human beings. Here I am reminded of the rumors that Adolf Hitler possessed powerful psi abilities (Ostrander and Schroeder, 1970). Within the

context of Grosso's evolutionary framework the difficulties of eliciting psi in modern parapsychological experiments may be seen to stem from the activity of protective cosmic forces, forces whose function it is to minimize but not completely impede the flow of psi into the physical universe. That psi abilities do not seem to be learnable but, on the contrary, often seem to attenuate and then disappear entirely in those persons subjected to extensive psi testing is, as Grosso notes, relevant to this argument. Rather than facilitating any increased capacity to manipulate space, time and matter, the natural thrust of psi, Grosso proposes, may be altogether different, i.e., it may facilitate the ascendance of human consciousness above and outside of space and time. Accordingly, Grosso speculates that "If the function of psi is essentially otherworldly, then we need not be surprised how transient and marginal an effect we find it to be in this world" (p. 49).

Grosso then reviews a number of arguments promoted by various distinguished biologists, zoologists, and other natural scientists on the extreme improbability of random physical forces fostering the evolution of life on earth. Siding with those scholars, Grosso states that "the mechanists' faith in the play of random forces is no more justified than the theists' faith in design" (p. 54). The plausibility of that particular argument is questionable in light of a recent development in modern logic called the "game of life" (Poundstone, 1985). This "game" is played on an infinite two-dimensional grid in which the various cells, according to the rules, may be designated to be "empty" or "occupied" by a dot. Out of the recursion of a few initial steps (wherein dot formations blink on or off, move and change shape, grow or wither) repeated randomly over sufficiently large spans of space and time, universes of extraordinary richness come into being, seemingly awash in a whole hierarchy of simple to complex "two dimensional" life forms. Similar games played in three dimensions have also been developed and their possible relevance to the evolution of our own physical universe is currently under investigation.

Abstract games of logic, however, may or may not be able to address another of the criticisms Grosso levels at natural selection, a criticism involving the difficulty of incorporating preadaptation into Darwin's evolutionary scheme. As one of any number of possible examples of preadaptation, Grosso cites evidence that "a tree-climbing apparatus developed in frogs before they began to climb trees" (p. 66). Preadaptation implies, Grosso argues, the preexistence of a goal or plan in Nature. Grosso construes examples of preadaptation to be evidence of intelligently planned forethought on the part of Mind at Large as it engages in the act of shaping what would otherwise be the play of

totally random physical forces and energies. Relating this theme to the fossils of dead-ended animal species, Grosso likens Mind at Large to "an experimental artist-God who makes mistakes and scratches them out discovering what it creates as it goes along" (p. 63). To digress momentarily, this scratching out of species brings to my mind the almost too-large-for-life dinosaurs. In the fossils of those bygone behemoths do we see preserved records of Mind at Large in the formative years of its education, before it graduated to engineer the creation of life forms with more promise for evolutionary growth?

Further on in his text, Grosso continues to articulate the theme that the evolution of life need not be confined to successive developments in space along a linear progression in time, much like the roots of a tree need not be confined to any set growth pattern, but rather will grow wildly in all manner of directions, to seek out life's sustaining waters. Grosso considers that theme within the framework of human consciousness surviving bodily death as he ponders that "if the goal of life is more life—in a word, survival—and if psi serves the needs of life's goals, then psi may be an instrument for mediating survival of bodily death itself" (p. 51). He continues, "If the goal of life is more life, higher, freer and more complex forms of life, then psi may represent the next medium of self transcending life. Psi thus understood as a transcendent function is the wedge of life driving through the most fundamental of obstacles to the evolutionary process" (p. 51).

Directing this theme to the NDE, Grosso speculates:

Normal consciousness, fixated upon the plane of life, is usually locked into a narrow band of the present. In the near-death experience, that fixation is broken, and consciousness dilates over the whole life field, of memory, just as Bergson predicted it would. It dilates beyond the present, overflowing toward the future, embracing the collective life-plan, surging beyond itself and escaping the constraints of brain filtered consciousness. (p. 70).

