ANABIOSIS
The Journal for Near-Death Studies

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THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR NEAR-DEATH STUDIES
ANABIOSIS

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Anabiosis—"A restoring to life from a death-like condition; resuscitation."

*Anabiosis—The Journal for Near-Death Studies* is a semi-annual periodical whose principal purpose is to publish articles concerned with near-death experiences and allied phenomena. Although the Journal will consider for publication any worthwhile manuscript from professionals or lay persons, it particularly welcomes submissions from scholars, scientists, researchers, and practitioners whose work is concerned with the study of human consciousness as it affected by the prospect or occurrence of death. The Journal will publish articles dealing directly with near-death experiences as well as with such related phenomena as (1) out-of-body experiences; (2) deathbed visions; (3) experiences of dying persons, or those in contact with them, prior to the onset of death; and (4) experiences of persons following the death of another. The Journal may publish articles on other topics or experiences if such articles make a definite contribution to the understanding of the experience and meaning of death (for example, experiences suggestive of reincarnation).

Concerning the types of articles the Journal will publish, it specifically encourages submissions in the following categories: (1) research reports; (2) theoretical or conceptual statements; (3) papers expressing a particular scientific, philosophic, religious or historical perspective on the study of near-death experiences; (4) cross-cultural studies; (5) individual case histories with instructive unusual features; and (6) personal accounts of near-death experiences or related phenomena.

Finally, the Journal invites contributions from professionals and lay persons, whatever their background or orientation, but particularly from persons in the fields of medicine, nursing, psychology, parapsychology, sociology, philosophy, and religion. The Journal is especially interested in soliciting manuscripts (in English) from persons living outside the United States of America. The Journal has no commitment to any particular position on or interpretation of near-death experiences (and related phenomena) and specifically encourages an exchange of a variety of perspectives on these issues.

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Editor's Foreword

As *Anabiosis* enters its fifth year of publication, we find ourselves exploring new formats within the journal, while maintaining our diversity of content and viewpoint. In this issue we continue and expand our Letters to the Editor section, initiated successfully in our last number, and we launch our first extended-length book review, Michael Grosso's comprehensive analysis of and perspective on Kenneth Ring's *Heading Toward Omega*. The remaining contents of this issue reflect the broadening range of near-death studies today: Carl Becker's comparative study of NDEs in light of Tibetan mystical tradition; V. Krishnan's most sophisticated philosophical consideration to date of the evidential value of the NDE; Martin Bauer's empirical study of life attitude changes following contemporary NDEs; and Howard Mickel's review of a state-of-the-art anthology, Bruce Greyson and Charles Flynn's *The Near-Death Experience: Problems, Prospects, Perspectives*. Our goal and intent in future issues of *Anabiosis* is to continue to publish the best scholarly literature on near-death and related phenomena, covering the greatest possible variety of viewpoints and methodologies, while continuing to experiment with innovative ways in which to present that material. We welcome readers' comments and suggestions as to alternative approaches and formats.

Bruce Greyson
Views from Tibet: NDEs and the Book of the Dead

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ABSTRACT
This article presents a Tibetan perspective on near-death experiences (NDEs) and life after death. Tibetans have been concerned with death and deathbed visions from ancient times. After reviewing the beliefs of the Bon religion and of Vajrayana Buddhism, this article focuses on the theories of the Tibetan Bardo Thodol or Book of the Dead (Evans-Wentz, 1957). Many similarities to modern NDE reports are noted, including hearing a noise and moving through darkness into light, out-of-body-type experiences, heavenly and hellish deities and scenery, life-review and judgment, etc. It is seen that the Tibetan Buddhist philosophical idealism, while challenging traditional paradigms, has potential to explain some previously inadequately understood NDE findings such as personal and cultural variations.

THE TIBETAN WORLD-VIEW

Tibet's unique geographical setting has strongly influenced its philosophy and history. Occupying over a million square miles in the middle of the Asian continent, Tibet is severely isolated from its neighbors by the Himalaya and Kunlun mountain ranges. Although its snows feed the Mekong, Brahmaputra, Indus, Yang-tse, and other major rivers, the mountains block the monsoons from the south, so annual rainfall is extremely low. Therefore the Tibetans can raise few crops, and must depend largely on nomadic sheep- and yak-herding for their livelihoods. Tibet's barren plateaux range from 11,000 to 18,000 feet in altitude, where oxygen is too thin for the unacclimated visitor. Because of the extreme altitude, the daily sun is very strong, but temperatures at night plunge to freezing even in summer. The winter adds to sub-zero temperatures the perils of blizzards, hailstorms, and windstorms carrying abrasive gravel and destructive stones. Thus, the land has never been particularly hospitable, and this environment early gave rise to its inhabitants' beliefs in malevolent

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powers greater than man. More than in other countries, the unusual environmental conditions of Tibet have been a strong influence on the philosophy and world-views of its people (Tucci, 1967, pp. 19-24). The nomadic, meat-eating habits of the Tibetans stand in obvious opposition to the lifestyle of semitropical India. Since fuel is scarce and boiling temperatures are lower at high altitudes, boiling is the chief means of cooking, further robbing the Tibetans' limited diet of needed nutrients. Taken together, a poor diet, severe climate, lack of oxygen, and frequent bouts with plagues early disposed Tibetans to take for granted many hallucinatory and paranormal experiences. This in turn led to their ready acceptance of philosophies that explained and situated such phenomena in a coherent picture of the universe. The first of these systematized philosophies was known as the Bon.

**Bon: Pre-Buddhist Tibetan Philosophy and Religion**

Like early Chinese philosophies, the Bon religion held that there were twin spirits in man (pho-lha and dGralha), which cooperate to protect and govern him, and which depart at death for other realms (Hoffman, 1961, pp. 17-23). If not properly exorcised and sent off, the disembodied spirits of man were said to haunt his former habitation shortly after death (Ekvall, 1964, p. 39). Malevolent spirits of the air, earth, and water were held to cause sickness and death unless propitiated by human or animal sacrifices (replaced by effigies after the advent of Buddhism). After death, the souls of virtuous people were thought to ascend to Heaven, while wicked souls were condemned by the lord of demons, rTsiu (Yama), to vividly described hells (Hoffman, 1975, pp. 94-100).

To assist the soul in its postmortem adventures, the corpse was carefully buried with clothes and provisions (a striking contrast to the later Buddhist practices of cremation or dismemberment and exposure!). The Bon believed that shamans could communicate with the spirits of the dead through trance-possession and could visit the world of the dead and return. These ideas persisted, to influence the Tibetan interpretation of Tantric Buddhism when it arrived (Nenesky-Wojkowitz, 1956, pp. 414-440).

It would be unfair to dismiss Bon as mere animism. From ancient times, the Bon religion accorded a central role to death and funeral ceremonies. Tibetan Buddhism was to continue this theme in a way quite foreign to Indian Buddhism. The un-Buddhist Bon notions that there is an intermediate period during which the soul may return, that
there is a judgment followed by heavens and hells, and that living men can communicate with the dead, all find their places in Tibetan Buddhism. Guiseppe Tucci claimed that the original ideas of hell came from India, but that the Tibetans supplemented the Indians’ visions of “hot hells” with their own “cold hells,” founded on their own deathbed experiences:

The Tibetan, with his tendency to the macabre, drew an even grimmer picture of hot and cold hells and frightful tortures which are dwelt on in a hair-raising literature, the delo. This is a series of accounts given by those who, on the brink of death, caught a glimpse of life beyond the tomb, but then returned to tell of the terrifying things they saw. (Tucci, 1967, p. 165)

Within the early Tibetan folk tradition, there are also many accounts of those who died, passed on to judgment and hell, and returned to life to describe their experiences a few days later (Waddell, 1934, p. 562). Again, there are descriptions of yogic masters who went to the Tusita heavens to commune with their dead masters while in trance (Waddell, 1934, p. 128), and then returned to normal waking life in this world, following the example of Asanga, founder of the yogacara school of Buddhism (Hoffman, 1961, p. 167). There was widespread agreement within Bon and popular Buddhism that prayer services and ceremonies could vicariously assist the progress of departed souls, paralleling the Ulambana (Jap.: O-bon) services in China and Japan (Waddell, 1934, pp. 217, 493). Such facts tend to refute the Christian prejudice that similarities in liturgy and doctrine concerning the afterlife must be borrowings from the Christian tradition; after all, Christianity did not even reach the borders of Tibet until the fifteenth century (Ellam, 1927, pp. 34ff.).