That beautiful passage contains, unfortunately, a misrepresentation of Bergson's thought on time dilation. Bergson's time dilation, in the book Grosso cites (Bergson, 1911/1970), entails only an expansion into the past, not into the future. In other words, for Bergson time spatializes exclusively in the direction of memory. Grosso makes no mention of the pioneer higher-space metaphysicians (e.g., Fechner, 1836/1943; Ouspensky, 1922; Dunne, 1927) who have truly championed the kind of theory outlined above. Nor does Grosso cite any of the modern proponents of that metaphysical view (McLaughlin, 1977, 1979-80, 1986; Murchie, 1978; Greene, 1981, 1984; Haight, 1983) who have

attempted to integrate it into the framework of contemporary consciousness research, parapsychology and near-death studies. Grosso does cite Ring (1984), who momentarily considered the possible relevance of higher-space theory in attempting to make sense of the prophetic visions sometimes reported by NDErs.

In the following section Grosso discusses the parameters of the OBE established between the mid-1970s and the mid-1980s. He observes that the concept of the OBE is currently in disarray among parapsychologists and other scholars. The major alternative hypotheses, Grosso notes, argue either that 1) some aspect of the experient actually separates from the physical body or that 2) experiencers are really entering hallucinatory dream-like spaces, "psychological spaces" that experiencers misconstrue to be the external three-dimensional environment viewed from a point separate from their physical bodies. Grosso's descriptions of these investigations are sufficiently developed for the informed reader to follow. However, I would argue that some of his descriptions are too vague and cursory for uninformed but interested readers to follow clearly; that is particularly so with his accounting of research conducted at the American Society for Psychological Research.

Next Grosso extrapolates a "psychical distance" approach to comprehending the OBE. He relates this understanding of the OBE, persuasively I believe, to the esthetic, visionary, and other creative "flights of the mind" engaged in by mystics, philosophers, poets, and artists. Some of the most compelling and original insights in Grosso's book are contained in this section.

From the study of OBEs Grosso turns to an analysis of NDEs. Much of that material has appeared previously in two articles published in this journal (Grosso, 1981, 1983). Grosso reviews current theories and opinions on NDEs and then expounds a Jungian archetypal interpretation that he, more than any other researcher, has promoted. More than just explaining diverse specific features of NDEs, Grosso's archetypal theory also illustrates certain ways in which NDEs may fit into a wider spectrum of consciousness states including OBEs, UFO visions, psychedelic states, dreams, mystical experiences and afterlife states. As I have noted elsewhere (Greene, 1986), Jungian psychology by itself is capable of assimilation into any number of different metaphysical systems. By placing his archetypal theory inside the wider context of Mind at Large, Grosso has, in my view, successfully oriented it within a metaphysical outlook broad enough to cover paranormal phenomena, mystical experiences and consciousness surviving bodily death.

In the ensuing section, Grosso examines reports of apparently divine intervention into human affairs. The New Testament accounts of

Christ's resurrection and of St. Paul's ecstatic vision on the road to Damascus are considered, as well as the inspirational visions of other early Christians. Reports of helping apparitions in modern times, materializations of both living and dead persons, and the bilocations of such saintly persons as Padre Pio are also noted. Later, Grosso returns to the theme of religious apparitions, as he presents a chronology of reported sightings of the Virgin Mary from the mid-1800s to the present. He argues that this evidence suggests an increase in the frequency of apparent visitations by the Virgin. UFO contacts in modern times and prophetic visions among NDErs are also discussed in this section.

Grosso sees these instances of seeming contact between humanity and spiritual agencies from "above" as evidence of Mind at Large guiding our planet's spiritual evolution by healing the physical, psychic and spiritual illnesses afflicting the human race. (Grosso's approach towards identifying and remedying these illnesses shall be examined shortly.) These emissaries from beyond and "harbingers of divine intimacy" have, Grosso surmises, intervened in human affairs at an accelerating rate that matches the continuing increase in planetary tensions. In other words, Mind at Large, Grosso suggests, may be helping to mobilize humanity's psycho-spiritual reserves. As a consequence of this adaptation, humanity is, Grosso speculates, being propelled into some sort of collective NDE—the spiritual fruits of which may activate evolutionary characteristics possessing survival value for the human race. Grosso also devotes a chapter to the mysterious Shroud of Turin, purportedly the burial cloth of Jesus Christ. Grosso sides with those scholars who advocate the spiritual and historical legitimacy of the cloth. He then incorporates that view into his concept of Mind at Large involved in facilitating planetary evolution.