The important point here is that the Tibetans, like the Chinese before them, did not merely adopt Buddhism in its entirety out of political or aesthetic considerations. They accepted Buddhism only insofar as it clarified processes they already knew and illustrated new truths they had not yet verbalized. An oversimplified view might suggest that Buddhism brought the Tibetans their views of heaven, hell, and afterlife. The above evidence documents that such views predated Buddhism and modified it based on the real deathbed experiences of the Tibetan people.

Vajrayana Buddhism

Buddhism is commonly divided into Hinayana (lesser vehicle) Buddhism of Southeast Asia, and Mahayana (greater vehicle)
Buddhism of East Asia. The third of the *yanas* (or "vehicles") of Buddhism, and last in its philosophical and chronological development, was the *Vajrayana* or *Tantrayana*. Vajra means diamond, and symbolizes the indestructible, absolute, or void. Tantra means thread or cord, referring to the uninterrupted chain of teachers who supposedly passed these teachings down from generation to generation. In short, the Vajrayana or Tantrayana is an esoteric philosophy bordering on mystery religion. It is passed on orally from master to disciple, and is primarily concerned with self-identification with the absolute. To achieve this understanding of the absolute, it advocates *mantras* (spells) and *mudras* (hand gestures) as well as yogic meditation (Hoffman, 1975, pp. 115-125).

Since Vajrayana Buddhism depends on a lineage of teachers and disciples, it has directed more attention to the personalities of its various teachers than to their doctrinal disagreements. Buddhism was first formally introduced to Tibet in the years 747-749 A.D. by Rinpoche (Padma Sambhava), a monk from the Indian university of Nalanda. Buddhism faced repeated opposition from both native Tibetan priesthood and government until the eleventh century, when Atisa, Marpa, and other teachers arrived from India to create vigorous new sects of Tibetanized Buddhism. Meanwhile, previous Bon-Buddhists "discovered" hidden sutras (texts) on which they based new claims for tradition and superior authority.

Mythologically, Vajrayana Buddhism developed a system of five great Buddhas, lords of the four directions and the center, viz.: Vairocana, Akshobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amoghasiddhi, and Amitabha. These are all taken to be visible manifestations of the ineffable and primordial *Adibuddha*, the void or absolute. Other buddhas and bodhisattvas, such as Avalokitesvara, Maitreya, and their female counterparts, also are said to exist on this level (Tucci, 1967, pp. 73-78).

The *trikaya* (three-body) doctrine is central to Vajrayana philosophy. These three bodies point to different levels of reality (Evans-Wentz, 1935, p. 232f.). Ultimately the only reality is Mind, the Absolute, formless Truth and Light, the body of Principle, or *dharma-kaya*. Buddhas and bodhisattvas possess bodies of spirit and light, which may seem to have form, but are essentially projections of the *dharma* body. This shape and form of spiritual beings just short of total selfless nirvana is called the *sambhogakaya*, or spirit body. Finally, there is the material level of the *nirmanakaya*, the body in which men and animals, mountains and dreams are experienced.
This nirmanakaya realm, although analogous to the world of philosophical realists, differs from it in two important respects. First, it includes levels of "subtle matter," invisible to our eyes but equally real, in which exist demons, ghosts, titans, and gods. (These four classes, added to men and animals, comprise the six worlds of animate existence in the material world, according to Buddhism). These semi-divine beings are unlike bodhisattvas on the sambhogakaya level in that they are still composed of subtle substances and thus still subject to laws of causation, decay, and rebirth. Then the Vajrayana teaching goes one step further: it asserts that all phenomena and experiences are no more than the illusory projections of consciousness; the material level is only a grosser distortion of truth and reality than the spiritual level.

In this view, there is a sense in which any experience is just as real as any other, whether apparently internal and hallucinatory, or ostensibly external and objective. All that is ultimately real and continuous of the individual person is the pure subject, the “mind-store” (alaya-vijnana)—although that too changes. It is this mind or alaya-vijnana that experiences, judges, contemplates, and remembers, thus constituting the locus of identity and continuity through the lives of many bodies, or “lifetimes.”

This concept has tremendous implications for Vajrayana philosophy. Since all is in mind, then the process of death and rebirth is no longer an inevitable aspect of an external reality to which everyone must submit. It becomes unnecessary to undergo a long succession of lifetimes, for by changing one’s conscious thoughts, the whole sequence can be broken or abridged. Even the law of karma is elevated to an entirely different level. No longer do physical actions require inevitable physical effects. Rather, mental acts are all that have any effects at all, whether in apparently external happenings, or in apparently internal visions. Karmic determination of an individual’s future good or ill can thus also be avoided or aborted by mental concentration and purification.

To effect this change of consciousness prerequisite to nirvana, mantras, mudras, and samadhi are prescribed. Here too, the Vajrayana departs from the orthodox schools of yoga, in allowing the consumption of meat, wine, and even sexual intercourse with women. At each step, it encourages the realization that none of these phenomena are ultimately real or pleasurable. Under the tutelage of a Vajrayana Lama (guru), the student expects to develop psychic powers (siddhis), to leave his body, and to become able to experience the Absolute in trance. Thus he can prepare himself for the moment of death,
when he will direct his consciousness out of his body for the last time, and into final union with Truth, the Dharma, rather than succumbing to any further cycles of rebirth (Evans-Wentz, 1935, pp. 237f, 254).

The vastness of Tibet, the repeated introductions of Buddhism by different Indian monks in different regions, and the varying degrees of assimilation of the old Bon religion into the new Vajrayana Buddhism—all these factors account for the development of numerous schools of Buddhism within Tibet. There are several excellent histories of Tibetan Buddhism that treat these thoroughly (Hoffman, 1961; Waddell, 1932, pp. 10-77; Tucci, 1967, pp. 24-60). More important to us is the fact that all the sects came to use the same Book of the Dead as the central scripture concerning death, dying, and the states immediately following death. More than any other Buddhist text, this book purports to explain the experiences of consciousness after the death of the body, so it is of particular interest to near-death researchers.

TIBETAN BUDDHIST VIEWS OF POSTMORTEM EXPERIENCE

Origins and Background

While early Buddhism tended to deny the possibility of disembodied consciousness between death and rebirth, the Buddhist tradition soon developed the idea of just such an intermediate state after death, called antarabhava in Sanskrit. This state was little discussed, but it accounted for the personal and psychic continuity needed between a person's death and the rebirth of that person's consciousness in another body. Since Vajrayana Buddhism had already rehabilitated the soul, alias the alaya-vijnana, which was thought to continue from one body to another, it was natural that it should also welcome the concept of an intermediate state between incarnations. The Tibetans called this state the bardo.

The sutra called the Bardo Thodol (or thosgroll) is a text for “salvation by Hearing while in the Intermediate State” (Hoffman, 1975, p. 162). It is read to the dying or dead person to explain to the soul the various phenomena it will encounter and to encourage it to a desirable rebirth. The text of the Bardo Thodol, or Book of the Dead, as it is commonly translated, purports to date back to the founder of Tibetan Buddhism, Padma Sambhava himself. There is no doubt that the teachings therein are of great age, for both the imagery and philosophy show many traces of Bon influence. How-
ever, the first known use of the Book dates to the eleventh century, when it was “miraculously discovered” among the many “treasure writings” (gTermas) that the lamas claimed Padma Sambhava had buried for posterity (Hoffman, 1961, p. 64). Some of these treasure writings were obviously fakes designed to lend an aura of authenticity to the old Nying-ma-pa school, in the face of Buddhist reform and innovation in the eleventh century.

Doubts of its authorship notwithstanding, the Book of the Dead gained wide acceptance among all the major Tibetan Buddhist sects, in very similar versions, showing its inherent compatibility with the Tibetan world-view. Lama Govinda’s statement is representative of the general view of Tibetans:

The descriptions of those visions which, according to the Bardo Thodol, appear in the intermediate state (bardo) following death are neither primitive folklore nor theological speculations. They are not concerned with the appearances of supernatural beings, like gods, spirits, or genii, but with the visible projections or reflexes of inner processes, experiences, and states of mind, produced in the creative phase of meditation. . . . The Bardo Thodol is first of all a book of the living, to prepare them not only for the dangers of death, but to give them an opportunity to make use of the great possibilities which offer themselves in the moment of relinquishing the body. (Govinda, 1960, pp. 122-123)

In short, the sacred text was thought to have been verified by the meditations of yogins in this lifetime, and it held out the invitation to test its truth by similar practices of meditation. Thus it served simultaneously as a description of what dying people and yogins in death-like trances have experienced, and also as a guide on how to deal with such experiences in one’s own meditations and finally in death.

Traditional Deathbed Practices

The mind or soul (Tibetan: sems) is held to linger around its corpse for several days after the cessation of breathing. While unable to speak, it can see and hear all that goes on. So the Book of the Dead is read in the home in the presence of the corpse (and soul) to protect and encourage it. Even when the soul goes through terrifying or surrealistic visual experiences, it is said that it can still hear the Book being read, echoing like a soundtrack behind the other-worldly visual imagery that it experiences.