In the following, and final, section of the book, Grosso takes on the enormous task of attempting to identify just what it is about human nature that has brought our planet to the brink of nuclear disaster. He introduces the psychoanalytic concept that the human psyche is caught in a struggle between two opposing cosmic forces, Eros, a life instinct, and Thanatos, a death instinct. Grosso is ambivalent in his use of this theme, perhaps because scientific evidence favoring the existence of a human death instinct is, as he notes, weak. His choice of terms when discussing Thanatos, e.g., the "Thanatos conspiracy" and the subchapter headed "Rumors of a Death-Instinct" (p. 263) exemplify, I believe, his thinking on the subject. Grosso incorrectly states that Freud introduced the term Thanatos to denote this hypothetical death instinct (p. 264). Actually, Neo-Freudian writers first adopted the term when commenting on Freud's "suspect" metapsychological theory of

instincts. Grosso also fails to discuss or even reference the only modern near-death study designed specifically to examine NDEs for a human death instinct (Greene, 1983). Had he briefly summarized, in the place of his own treatment, Kenneth Wilber's (1980) brilliant extension to Freudian instinct theory, or refrained entirely from developing this avenue of speculation, his generally superb volume would have been that much better.

Grosso does, however, use other modern psychological concepts far more intelligently. He demonstrates, with unusual skill and insight, I believe, how certain concepts related to human security needs, e.g., notions of anxiety and paranoia, may be made to illuminate the behavior not only of individual persons but also of whole nation states. His depiction of the standoff between the US and the USSR is, in my view, particularly enlightening. He states that "The real conflict . . . that threatens the world today is not between East and West, Communism and Capitalism; it is the conflict between the paranoid and metanoid potentials of the human mind" (p. 275). By "metanoid potentials" Grosso refers to largely dormant capacities in the collective human psyche, that are awakened in a few persons to produce an enhanced ability to love and an increased trust in the course of events that manifest in the universe (p. 269). In another passage Grosso observes, chillingly, that "A nuclear war might erupt on the basis of what, in effect, was the hallucination of danger. The inability to distinguish between real and imagined threats is one mark of the paranoid personality" (p. 269). That collective mentality of nuclear besiegement and the collective sense of paranoia infusing it, Grosso argues, is symptomatic of a deeply ingrained "metaphysical disease" afflicting humanity in our day. And it is only in consciously striving to awaken our metanoid potentials, and thereby in opening ourselves up more directly to the ministrings of Mind at Large, Grosso writes, that we shall have any chance to heal ourselves.

That is the reason Grosso conceives our planet's nuclear crisis in terms of a choice. If we are to avoid falling blindly into the Darwinian pit of disregarded species, we must choose consciously to shed our collective paranoia so our underlying metanoid capacities will spring into action. The prospect of nuclear holocaust—viewed from a metanoid disposition—may actually serve, Grosso contends, as the primary impetus that will enable us to give birth to the next stage in the evolution of planetary consciousness instead of destroying ourselves.

Grosso finishes his volume with a two-page "coda" scribed in lyrical prose poetry that serves as a paean to the transcendental promise he sees as present, for all of us, in NDEs.

In rounding out this review, I have one additional criticism, after which I will address what I feel to be the major weaknesses in his *Mind at Large* construct. Grosso states that cases of transcendental music constitute a "rarer phenomenon among characteristics comprising NDEs" (p. 193). I would argue that not enough is known today to state confidently how frequently transcendental music is experienced during NDEs. I myself have come across many instances of this effect scattered throughout the NDE cases of Robert Crookall, Russell Noyes, Johann Hampe, Kenneth Ring, and other researchers. What is rare is researcher interest in this fascinating area of near-death studies. Few contemporary near-death researchers seem even to be aware of D. Scott Rogo's (1970, 1972) two-volume content analysis of transcendental music in OBEs, NDEs, deathbed visions and other states of consciousness thought to be conducive to ESP.