In fact, actual practices at death are not so simple or unified. It is not unusual to find several services conducted at once: a Bon
service chasing evil spirits out of the house and convincing the spirit of the dead person that it is indeed dead and must leave; a Pure Land service invoking Amida to come to the deathbed and escort the soul of the believer to heaven (see Becker, 1981); and a Bardo service occupying one or several weeks, in which the Book is read to guard and guide the soul through its immediate postmortem adventures (Waddell, 1934, pp. 789-793). These practices are not as contradictory as they might seem, for the Bardo allows each soul its choice from among these options: to become a ghost, to be reborn in the Pure Land, or to transcend everything. These variations depend upon the spiritual advancement of the deceased: the average person experiences a loss of consciousness before waking in the Bardo state; gods and gurus may come to greet the especially pious person at the deathbed, and trained yogins will pass directly into higher states with no loss of consciousness (Evans-Wentz, 1935, pp. 234-236).

The moments immediately surrounding death are sometimes said to be accompanied by a tremendous roaring and crashing sound, by flashes of light and periods of darkness. Commentators consider these to be the physiological side effects of the dissociation of the consciousness from the body, a physically but not spiritually important phenomenon (Evans-Wentz, 1935, pp. 237-243). The location from which the sems, or semimaterial consciousness, leaves the corpse is considered highly important. There are said to be nine places from which the soul may leave the body, but it will fall into subhuman wombs unless it leaves by the parietal aperture (at the top of the skull). This is the rationale given for not allowing anyone to touch the corpse except for the priests, who try to coax out the soul by pulling some hairs from the top of the head (Waddell, 1934, pp. 488-489).

The departure of the soul at death is thought to be identical to the departure of the soul discussed in the literature of OBEs and "astral projection," feats commonly attributed to accomplished yogins (Evans-Wentz, 1935, p. 170). When the consciousness is transferred out of the body, in a process called pho-wa in Tibetan, it is thought to be able to travel freely over distances, or to take up the dead body of some other creature. Meditative pho-wa, or "soul travel," is considered very dangerous; it is only to be undertaken by the adept under the careful guidance of a guru, while someone else remains to protect the original body (Hoffman, 1975, p. 153).

The important point is that in both yoga and Buddhism, the processes involved in meditative travel and in death are essentially alike. The only major difference between the yogic trance and death
is that in trance, the soul returns to its body after its sojourns, while in death it cannot do so.

The Three Stages of the Bardo

According to the Book of the Dead, there are three stages to the Bardo, or intermediate disembodied state following death. Each of these stages corresponds to an opportunity to enter a different level of existence in an ontologically different form, viz.: dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, and nirmanakaya (Evans-Wentz, 1935, p. 232).

The first stage is called the Chikhai Bardo. There,

At the moment of death, the empiric consciousness, or consciousness of objects, is lost. This is what is popularly called a "swoon," which is however the corollary of super-consciousness itself, or of the Clear Light of the Void. . . . This empiric consciousness disappears, unveiling Pure Consciousness, which is ever ready to be "discovered" by those who have the will to seek and the power to find it. That clear, colourless Light is a sense-symbol of the formless Void. . . . consciousness freed of all limitation... Nirvana. (Woodroffe, 1957, pp. lxxi-lxxiv.)

These visions of pure light may be accompanied by "such a dazzlement as is produced by an infinitely vibrant landscape in the Springtide" (Woodroffe, 1957, p. lxxiii). Or it may remind one of transparent moonlight, sometimes mistaken for heaven; but it is most often analogized to a blindingly open clear sky (Evans-Wentz, 1935, p. 236, Evans-Wentz, 1957, p. 91). The dying consciousness is advised to identify itself with this light and abandon all traces of self-identification or self-consciousness. Some observers take the halo around a dying saint to be evidence of such identification with the absolute Truth and Light. For the enlightened saint or yogin, this is the consummation of existence: personal consciousness is transcended, temporality is no more, and there is only the unqualifiable Suchness of Nirvana. Lesser yogins or blessed people may be able to retain this vision of the light for several days, but they are eventually pulled away from it by their desires and deluded habits of thinking. For still others, this experience may be no more than a brief flash or glimpse of light (Woodroffe, 1957.) Bound by their karmic cravings and habits of believing in illusions, they regress downward to other levels.

In the second stage, called the Chonyid Bardo, the consciousness clothes itself with a psychically projected body resembling the physical body it had once projected on this material plane. Over the
course of seven days, seven benign Buddhas appear to the consciousness (the pentad mentioned above, then the Buddha representing the combined deities of the six material realms, and finally the Buddha representing "wisdom holding deities"). Each of these Buddhas is symbolized as a blinding colored light, and with imagery like that of the Tibetan tanka paintings. Again, the soul is urged to identify with these lights, for these are seven last chances to bring itself into spiritual oneness with these Buddhas. If successful, it may dwell indefinitely on their higher planes as a bodhisattva, with no need for further rebirth, and with ideal conditions for progress towards final nirvana. On the other hand, if at any point it is repelled by these visions (because of its recognition of its own impurities), or is more attracted to the dull lights of the lower sensual realms in the opposite direction, it will be reborn into one of the six realms of worldly existence. There is some disagreement among the various sects as to exactly what the order of appearance and the colors of the seven Buddhas are, but this question is of little importance to our study now (Govinda, 1960, pp. 249-252).

If the dead person's consciousness has passed through these seven days of Buddha-manifestations and has neither been able to identify with any of their luminosities nor has fled to any lower realm, then it is confronted with another seven periods in which terrifying deities appear. The Book encourages the soul to see these gruesome apparitions also as mere projections of its own subconsciousness, and to embrace and absorb them without fear, rather than accepting their appearance as reality and fleeing from them. Catholic interpreter Tucci explained:

The forces thus represented are present in all of us, and go to make up our personality of which they form the underlying pattern; they are therefore also the means of salvation, when our gnosis, on understanding their nature, absorbs them. This is the knowledge that annihilates, bringing us back from the apparent to the real, a return to our origin. . . . When recognition is absent, such visions would be regarded as the god of death, and death would be believed to be a reality, and the dead man caught up in the succeeding phases of the karmic process. (Tucci, 1967, p. 89)

These terrifying apparitions must not be thought of as the evil counterparts of the previous "good" Buddhas, for in Vajrayana Buddhism, there is neither good nor evil. In fact, both the Buddhas and these Herukas, or lords of death, are no more than the projections of the subconscious mind of the deceased. One can attain spiritual rebirth by knowing that all is spirit, by identifying with
these brilliant or terrifying images and granting neither them nor oneself any objective reality. If the consciousness has still been unable to yogically identify itself with any of these apparitions during the first two weeks after death, it then proceeds still further into a period of prematerial existence.

The third period, called the *Sidpa Bardo*, depicts the consciousness clad in a body of subtle matter. Conscious of the material world (and its six realms), the soul has the powers of astral projection, such as moving at will through objects and across distances instantaneously. The consciousness first perceives its old home and family in mourning, and tries to convince them that it has not died, but to no avail (Evans-Wentz, 1957, pp. 160-166). Unable to reenter its cremated or dismembered corpse, blown by the “winds” of karma, it wanders forth feeling homeless and miserably alone, realizing for the first time that it is dead to other humans. It may try to rest in graveyards or temples, but as its nature is pure consciousness, which it has not yet learned how to calm or control, it may not rest for long in any one spot. The *Book* predicts visions of fearful precipices and chasms and feelings of being crushed or squeezed into crevices.

Finally, the soul perceives the lord of death and his demons come to judge it (Hoffman, 1975, p. 162). It sees its good and evil deeds weighed before it, and feels itself hacked and racked by demons. Since its new body is a mental projection, it is not destroyed, but continues to feel these (self-) punishments as long as the reality of that body and its sins are adhered to. Finally it is released, only to be pursued by furies across many strange landscapes prior to material rebirth.

At any point in this last process of the *Sidpa Bardo*—whether as a disembodied soul, as a judged and tortured being, or as a spirit pursued by furies—it may yet escape. It may transcend the whole illusion of misery and suffering by fixing its mind on Amida, Kwan-yin, or any other patron bodhisattva. If it can hold such imagery in its mind, it can cast out all other self-created imagery of fearful visions, and it may yet rise to the Pure Land or Tusita heavens to meditate in the company of the saints and avoid further rebirth. However, it is much harder to hold an image of Amida in mind while one imagines oneself being tortured, than when that image presents itself vividly and naturally in the *Chonyid Bardo* stage. Therefore not many are able to reach transcendence at the *Sidpa* stage, although the *Book* is read as a spur in that direction.
The more average consciousness, after a seemingly endless period of tortures (which actually take place in a few weeks of human time), again finds itself looking at the six material realms, now chastised in spirit. Premonitory scenes of different landscapes indicate the type of body into which its consciousness will be reborn. Seeing beautiful bodies in the sex act, it is drawn towards its old pastime, and finds itself drawn into a womb of its own choosing. Some interpreters say that it may be drawn into animal or divine wombs depending on its flight from the furies; others, that all rebirth at this point is on human level (Evans-Wentz, 1957, pp. 180-185). The Book urges the consciousness (if it is still listening at all!) not to choose by physical attraction, but to choose a home with parents of pious character and adequate wealth to permit their offspring to follow the yogic religious path and progress yet higher in the next round of existence (Evans-Wentz, 1935, p. 246).

The Death of Great Souls

The saints and yogins go directly to nirvana or become bodhisattvas in the higher heavens at their deaths. The “great incarnation” lamas—the spiritual and secular heads of the great lamaseries and districts of Tibet—are said to have a somewhat different mode of progress. The Dalai (political head) and Panchen (spiritual head) lamas are thought to be the material manifestations of the bodhisattvas Kwan-yin and Amida, respectively. Accordingly, they undergo no illusory visions during the 49-day period during which average souls are said to wander through the three Bardos. Before their deaths, they indicate the region of the country and the characteristics of the family into which they plan to be reborn. After they die, families expecting babies in those regions are sought out. Babies showing miraculous signs 49 days after the lama’s passing are inspected for birthmarks and other similarities to the departed lama (Hoffman, 1975, p. 167). They are then placed in a room with a number of sacred objects, some of which had belonged to the previous lama (Ellam, 1927, pp. 42-43). The baby who shows the most marked preference for those objects alone is then singled out for special attention. The priests put the child to further tests of identity, while conducting divination and prayer ceremonies, and the country or diocese is temporarily ruled by regents. The body of the departed predecessor is carefully preserved in a chorten (stupa).

At the age of four, the chosen child assumes the garb and tonsure
of a monk; at eight, he is made abbot of a convent; and at eighteen, he is installed with the full powers of the highest lama (Waddell, 1934, pp. 229-253). Thus, there is a sense in which the highest lamas are never discarnate from the world for more than 49 days. This is only possible because the bodhisattvas Amida and Kwan-yin are miraculously able to maintain both a nirmanakaya (fleshly body) in this world and a sambhogakaya (spiritual body) in their respective Buddha-ksetra (heavens) simultaneously.

Although this practice of reincarnation lamas dates back only about 500 years, it is sometimes accompanied by such miraculous occurrences that even critical Western observers have been impressed (David-Neel, 1931, pp. 122ff). While there are elaborate ceremonies surrounding the deaths of incarnate lamas, there is no need for others to read to them from the Book of the Dead, since they already know the idealistic landscapes to come and how to deal with them (Waddell, 1934, p. 494).

The Book of the Dead, then, is not a Dantian description of eternal heavens and hells. Rather, it is a chronological review of the gateways to numerous postmortem levels of experience during the intermediate state between incarnations, usually 28 to 49 days. Its imagery incorporates all of the possible afterlives that Buddhists have yet envisioned: total transcendence into nirvana; ascension to heavenly Pure Lands; life-review, judgment, and torture; disembodied existence as an invisible ghost; rebirth in this or other worlds. Its reconciliation of so many traditions is based, not on crude eclecticism alone, but on a profound philosophy of absolute idealism, buttressed by a long tradition of experience in yogic meditation (Govinda, 1960, p. 125).

The thrust of Vajrayana philosophy is that all meditative and postmortem visions are mentally projected images. (We may recall H. H. Price’s [1953] discussions of postmortem image-worlds and the inability of dead people to believe that they had died—paralleled by the experiences predicted in the Book of the Dead.) This does not mean that imaginary experiences are less important, however, because the experiences of this present world are held to be equally illusory from an enlightened perspective! (Evans-Wentz, 1935, p. 167)

Vajrayana Buddhists say that any explanation of reality based on the physical senses or on the appearances of the material world is ultimately doomed to failure. Although there is some measure of shared illusion (intersubjectivity) on each level, the laws and structures of any given realm may be violated at will by one who has yogically perfected his mind and come to know their unreality. The
Tibetans can also explain their siddhas, or miracle-working lamas and yogins, on this model. This philosophy allows students of the Book of the Dead to predict that the heavens, judgments, or ghostly scenarios described by other religions may have equal claims to (provisional) validity.

**Theoretical Implications for NDEs**

The Tibetan Book of the Dead, while based on centuries of meditation and deathbed experiences, cannot be proven true or false at this point. However, if it were accepted as providing a widely applicable description of afterdeath experiences, it would explain some otherwise inexplicable observations made of near-death experiencers in America. Let us dare to speculate about a few of these possibilities:

First, the majority of near-death experiencers in the West report either OBEs, passing through darkness to meet a figure of light, heavenly scenery, or some combination of these. While some fundamentalist researchers have sought reports of hellish visions as well (Rawlings, 1978), the preponderance of reports are of beatific visions. According to the Book of the Dead, this may be due not to the benevolence of God nor to the absence of Hell, but to the order of postmortem experiences. In other words, heavenly visions occur in the first week after death, and hellish visions in the second. Indeed, this temporal sequence is taken very literally in Tibet, where the proper chapters are read into the ear of the corpse on the proper days after death, so that the soul, if it is listening, may be more wisely guided through the experiences that await it, and may choose a better rebirth, or none at all.

Since all of our resuscitated NDE reporters in America have been dead far less than a week, the Book of the Dead would lead us to predict that they should have beatific rather than hellish visions, which is in fact what they report. Now it may well be argued that the terms "week" or "second week" are not exact measurements; that people may pass through these stages at different rates, and therefore that some may experience hellish visions even if dead only briefly. But since the order of visions is from heavenly to hellish (which may in turn be followed by heavenly saviours or premonitions of reincarnation), it would stand to reason that more of those who revived would report the former than the latter. If the Book of the Dead is correct, some of those who remain dead are also passing through hellish visions (although they cannot report them to us)
unless they have already transcended to a higher existence.

Secondly, Ring (1980, p. 136) reported the surprising and inexplicable finding that those with prior knowledge of NDEs were less likely to experience them, and those with no prior knowledge were more likely to do so. The Tibetan tradition gives us some ways of approaching this problem as well. First it says that all such visions are mental projections of the percipient. It also holds that those who know what the postmortem experience is like (such as lamas) can thereby avoid the series of delusionary experiences that normal people undergo. By similar logic, those who have no knowledge about NDEs simply and naively project their own mental imagery onto the screen of their experience, and report such NDEs when they revive. Knowing nothing in advance about this phenomenon, expecting nothing, their consciousnesses simply manifest naturally their inner imagery, as we do when we dream. However, those with prior knowledge of NDEs may to some degree expect the NDE to happen to them, as if given from some external source. Since NDE visions are not given from some external source, but projected from within (if we accept the explanation of the Book of the Dead), then many of them await such experiences without generating or projecting anything on their own; and the result is that they experience nothing. If NDE visions are objective observations of another world, it is hard to explain why those with prior knowledge of NDEs have fewer such visions. If NDE visions are projections of personal imagination, then those without prior knowledge will allow their imaginations to run freely, hence experiencing prototypical NDEs. Those who expect the NDE to be given to them "from the outside" and simply wait for it to happen, however, will find that nothing occurs at all in their waiting minds—and they fail to report typical NDE visions.

Thirdly, the theory of the Book of the Dead that all such visions are projections of consciousness would help to explain the wide variation in details of visions among different persons and cultures, and would suggest that cultural conditioning may play some part in the content of NDEs. Of course, further data collection and analysis are essential before we can say how similar or different are visions from cultures with drastically different religious educations and expectations. Osis and Haraldsson found some differences between contents of Indian and American visions (1977), but even their study tended to focus on Indian Christians rather than Hindus and Buddhists. It would be most informative to collect such data from persons with Hindu, Buddhist, or other drastically
non-Western world-views. If indeed there are major differences in the visions of such cultures, then we might well conclude, not that the same reality is being differently labeled by different people, but that the perceived reality is in fact a projection of the minds of people in these different cultures.