And finally, nowhere does Grosso address certain essential theological and ontological problems impossible to divorce from any deeper analysis of his *Mind at Large* construct. In his attempt to build the case for the actual existence of an "experimenter God," Grosso has not, in my opinion, sufficiently separated that entity from all else in the universe. For instance, it is not clear where the entity ends and his creation begins and vice versa. Are we to assume that the creator and his creation are one and the same thing? Furthermore, it seems very clear to me that a creator God possessing the attributes that Grosso ascribes to his hypothesized deity should, more specifically, be assigned the role of a "demiurgic intelligence" (e.g., see Bennett, 1965) or planetary deity—not to be confused with the creator of whole cosmoses. Once again, Grosso fails to make the necessary critical distinction.

In conclusion, Grosso's scholarship reaches its lowest ebb when he is attempting to construct a coherent and plausible portrait of *Mind at Large*. In the introduction he asserts, overstating the case I believe, that the one purpose of the book is "to draw a picture of *Mind at Large* and show how the concept may relate to our survival, both here and hereafter" (p. 6). However, in the middle of the book (pp. 200–201), where he offers the most extensive single accounting of what that concept means to him, Grosso states that "*Mind at Large* doesn't refer to any 'thing,' it points only to a process" (p. 201). This hypothesized suprarational creative experimentalist, who intellectually deliberates upon and profits by his mistakes, who fashions successively more sophisticated life forms, who works to liberate human consciousness from a dependence upon material existence, points only to a process? Surely, at the very least, these are poorly chosen words with which to describe the entity that is the primary theoretical construct of the

book. Practically speaking, these words are meaningless, as anything existing or conceived to be existing in the universe may be said to "point to a process." As a psychologist, a parapsychologist and a philosopher, Grosso is, I have already stated, a truly inspired thinker, but as a theologian, I believe, he fails to attain the same high standard of insight and clarity.

The true worth of Grosso's book lies not, in my view, with his underdeveloped and overly obscure construction of Mind at Large, however profound the idea may be. Rather, Grosso's scholarship reaches its zenith when he is integrating theories of psi, OBEs and NDEs into the frameworks of depth psychology, consciousness research and evolution. It is in his vision of the human species as the vanguard in an evolutionary push, a push bursting beyond the very confines of space and time—as we currently recognize these parameters of human experience—that Grosso has, I believe, established himself as one of our day's foremost visionary philosophers.

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Letters To The Editor

Counseling After a Near-Death Experience

To the Editor:

I strongly disagree with Joseph Geraci's statements that "the NDE is not a human experience" and that "the most difficult adjustment [for a near-death experiencer] is being human again" (1987, p. 28).

The phenomenon of an NDE is the experience of a reality or dimension not previously known, or possibly only known about. However, the NDEr is not someone different, greater, or even lesser during the NDE. Research has shown that the NDE expands and raises the consciousness of NDErs; it changes their perception and understanding of reality and of themselves (Moody, 1975; Kelsey, 1982; Greyson and Flynn, 1984). Yet they are, in their constitutional nature and essence, still human *during* and *after* their NDEs.

Every experience a person has registers, at some level, upon the human psyche or soul, whether in or out of the physical body. It is through the psyche that we experience reality or realities. Now this experience of reality varies. The psyche of a 6-month-old infant perceives, experiences, and relates to reality differently than that of a 35-year-old adult. But the infant and adult are human in their constitutional nature, and always will be. As research has shown, at no point during the NDE do NDErs lose awareness of who they are. Their identity going into the experience is not lost afterwards. This is quite different in the case of psychosis or multiple personality disorder.

It is not a question of how a professional counselor, therapist, or anyone else can help an NDEr "be human again." It is a question of how they can help the human NDEr live in this reality or dimension again without giving up or losing the effects of the reality encountered during the NDE.

I fully empathize with Geraci's experience of the NDEr being "subjected to mere curiosity by some and to dissection by others" (1987, p. 28). It is a shame that the majority of the medical and scientific communities still approach the NDE this way. What NDErs do have is

an experience that the majority of humanity, no matter what culture, has not yet had. Given the assumption that what NDErs have encountered is a valid reality or dimension of human existence, then what they share can help humanity come to a greater understanding of the nature of things.