To call these visions mental projections, however, is not to question their reality at all. Rather, it is to indicate that they are subject to psychic rather than physical laws and regularities. There still seem to be regularities within these experiences, and the fact that they are psychically caused (if so) does not deny the fact that they are experienced as very real. But it changes the philosophically central question from: "What is the landscape of the next world like," to "What causes or conditions the regularities in our minds such that our postmortem experiences come out to be seen as they are?" If the next world (or even this world?!?) is structured by mind, and not matter alone, we still have much to learn about the ways in which our minds create and structure experience, and this becomes an exciting and important field to explore as well. We still want to know "How is the next world structured?" But we should expect the answer not in some other-worldly geophysics, but rather in a deeper investigation of the life of the mind, into how mental experiences are structured, and by what.

This conclusion is far from a pessimistic one. To say that afterlife experiences are mental projections does not deprive them of reality. Rather, it emphasizes that what is important hereafter is the continuing life of the mind. If in fact the afterlife is some other physically conditioned universe that we cannot sense while in our present bodies, then it is impossible to investigate it at all, except from the reports of those who have touched its fringes in NDEs and returned to tell the tale. If, however, afterlife is composed of mental imagery, there are many ways we can approach its investigation here in this world, by studying the mental and psychic states of many persons, and seeing how those states influence their NDEs. Regardless of which hypothesis is correct, the Tibetan Buddhist tradition lends further support to the idea that NDEs happen in widely disparate cultures and periods of history. We should be encouraged to seek further interrelationships among NDEs, the circumstances surrounding death, and human consciousness.
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Near-Death Experiences: Evidence for Survival?\(^1\)

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the out-of-body experience (OBE) and other elements of a near-death experience (NDE), as well as the positive affects that accompany them, do not yield conclusive evidence for survival after death. The OBE has features that suggest a physical basis for it, the other elements show the influence of cultural background, and positive affects may simply occur to conserve one's energy and prolong life. Other explanations for near-death elements, such as sensory deprivation, extrasensory perception, and eyeless sight, are addressed.

INTRODUCTION

Various interpretations have been offered for near-death experiences (NDEs) (see Drab [1981] for a brief account). I am concerned here with the view that they hint at survival after death. As I have said elsewhere in a rather piecemeal fashion, I doubt whether such a claim can be made on the basis of the experiences currently cited in support of it (Krishnan, 1978, 1981, 1982). In fact, some of them seem to me to be biological mechanisms that help the experiencer survive. However, I do not hold the view that it is fruitless to look for survival evidence in NDEs or other phenomena. Indeed, there are good reasons for not closing the issue.

Before examining the survivalists' use of the NDE as evidence, let me recall here briefly the NDE's most common elements: an overwhelming feeling of peace and well-being (which serves as an affective background for other experiences, if there are any); an out-of-body experience (OBE); a sensation of floating through darkness or a passage described as a tunnel, etc.; meeting spirits, dead relatives, and religious figures; an encounter with a presence or a brilliant light; a feeling of being in a realm of ethereal beauty; a life review; and a sense of reaching a limit beyond which the experiencer feels that he or she should not go. Upon deciding to return to life or being told to, the experiencer regains consciousness. Very few
experiencers have reported all these elements, and the elements do not occur in any strict sequence.

WEAKNESSES IN THE SURVIVALIST INTERPRETATION

The OBE as Evidence of Survival

The survivalist argument is that the OBE element of an NDE, especially, is strongly suggestive of an afterlife. In this phenomenon the experiencer feels, even though his or her vital signs may be undetectable and eyes closed or covered, that an aspect of himself or herself leaves the physical body and disinterestedly observes it and any events taking place in its vicinity from a position above it. The sense of hearing is often functional as well. According to the survivalist view, this experience means that there is a psychic component in us that can separate from the body, and it is that component that mediates visual and auditory perceptions. Since it seems to function independently of the body, it is conceivable that it may continue to exist even after the disintegration of the body. The other elements of NDEs mentioned above are, in the survivalist interpretation, the experiences of the detached aspect in a postmortem dimension. (Hereafter the near-death elements besides the OBE are together referred to as visionary experiences [VEs] since this term seems to me to be less evaluative than terms like transcendental or hallucinatory experiences.)

The survivalist explanation of the OBE is open to the criticism that whatever veridical information the subject relates after the episode may be based on memories, educated guesses, perceptions made in a semiconscious state, and so on; that is, the NDEr visualizes this information in a vivid manner, but does not actually see. Michael Sabom (1982) painstakingly investigated this question. His conclusion was that some of his interviewees could not have reconstructed many of the events they reported from information acquired by normal means; on the contrary, they seemed to see accurately and clearly in some nonordinary way. In my view, it should not be generalized from this finding that all OBErs see accurately, or that all OBEs involve visual experience. At present the term OBE is used to describe almost any experience in which the subject feels that he or she separates from the body and, therefore, there can be varieties or classes of OBEs distinguishable from one another by differences in accuracy of perception, clarity, and so on. For instance, several researchers have noted differences between induced OBEs and single, spontaneous OBEs (e.g., Green, 1968;
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Smith and Irwin, 1981). What Sabom's study showed, then, was that there are some OBEs (or a class of OBEs) in which clear and accurate visual perception occurs. In my discussion I have taken into account only this class of experiences.

I suspect that even such cases do not support the survivalist interpretation of the phenomenon. One reason has to do with the position from which the subject says he or she observes. This appears to be nearly always above the level of the body when the experience occurs spontaneously and for the first time. Most of the cases Kenneth Ring and Sabom, for instance, cited are of this kind, and they both noted that the vantage point was above the body (Ring, 1980, p. 46; Sabom, 1982, p. 27). Apparently, judging from accounts where the subject's posture is mentioned, it has no influence on the vantage point. Thus, whether OBErs are walking or sitting (Green, 1968, p. 50), prone (Sabom, 1982, p. 69), or lying on one side (Sabom, 1982, p. 88), it is elevated. It seems that persons falling from a height very rarely have an OBE, but I have come across a survivor of a fall from a coconut tree who felt that he saw himself going down from above his body and the "perceiving self" also moved down with him. As Celia Green (1968, p. 46) noted, subjects very rarely report having viewed their body from a position below it.

Why is the vantage point above the level of the body? If the mediator of out-of-body vision is an element that functions independently of the body, I find no reason why it should position itself only above the body; it seems reasonable to expect instances of observation of oneself from other positions to be no less frequent. For example, in the case of a person undergoing an OBE when sitting or standing or falling from a height, self-observation is possible from the front at eye-level or below it. This is a feature of the OBE that near-death researchers have long overlooked. Carl Jung (1969, pp. 509-511) speculated whether the OBE represented a shift of consciousness from the cerebrum to some other nervous substrate. Recently Gordon Greene (1983) offered an explanation using the hyperspace concept, and Susan Blackmore (1983) suggested that a position above and behind the head might be a convenient place from which to structure imagined places. However, in the light of Georg von Bekesy's (1963, 1967) experiments in another sensory modality, the feeling of observing one's body from a location outside it seems to have a physical basis to it.

Von Bekesy showed that a series of vibrators applied to the forearm will produce a point perception when the phases of vibration are
appropriately adjusted, and when such vibrators are worn on both forearms for some time the point perception suddenly leaps into the space between them; that is, the subject feels that the perception of stimulation is occurring away from the receptor surface. There are some similarities between the experiences of von Bekesy’s experimental subjects and OBErs. For instance, many OBErs have said that the change of viewpoint was sudden. Some have observed that they felt they were a point of presence (Green, 1968, p. 36) or a point of consciousness (Moody, 1977, p. 42) in space. Again, a few OBE subjects have reported that their experiences were preceded by a sensation of trembling or vibrating (Moody, 1977, p. 16; Rogo, 1978, p. 17). It is noteworthy that one of the methods of voluntary exteriorization is causing the body to tingle or vibrate (Walker, 1977, pp. 110-111). I imagine that we shall find an answer to the question of an elevated observation point in OBEs when we know how, why, and where in the brain processes similar to those illustrated by von Bekesy occur.

Von Bekesy’s experiments also shed light on the feeling, reported by some OBErs, that they were looking down from a great height (e.g., Ring, 1980, pp. 48-49; Sabom, 1982, pp. 27-28) or they were able to move closer to or farther away from the body at will (Sabom, 1982, p. 70). What causes these experiences is an alteration of perspective, and it can happen in the normal state (as distinguished from the out-of-body state). In such cases the vantage point is coincident with the physical eyes, but objects may suddenly appear to be farther away or closer in space than they are. One of the conditions in which this phenomenon occurs is temporal lobe epilepsy. Sometimes it happens even in children in whom no dysfunction has been diagnosed. It has also been found that some individuals have learned to cause their visual field to approach or recede at will (Ferguson, 1975, p. 244). If such changes in perspective happen during an OBE (in which perception of stimulation is projected), the subject will naturally feel that it is he or she who is moving in relation to the visual field (the body and the objects near it).

Another feature of the OBE that strains the separation hypothesis is the similarity of the subject’s visual and auditory perceptions to perceptions in these modalities in the ordinary state of consciousness. (These are the two perceptual modalities usually found to be functional in OBErs.) In the ordinary state of consciousness our experience of the environment is limited in the sense that we are not aware of various energy forms such as X-rays, ultrasonics, gamma rays, and so on. It appears that the brain and the senses function as data-
reduction systems (Ornstein, 1975). Now, one would expect that an entity that separates from the body would not suffer from the limitations caused by the senses and the brain. Clearly, OBErs are not free from them, as can be seen from their reports. Their limited experience of the environment could then mean that the visual and auditory processes in the out-of-body state are associated with the body.

Those who suffer from weak eyesight (e.g., Green, 1968, pp. 32-33) and even those who became blind some time after birth (Davis-Cambridge, 1976)² have had OBEs with visual experience. But do congenitally blind persons see in the out-of-body state? It is possible they may have the OBE in the sense of a feeling of leaving the body without visual experience, just as congenitally blind persons may dream without visual experience (Offenkrantz and Wolpert, 1963).

I have not come across a reference to a congenitally blind person’s OBE in the literature, nor has my letter in Vital Signs (Krishnan, 1983) brought one to light. I am beginning to suspect that people born blind may not have out-of-body vision. Should my suspicion prove true, then I think it would be a clear indication that out-of-body vision is associated with the body. It should be noted, however, that if people born blind experience out-of-body vision, it would not automatically strengthen the survivalist interpretation of the OBE, because present knowledge about human vision is incomplete (see below).

Other Near-Death Elements as Evidence of Survival

In the survivalist view the other near-death elements (VEs) are experienced by the detached aspect in a postmortem realm. One argument for their objective reality rests on the fact that they are essentially similar, unlike hallucinations, which usually vary from person to person. Another claim for their reality (Ring, 1980) derives from the holographic theory of brain functioning. Briefly, this theory states that “primary reality” is composed of frequencies only, and our brains, which function holographically, interpret this domain of frequencies in terms of objects (that is, the physical world). According to Ring (1980), there can be other frequency domains. When consciousness leaves the body, at death or as a result of suitable techniques, it becomes capable of being aware of one or other of the frequency realms. Just as the brain translates the primary reality into objects, so also the detached consciousness interprets the other frequency domains in object terms.
Thus the spirit forms, the light phenomenon, the environments of supernal beauty, etc. are all constructions of the disembodied consciousness. They are therefore as real as the objects of our familiar physical world.

The problem with both interpretations of VEs is that they leave unexplained why the experiencers usually describe the imagery in terms of their respective religion or cultural background. As can be seen from Karlis Osis and Erlendur Haraldsson’s cross-cultural study of NDEs (1978, pp. 39, 64), Hindus spoke of seeing temples, Yama (god of death), yamadoots (messengers of Yama), and such elements related to their religion, while Christian imagery such as angels, Christ, and pearly gates predominated in the visions of Christians. The interviewees of both Ring (1980) and Sabom (1982), most of whom were from a Christian background, also, in the main, described the postmortem world in terms appropriate to their religion or culture. In the negative experiences collected by Maurice Rawlings (1979), again, his Christian subjects spoke of hell in terms that accord with the Christian conception of it. Ring (1980, pp. 201-202) as well as Osis and Haraldsson (1978, p. 37) suggested that this relationship between religious background and NDE content is a matter of interpretation; although NDErs see a common reality, their description of it is shaped by their respective belief systems.

I find this explanation unsatisfactory. Since these authors seemed to accept that NDErs were capable of identifying some of the apparitions they saw as their close relatives or friends (Ring, 1980, p. 68; Osis and Haraldsson, 1978, pp. 184-185), why did they write that the experiencers were unable to describe other images correctly? I think the question of independence of NDE content from religious and cultural background is unsettled. This is also the subject of a recent study of NDEs by an anthropologist (Counts, 1983).

Osis and Haraldsson seemed to adopt a partially representational approach. According to them, the “take-away apparitions” (those that convey they have come to assist the percipient into a postmortem dimension, or take him “by-force,” as in the Indian sample) are not hallucinations but are entities with a will of their own and, therefore, have objective reality, whereas near-death environments are symbolizations pointing to a postmortem world. The former claim rests on their finding that the occurrence of the apparitions was not determined by the percipients’ expectations or wishes. They were seen by those who were well on the way to recovery and were not expecting to die. Further, some patients, upon seeing take-away apparitions, expressed their unwillingness to go with them.
Such apparitions, the authors argued, cannot be interpreted as projected wish-fulfillment imagery.

I doubt whether such findings are sufficient reason for ascribing an objective dimension to the apparitions. The fact that most of those patients who saw them died could mean that the apparitions are conscious manifestations of knowledge of impending death at an unconscious level. They would then appear to be unrelated to the percipients' wishes and expectations.

Hallucination of take-away apparitions is but one way in which intimations of the approach of death can occur. They may also come in dreams, even months ahead of the event (Jung, 1969, pp. 410-411), as a hunch that finds expression in the form of leave-taking (Exton-Smith, 1961), as an urge to set one's affairs in order (Grosso, 1981), and so on. The interpretation of such behavior, which may be noticed even in apparently healthy persons, as an indication of a weakening of the will to live is debatable. Many disease processes can exist in a "silent" state in the elderly (Exton-Smith, 1961). That could mean that the victims may have unconscious knowledge of impending death. Alexis Carrel (1948, pp. 102-103) suggested that warnings of death come from the center of visceral consciousness. According to Morton Lieberman, who has studied the psychological behavior of elderly persons, they may perceive approaching death if they allow themselves to be introspective and contemplative (Fiore and Landsburg, 1976, pp. 63-65).

Just as there can be warnings of the approach of death, there can also be intimations of recovery. I think that it is in this light that hearing a voice in an NDE (mentioned previously) and experiencing images such as a border, a temple with closed gates, an unfinished house, etc. are to be understood.

As for Osis and Haraldsson's (1978) claim that the near-death environments are symbolizations of the hereafter, their reasons for making it are unclear. Since such visions meet the criteria for which they attribute objective reality to take-away apparitions, why are they treated as symbols? It looks as though the variety and close resemblance of the contents of these visions to earthly forms compelled the authors to a representational interpretation.

According to them, the sense of peace and well-being NDErs feel is the result of extrasensory glimpses of the hereafter (Osis and Haraldsson, 1978, pp. 138-140). That is a questionable claim, since, as I pointed out earlier, it is uncertain whether they see a common reality—a postmortem world. Ring wrote that these positive affects may be due to consciousness being out of the body and therefore
free from body-based sensations (1980, p. 221). But the question of body/consciousness separation is unsettled. That aside, why is it assumed that absence of any input from the body will engender pleasant feelings? Ring (1980) did not give any reason. It is true that a decrease in sensory input can cause pleasant experiences, but, as we shall see later, the reason may not be the detachment of consciousness from the body.

Other Arguments for Survival

In pointing out some of the weaknesses of the current survivalist interpretation of NDEs, it is not my intention to suggest that these phenomena will not yield any survival hints. If there can be flashforwards about one's earthly life in NDEs (Ring, 1982), might not we also expect pointers to what might happen to us after death?

I prefer to keep the survival question open. The chief reason is the implication of telepathy, to which several writers have drawn attention (e.g., Jung, 1969, pp. 412-414). Although we do not know how telepathy works, on present evidence its existence cannot be denied. It has been found that one of its characteristics is that it is unconstrained by time or space. If that finding is correct, it could mean that at some level of our being we are not subject to spatio-temporal laws. In other words, we have a collective aspect that does not cease to exist when we, as separate individuals, die. To cite an analogy from the Hindu tradition, we, as separate individuals, are like the waves in an ocean; although the waves disappear, the ocean remains. It is in this sense that I understand survival, at least at present.

Can this view account for apparitions, possession, reincarnation, mediumistic communication, and such phenomena that are believed to suggest survival as separate entities? The answer is that it does not preclude such a form of postmortem existence, but it does imply that this mode can only be temporary, since survival in two ways that are both independent of space and time is unlikely. Anyway, I think we should consider whether all the phenomena currently thought to be survival related have equal significance for the afterlife issue. Take, for example, apparitions. There are different kinds of apparitions: crisis apparitions, apparitions that are seen only at a particular place repeating an action over and over again, those that are not localized but seen in different places, those that are witnessed inside a building but disappear after its demolition or major repairs to the interior walls, those that are collectively seen
but appear to be wearing different apparel to different percipients, and so on. What is the reason for these differences? Without accounting for them, can we regard all types of apparitions as being suggestive of survival?