In all the research I have read concerning the NDE, it is exciting to note the strong similarity it has with traditional Christian mystical experience. Theologically speaking, what the NDEr and Christian mystic, and mystics of other faiths, share is a strong *metanoia* where one's values, beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and understanding of reality and of oneself are profoundly and positively altered. There is a turning away (*metanoia*) from one world view to a new world view (Kelsey, 1982; Johnston, 1984; Egan, 1982, 1984). This change for the NDEr appears to be quicker due to the intensity and uniqueness of the NDE.

If in time sound clinical research reveals that the most common and profound part of the NDE is the encounter with or experience of the presence or "being of light," and that that is the same experience of God that the Christian mystics have had during deep contemplative prayer, then, as Geraci has clearly stated, "it's time to give the NDEr a chance to 'successfully intervene in the adjustment process'" of humanity experiencing and living in this reality of time and space.

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Joseph Geraci Responds

To the Editor:

Although I disagree with the parameters of research that Michael Schaefer places on the NDE, I truly appreciate his interest and com-

ments. I believe that dialogue regarding the NDE is necessary if its meaning is to be understood and shared. Perhaps one day the concerns of Schaefer and other researchers will be answered when the NDEr is able to verbalize the essence of the experience, which yet remains locked inside.

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Are OBEs Evidence For Survival?

To the Editor:

Amid the burgeoning "evidence" of consciousness above or beyond the physical body explored in this journal and countless other publications, Susan Blackmore's article, "Are Out-of-Body Experiences Evidence For Survival?", is notable as a well-written and thorough presentation of the evidence that seems to dismiss much of this fascinating subject (Blackmore, 1983).

Distilled, Blackmore said that out-of-body experiences (OBEs) and near-death experiences (NDEs) are unproven, because it cannot be demonstrated that anything leaves the body during such experiences; she added legitimate questions about some reported experiences that could not be factually verified. The real question is: is Blackmore's article evidence that there is no survival? The human mind has the inborn capability of approaching such questions, but in a rather different way than the scientific method.

Rather than attempt to discredit Blackmore's argument, let me start by agreeing with her methodical insistence that conclusive evidence has not yet been shown. I can imagine a fairly simple example that would be very close to "hard evidence." Imagine an accident in which two or more people are injured to the point of near-death, and then both recover in different hospitals, and both report NDEs in which they journeyed through the tunnel and viewed the beautiful light together, commenting to each other or sharing some incident they independently describe.

But rather than seeking some incontrovertible experience that could abolish Blackmore's arguments, we can constructively analyze what is involved in the OBE and NDE in such a way that her reasoning will no longer hinder our appreciation of these truly remarkable incidents in human consciousness.

Evidence is what we think it to be. We cannot depend on our physical senses, and throughout most of human history we had no dependable measuring devices to prove all sorts of things. First of all, we are satisfied that we live in a world that is solid, walking upon solid earth, sitting on sturdy chairs in durable structures. Yet most people today accept that our senses deceive us, that these physical surroundings are incredibly lacking in substance. Each atom is enormously empty, thrashing around at a tremendous rate, in spite of the appearance that the ground below us is firm. Likewise, our senses do not tell us that we are on a rotating globe whirling around its orbit in a vast galaxy that is hurtling toward some remote destiny beyond our comprehension; but we accept that as true.

We accept that our five familiar senses tell us only a tiny fraction of what constitutes our existence. Our eyes and brain pick up only a narrow portion of the electromagnetic spectrum. We cannot hear the cries of the bat as it maneuvers in darkness; our senses of touch, taste, and smell are not difficult to deceive. True, we have devices that expand our senses into the infrared, ultraviolet, and ultrasonic, as well as microscopes, telescopes, radar, time-lapse photography, etc. These, if we wish to say so, provide evidence that can then be transmitted over great distance by invisible, unsmelt, unheard, and unfelt electromagnetic waves.

We might do well, then, to ask whether in seeking evidence we must not first admit that our consciousness or experience is simply not designed to provide such proof. On far more levels than the singular, "I think, therefore I am," we may assert that what we experience, is.