Ian Stevenson (1977, p. 658) found that a person tends to be reborn near where he died. While, as he suggested, this feature of reincarnation-type cases has predictive value, it seems to me that it also means that the source of information about a past life is in some way bound to place of death. Until we know how, why, and to what it is bound, can we conclude with any degree of certainty that this source is a psychic aspect that exists on its own?

Possession also seems to share this characteristic of reincarnation. To put it simply, we do not hear of, say, a “Japanese spirit” possessing a person who has never had any contact with Japan.

There have been attempts to find out from spirit controls themselves whether they are independent entities. It cannot be said that they have succeeded. Once in a session with Eileen Garrett a psychologist asked her spirit control Uvani what he had been doing since their last session. The question threw Uvani into confusion (Watson, 1979, p. 288). Does this mean that the spirit came into being only during the session? In other words, was it a construction of the medium? Of her own attempt to establish the reality of spirits, Garrett wrote, “I asked these spirit figures if I was seeing them or if I was seeing what was in my own brain. They answered ‘both’” (LeShan, 1969, p. 88).

What I am suggesting is that we should not judge the survival issue solely on the basis of those phenomena commonly thought to be afterlife related. In investigating them, questions such as whether they have a common cause or whether they are different ways of experiencing past events should be kept in mind.

OTHER EXPLANATIONS FOR NEAR-DEATH ELEMENTS

I look upon the OBE, VEs, and the sense of peace and well-being experienced by NDErs this way. They are prevalent in man, so they are very likely to serve a purpose. I do not see in the NDEs known at present any hint that their purpose is to give the subjects glimpses of an afterlife; rather, they seem to me to be biological devices with a protective function.
Sensory Deprivation

Studies of humans in conditions of sensory deprivation\(^4\) show that a sustained level and variety of input of information to the brain is necessary to maintain normal awareness (e.g., Kubzansky and Leiderman, 1961). It appears there are "built-in" mechanisms for this purpose, the most easily recognizable one being the mind's propensity to "wander." When there is a decrease in sensory input, perceptual anomalies and so on can occur. It is even conjectured that if all input, both external and internal, could be stopped completely, the brain would cease to function (Watson, 1976, pp. 96-97). Since an organism is a self-regulative system, it is conceivable that the brain attempts to increase input when it falls below the normal level. One of the ways in which the brain may do this is by creating its own input, that is, by hallucinating. Harmon Ephron and Patricia Carrington (1966), for instance, have shown why hallucinations can be considered in this light—as replacement phenomena. In my view, VEs, except for the life review, are of this nature. (The life review appears to be a different order of experience from the other near-death elements in that it is triggered by the suddenness of a threat to life [Noyes and Kletti, 1977; Ring, 1980].) The veridical OBE, in which visual perception in a large measure similar to physical sight occurs, may be another means of providing input.

This interpretation raises many questions. Are the situations in which the OBE and other near-death elements occur marked by sensory deprivation? If they are, why doesn't everyone who comes near death experience them? How does an OBEr see?

Several investigators have noted that sensory deprivation is one of the situations in which the OBE can happen (e.g., Eastman, 1962; Twemlow, Gabbard, and Jones, 1980; Greyson and Stevenson, 1980; Noyes, 1979). They have not suggested a causal connection, but I think there is a correlation. An indication is the feeling of "time standing still," which many NDErs have reported. According to Robert Ornstein (1969), for example, periods when the input of sensory information is low will result in less information being processed per unit of clock time than normal, and consequently perceived time will be slow by comparison. When the input of information is fast, perceived time runs fast by comparison with clock time. As some physicists would say, there is no time divorced of events.

As to how sensory deprivation may occur in OBE/NDE contexts, a few illustrative examples follow. During the dying process there can
be sensory deprivation due to progressive deterioration of the sense organs and nervous system and/or environmental isolation. Reduction of information input also takes place during meditation, another context in which the OBE/NDE elements may occur, because the essence of meditation is restriction of awareness to a single, unchanging source of stimulation (Ornstein, 1975). Positive or stressful emotions, when they are overpowering, may trigger the OBE/NDE elements, because in these states "one extremely powerful motive or one strong preoccupation momentarily towers over all other purposes" (White, cited in Shor, 1972); in other words, a narrowing of the stimulus field occurs. Both Margaret Eastman (1962) and Celia Green (1968, p. 29) cited cases of the OBE associated with positive emotions. Hallucinogens interfere with the level of information input, not necessarily by decreasing synaptic transmission through raising the resistance to the passage of electrochemical impulses; they may increase synaptic transmission, thus causing disruption of orderly input of information, and jam the circuits (West, 1975). Procedures that cause sensory overload may also jam the circuits (Miller, 1960) and thus reduce information input.

It is true that everyone who faces a life-threatening situation does not undergo out-of-body or near-death experiences. One reason may be that tolerance for sensory deprivation, like the pain threshold, varies from person to person. Besides, the OBE and NDE may be only two of the many ways in which an individual reacts to sensory deprivation.

**Extrasensory Perception**

As for accurate perceptions during the OBE, we have seen why the proposal that a detached aspect may be the mediator is unhelpful. An alternative explanation is extrasensory perception (ESP). But two facts about ESP argue against that. One is that an elevated vantage point is not a typical feature of ESP, as it is of out-of-body vision. The other is that visual ESP is seldom, if ever, as clear as out-of-body vision (Rogo, 1978). ESP may, however, be associated with the OBE or other near-death elements, since one of the psi-conducive conditions is sensory deprivation (Honorton, 1978).

**Sight Without the Eyes**

If neither ESP nor the separation hypothesis can account for
out-of-body vision, how does the subject see? I think we might look for an answer in cerebral mechanics. My reasons for this suggestion, mentioned earlier, are the similarity of out-of-body vision to physical sight, the elevated vantage point, and von Bekesy's (1963) experimental demonstration that perception of tactile stimulation can seem to be occurring outside the body.

A physical basis to out-of-body vision would imply sight without the use of the eyes, since many OBEs have taken place during clinical death. In one of the cases investigated by Sabom (1982, p. 65), the patient, undergoing surgery, was covered from head to foot with several sheets. Still he saw the events near him. Eyeless sight does sound impossible, but I think we should suspend disbelief because our present knowledge about human vision, despite brilliant advances, is by no means complete. For instance, it is still an unsettled question whether humans have more than two visual systems (cortical and tectal) (Furst, 1979, p. 68). For another example, in an attempt to make a vision-substitution system for the blind, it has been found that tactile stimulation can produce images of objects (White, Saunders, Scadden, Bach-Y-Rita, and Collins, 1970). The equipment used translates images of objects, using a TV camera, into a vibratory pattern on the back of the subject. The subject, blind or sighted, can identify the objects with some practice. When the camera is kept fixed, the subject feels the objects to be on his or her back, and when the camera is moved to scan the visual displays, the subject perceives the objects to be in front of him in visual space. Whether such "skin sight" represents a challenge to the doctrine of specific nerve energies is unclear (Furst, 1979, pp. 69-70, 222).

For a third example, sighted children (up to the age of 15 years) can be trained to see without using their eyes or any external aid (Grinberg-Zylberbaum, 1983). This phenomenon, called extraocular vision, follows the same laws of perspective, contrast, acuity, etc. as retinal vision. In addition, one of the experimental subjects could simultaneously see not only what was in front of her but also what was behind her and at her sides. (This is similar to the 360-degree vision reported by some OBErs.) Some children were able to see inside the body of others and describe the location and dimensions of the scars of bone fractures several years old. Grinberg-Zylberbaum, while offering a psychophysiological explanation for extraocular vision, suggested that the phenomenon may not involve the cerebral structures commonly associated with vision.

Compounding the mystery of vision are the finding that light enters the brains of mammals directly (not only through the visual
system) (Ferguson, 1975, p. 9; Van Brunt, Shepherd, Wall, Ganong, and Clegg, 1964) and speculations about the legendary third eye, the pineal body (Floyd, cited in Talbot, 1981, pp. 56-57).

**Emotions as Protection**

Most NDErs describe the feeling of their experiences with words like peace, tranquility, joy, etc. It is noteworthy that these emotions are experienced not only in situations that are patently life threatening, such as an accident; they can also be induced. Down the ages various techniques have been employed for the purpose. Some of them used in India, for example, are hyperventilation alternating with prolonged withholding of breath, constriction of the carotid arteries, obstruction of the larynx by bending the tongue backward, and suspension by the feet for a prolonged period. No matter what the technique employed, it can be seen that the purpose is to restrict the supply of oxygen to the brain. Thus these methods constitute a threat to life. It appears that there is a biological reason why danger to life produces a feeling of peace.