At a certain point we must begin to reckon with the sort of evidence that is being sought. Blackmore's article includes the rather astonishing statement that "if nothing leaves the body in an OBE, then there is nothing to survive, and the OBE cannot be cited as evidence for survival" (p. 142). That is like the assertion, "if I can't poke my finger through this stone, it must be solid."

But that is not intended as sufficient response to Blackmore's contentions. Various aspects of the subject deserve serious consideration, most notably, what is meant by the "thing" part of "nothing." Must it be visible or have weight? She refers to this "thing" no less than a half dozen times in the article, so it is a legitimate question; and a similar question could be raised about magnetism, gravity, x-rays, etc. These sorts of "things" are not easily measured by our thinking process any more than is that most exalted of all "things," life itself. Does life leave the body at the time of death? It certainly gives that impression. And

this is important because Blackmore's argument is that if something does not leave the body, the OBE offers no evidence of human survival.

Before getting into more serious analysis, it seems allowable to ask whether the "thing" that Blackmore could not imagine leaving would be visible. There have been numerous references to some "thing" described as a silver strand, like a supernatural extension cord connecting a power source to an airborne vehicle. Does it have weight or temperature? Is it a conductor or an insulator? A host of imponderables arise even before we contemplate the astral body itself.

The astral body concept has been given much attention over the ages, and it is a semantic question when this "thing" is also called a soul. Rather than seeking an observable or measurable "thing" that is *in* a human body during life, *out* of the same body when death occurs, and on occasion travelling *in and out* to bring about an OBE or NDE, should we not look for other forms of evidence?

It is legitimate to note that many modern concepts are based on tenuous evidence. The DNA helix became a useful model without being seen or weighed. The mystifying tracks in atomic cloud chambers are cited as evidence of numerous subatomic properties of matter and energy. The evidence of modern medicine includes symptoms of pain, dizziness, weakness, and nausea, "things" (which, incidentally, come and go in the body) that are more related to consciousness than to physical anatomy.

But evidence takes other forms, too. Perhaps the most impressive evidence of the validity of the NDE is not only its repeatability, in that millions of people of all sorts have strikingly similar NDEs, but that the variety of experiences is so harmonious. Nearly everyone dreams, yet how many people have the same dreams? That simple fact speaks against a broad range of "hallucination" and "imagination" arguments. Thoughtful people, too, would consider it evidence that, unlike dreams, these experiences produce observable changes in the experiencers' lives. Often these experiences are vividly remembered over periods of many years; yet few of us could remember a dream from last month.

But the evidence goes far beyond that. There is much that is evidential in the vast treasure of ancient tombs, monuments, and temples. From a practical, economic, or physical point of view, it is hard to imagine why ancient people would labor with incomprehensible zeal to construct enormous and magnificent pyramids, ziggurats, and tombs unless they had reason to believe in something beyond physical death. To them, at least, there was certainly evidence.

Less impressive physically, there is astonishing evidence, too, in the

surviving stories and legends and beliefs, spoken or written, that proclaim through the ages that there was some sort of evidence that this enormous expenditure of energy was for a purpose. A thoughtful reading of the thanatological literature and of the Bible reveals that visions of a being of light, and a life beyond that of the physical body, are not phenomena that emerged in our lifetime.

If anything, we can say that people tended to keep quiet and not acknowledge their experiences until the surge of evidence that they were not going out of their minds. We can assert, then, that there is an abundance of evidence that people have OBEs and NDEs; but Blackmore's contention remains that this does not prove survival. She is absolutely correct, but is it for the reasons that she thinks? The lack of evidence, I contend, is for another reason.

As a Swedenborgian, my own special interest in the NDE is not only my acceptance of it as a glimpse into life after death, but also my firm conviction that there is a purpose, an order and reason why such experiences do occur (Rhodes, 1982). Personal religious beliefs do not lend themselves really to brief explanations, but let me simply assert that Our Heavenly Father, the Creator and Ruler of the Universe, is running the show far more than we can comprehend. Such things as NDEs are not aberrations, accidents, or meaningless events. Swedenborgians believe that God is meticulously guiding each of us toward a blessed destiny ("heaven") except to the extent that we choose to reject that guidance. The OBE, then, is one of the countless ways in which our God infuses into our minds ideas that can further our development into full human beings.

In other words, experiences enable us to learn something that will contribute to our eternal welfare. I believe that the large number of OBEs of great variety are telling us something, and we should be paying attention. Just about all of our experiences are provided in order that we can get a message, and thereby direct our courses and conduct our lives.

Next, and most importantly, Swedenborgians teach that our God is so concerned with our spiritual freedom that He will not permit anything that will compel us to believe. We cannot be compelled to love what is good and true, to love whatever God we believe in. We are human, and in the image and likeness of God, because of this God-given freedom. Careful thinking then leads us to the essential point that God will not compel us to believe in a life after death. He may hope that we will, and He may give us abundant evidence that there is a purpose to creation, but He simply will not compel our belief.

Ponder this a moment, and it will be fairly obvious that an all-wise God will arrange things so that we remain free to doubt, free to reject the evidence. No matter how vivid and emotionally convincing an NDE, we will remain free to dismiss it as some sort of hallucination. It follows, then, that it is a quality in ourselves that, no matter what the experience, will make it possible for us to reject the sights and emotions and derive no harm or benefit from even such a traumatic moment as dying. Or, we can cherish this new memory and let it play a part in our lives.

It is difficult to avoid the clear and simple implications in Luke 16:31, "And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

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Susan Blackmore Responds

To the Editor:

Leon Rhodes believes "that the large number of OBEs of great variety are telling us something, and we should be paying attention." I couldn't agree more.

But what comes of our attention is entirely different. Rhodes argues that God has control of our lives and can give the OBE as a glimpse of an afterlife—while not compelling us to believe in it. He further seems to accept that something leaves the body and survives after the death of that body. He awaits death with confidence that a further life follows.

I prefer to use my attention in two quite different ways: first by having OBEs and practicing altered states of consciousness, and sec-

ond by keeping on asking questions when explanations seem inadequate. In this way experience and explanation work on each other.

I would like to set the OBE in the context of the many experiences that occur during personal development, during training in meditation, when taking drugs (especially hallucinogens), and when facing death or other life crises. For those of us who seek explanations (and Rhodes is clearly one) there are generally three kinds.

First there are the occult or pseudo-scientific explanations. These are characterized by *ad hoc* multiplication of "new energies," "vibrations" or "forces unknown to science." While couched in apparently scientific terms they cannot be made to yield predictions and do little or no scientific work. Their great appeal is that they seem to account for the phenomenology of the experiences.

To someone who has had an OBE the idea of the astral body may make a lot of sense and give reassurance. However, the astral body is, as I have tried to show, a vacuous concept (Blackmore 1982). Rhodes points out that "The DNA helix became a useful model without being seen or weighed." Indeed it did. And that is precisely what the astral body fails to do. It is not a useful model. It explains nothing (e.g., why the OB world looks the way it does, why OBEs occur when they do, why one looks from above and not from across the room on the floor) and predicts nothing. I used the examples of weighing and seeing as possible predictions that have failed the test of experiment. For these reasons, and not without a little sadness, I reject the whole concept of astral projection.

The second type of explanation is the skeptical dismissive type. This is just as useless. In the case of OBEs one might say "they are just hallucinations," "just imagination," or, for those convinced of perception at a distance, "imagination plus ESP." The advantage of such "theories" is that no great revision of science is required. However no scientific work is done here either. Such theories cannot explain the phenomenology of the OBE and their predictions are limited.

Considering these all too common approaches makes it clear what the criteria should be for a really useful theory of the OBE. It should first account for the phenomenology (explain why the OBE is like it is and why it comes about, and make good sense to experiencers); second it should build on scientific understanding rather than rejecting it; and third it should provide helpful predictions.

I have proposed that the OBE occurs when a person's normal sense-based "model of reality" breaks down and a bird's eye view constructed from memory and imagination takes over as "real" (Blackmore 1984). I do not claim that this fulfills all the criteria of a good theory in one go.

Nevertheless, it does account for why the OBE seems so real, why the OB world has the features of "cognitive maps," why experiments searching for an astral body or astral vision have failed, and what conditions can initiate and end an OBE. It has also led to predictions, such as that people with good spatial imagery skills and those who are better able to switch viewpoints in imagery should be more likely to report OBEs. These predictions have been confirmed (Blackmore 1987; Irwin 1986). It is also competing with other related theories, such as Irwin's "synaesthetic model of the OBE" (Irwin 1985). In other words, we can make progress with such theories.

The same three approaches can be applied, for example, to the tunnel experience. It is not helpful to compare the tunnel to the birth canal or make it a path to another life (Sagan 1977; Blackmore 1988). It is equally pointless to call it "just imagination." However, recent theories that explain how it arises from the structure of the visual cortex make a genuine contribution to our understanding of NDEs (Blackmore 1988; Cowan 1982).

Experiences of oneness, cosmic consciousness, self-transcendence, and emptiness may look harder to tackle, but the same principles apply.

I am acutely aware that some readers will take this approach as some kind of denial of the validity of the OBE, and indeed of all sorts of experiences that they find spiritually or personally important. No such denial is intended, nor does it follow from what I have said.

Seeing the OBE as a purely psychological phenomenon, as an "illusion of reality," puts it in a most interesting perspective. There are many experiences that contribute to a person dropping the usual illusion that we are independent selves inhabiting bodies and separate from the world around us. The OBE can be one such experience. It can make the physical body seem unimportant, one's daily desires and intrigues trivial, and a world other than the sensory world seem "real." However, it is a very limited step. The usual body is replaced by a replica, and the world around just seen from a different viewpoint. For some it can be a stepping stone, however. The replica can be dropped, the imagined world allowed to dissolve, and progress to less restricted states made.

These further steps are easier if you drop the astral projection notion, and they are helped by psychology's insight that the self and world are constructions of an information processing system. If OBEs "are telling us something" I think it is how strong is our tendency to hang onto our constructions of a self and its world.

This reminds me that, in many spiritual traditions, trainees are

advised to ignore such experiences if they wish to progress. A fruitful science of personal development will make the reason for this injunction quite obvious (Blackmore, in press). Although such work is in its infancy, it is certainly beginning (Wilber, Engler, & Brown, 1986).

The analogy with the three kinds of explanation should now be clear. The first is just like the clinging to that replica body. It replaces one world of bodies and objects with another, one self with another. The second also blocks further questioning by denying that the experience is interesting. Only the third (in its widest sense, not any one theory) really "pays attention." The person who tries this approach does not rest with easy "answers" and can only go on experiencing and questioning. In this way personal experience and science require the same skills, not to rest content with vacuous explanations and to keep on facing up to the phenomena.

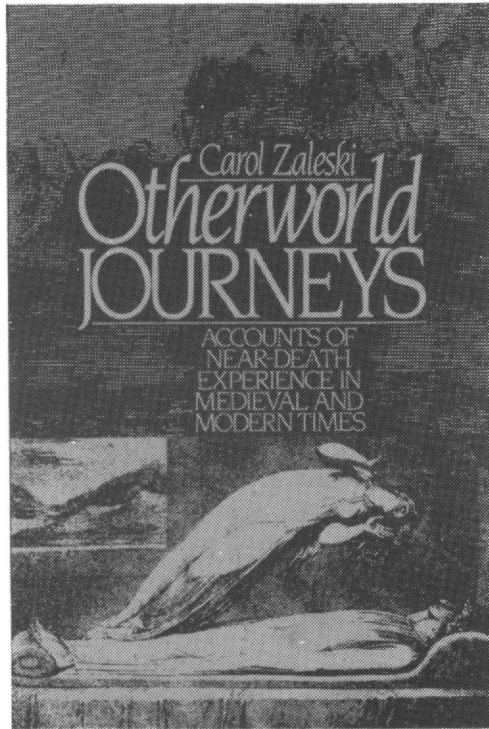
And what is the point of all this? Unlike Rhodes, I do not assume that life has a purpose nor any goal. I do not await death with any certainty of an afterlife. Indeed, I rather imagine that with practice I might die before my physical body rather than afterwards.

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