Russian researchers have found from experiments with dogs that were brought to terminal states by bleeding that those animals that were quiet or asleep when they began to die stood a better chance of recovery than those that were in a state of excitement before dying (Watson, 1976, pp. 67-68). The reason is said to be that a calm frame of mind helps to conserve an organism’s energy reserves, while excitement and such states deplete them. Lyall Watson (1976) suggested that the beautiful visions and transcendental feelings of a person falling from a great height could then have survival value; they increase the person’s chances of recovery from injury or even clinical death. Watson’s suggestion could also apply to other life-threatening situations.

Unpleasant experiences in people close to death have also been reported. These may be visions of demonic creatures threatening the subject, “hell,” and the like, or the subject may only feel a sense of acute fear or panic. Several investigators found them to be rare (e.g., Greyson and Stevenson, 1980; Lindley, Bryan, and Conley 1981; Moody, 1977a; Osis and Haraldsson, 1978; Ring, 1980; Sabom, 1982), but Rawlings (1979) claimed they might be as frequent as pleasant experiences. Ring (1980) contested that view, pointing out Rawlings's conceptual and methodological weaknesses. In Watson’s (1976) hypothesis, however, very few who have negative
experiences are likely to survive, so the incidence of hellish experiences would appear to be small. But if positive affects are a biological device with survival value, as Watson conceived them to be, would the device fail to operate as often as Rawlings suggested? The data on negative experiences are too meager to formulate an explanation. However, a possibility we might consider is whether they are caused by failure or malfunctioning of the mechanisms that create positive experiences. For instance, if endogenous morphine-like substances are the explanation for positive feelings near death, then the presence of certain drugs in the body could block their release (Lindley, Bryan, and Conley, 1981). In multiple NDEs the trend is usually from bad to good experiences (Rawlings, 1979, pp. 100-103; Ring, 1980, p. 249; see Bush, 1983, for exception). Does such a trend mean that self-correction can sometimes occur? Anyway, negative experiences do take place and require further study.

CONCLUSION

I do not even imagine that what I have said about NDEs and survival is the last word on them. Many questions remain to be addressed. The reasons for the different responses to a threat to life (ranging from absence of any NDE to a large number of them, positive or negative) and the factors underlying the various near-death images are some of them. Above all there is the puzzle of out-of-body vision. The experiments of von Bekesy (1963) and Grinberg-Zylberbaum (1983) may help explain some aspects of it, but not all. For example, they do not explain why, if a man is bending over an OBEr, the latter sees only the back of the person and not his face. My main object in this article was to point out certain aspects of NDEs that, to my knowledge, have not received much critical attention. In my view, they indicate that there are good grounds for looking for a naturalistic explanation for these phenomena. Some researchers have already made a beginning in this direction (e.g., Carr, 1982; Greyson, 1982; Lindley, Bryan, and Conley, 1981; Noyes, 1979). On the basis of their work I think that a major result of NDE research will be a greater understanding of the various mechanisms the human organism has evolved to overcome a threat to life and to adapt to the situation that arises when survival efforts have to be given up. This knowledge will no doubt have practical applications. Another result, I hope, will be knowledge of how an OBEr sees, which may even lead to a means of giving sight to the blind.
NOTES

1. I wish to express my thanks to the Institute of Psychophysical Research, Oxford, England, for lending me several of their publications.

2. I am indebted to Glen O. Gabbard, M.D., The Menninger Foundation, Topeka, Kansas, for this reference.

3. There is an ancient branch of astrology in India known as nadi astrology, which can perhaps be used in reincarnation research. The nadi are, roughly, ready-made horoscopes constructed for different days of birth along with their readings in a highly condensed form. According to some nadi astrologers, some details relating to past lives (such as place and year of birth, names of parents, etc.) are found in some nadi. If this is indeed the case, investigation on the basis of nadi readings may throw some light on the reincarnation phenomenon. It may not, however, help confirm the belief that it is a psychic factor existing in a free state that reincarnates. (The possible use of nadi astrology in reincarnation research was suggested to me by Swami Shaktidhara, Nidagalluhalli, Karnataka, India.)

4. Researchers in the field are not agreed on the use of the term sensory deprivation on the ground that it lacks conceptual and descriptive accuracy. It is used here in the general sense of reduced patterned information input to the brain.

5. I am grateful to F. Gordon Greene for sending me Grinberg-Zylberbaum's paper.

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Near-Death Experiences and Attitude Change

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ABSTRACT

Near-death experiences (NDEs) are purported by many researchers and experiencers to produce positive changes in life attitudes, such as a sense of purpose, acceptance of death, concern for others, and an awareness of the value of life. This study explores the association between NDEs and subsequent attitude changes through the responses of 28 near-death experiencers on the Life Attitude Profile (LAP) questionnaire. The 20 women and 8 men who completed the LAP ranged in age from 31 to 75 years and lived all over the country, with no majority from any geographical region. Religious background was varied. Positive changes in life attitude were found to significant degrees in all of the respondents, strongly suggesting that a relationship exists with the NDE.

The more common elements comprising a near-death experience (NDE), as outlined by Raymond Moody (1975) and Kenneth Ring (1980), are well known and include the tunnel experience, the out-of-body experience (OBE), the meeting of an entity of light, the meeting of deceased friends and relatives, and the encountering of a barrier between this life and beyond. Moody’s and Ring’s descriptions of the event, independently formulated, are highly similar, but as both researchers state, their accounts are not meant to be representative of all NDEs. No two experiences are alike, no single component of the NDE is universal, and there is no single sequence of events within the NDE. The present study tests the hypothesis that those who undergo an NDE have their perception of reality transformed and appreciate their lives to a greater degree than before this experience.

Researchers have found that individuals outwardly show a measurable change in attitude and behavior towards life, which they attribute to the NDE. Ring (1980), in a very thorough and systematic study on the nature of the experience, offered empirical data on the feelings reportedly evoked by the NDE. The most common feelings,
those of peace, the absence of pain, and no fear, were found in a large majority of Ring's respondents who had come close to death, though more frequently in those who experienced some elements of the “core” NDE (core experiencers, or CErS) than in those who did not (non-experiencers, or NErs). Ring reported less-than-comfortable emotions due to the NDE in less than 5 percent of his respondents, and those emotions consisted chiefly of transient feelings of fear either before or after the experience. Michael Sabom summarized his own findings regarding attitude change:

By far the most important implications of the NDE lie with the individual who has encountered the experience. Almost every subject interviewed in this study indicated, in his own way, that his NDE had been a truly remarkable and important event in his life. Some even described it as the “peak” event, which had done more to shape the depth and direction of life goals and attitudes than any previous single experience. The impact of the NDE on these persons was evident in many different and unique ways. (1982, pp. 124-125)

Charles Flynn (1982) examined and categorized beliefs reported to have originated with the NDE. His findings indicated an increased concern for others, a reduced fear of death, an increased belief in an afterlife, a reduction of materialistic concerns, and greater religious feeling in near-death experiencers (NDErs). Moody (1975) offered many reports of reduced feelings of fear of death from NDErs. Russell Noyes (1980) gathered 215 reports of attitude change from people who had undergone a life-threatening event. He found that people communicated a reduced fear of death, a feeling of invulnerability, feelings of special destiny and of being favored by God, and a strengthened belief in a continued postmortem existence. Stanislav Grof and Joan Halifax (1977) described a pattern of change including a reduced fear of death, improved well-being, and enhanced meaning of life. Sabom (1982) found that of the NDErs who were queried about fear of death, the majority of them reported a decrease in their fear, with a smaller number (20 percent) claiming no change; no one responding to these questions indicated an increased fear of death nor a decreased belief in an afterlife. Follow-up studies revealed the reduced fear of death still strongly in evidence among respondents; no follow-up studies were done on afterlife beliefs. Ring (1980) reported strong data that indicate that his respondents have both reduced fear of death and an increased amount of inner religious feeling.
METHODS

Subjects

Respondents to this study all had a self-defined near-death experience. They resided in all parts of the country, favoring no one section. Their religious background was as follows: 11.5% were Catholics, 50% belonged to other Christian sects, 9.5% were Jewish, 20.3% belonged to other religions, and 7.8% claimed no religious affiliation. There were 20 women and 8 men, with an age range of 31 to 75 years. The mean and median of the respondents' ages was 49.4 and 49.0 years, while their mean and median ages at the time of the NDE were 34.8 and 32.5 years. A mean of 14.5 years and a median of 8.0 years elapsed between the NDE and the present study.

Instrument

The Life Attitude Profile (LAP) by Gary Reker and Edward Peacock (1981) was used in this study to assess both pre- and post-NDE attitudes toward life and death. The LAP consists of 44 questions that fit into one of seven categories chosen to cover a wide range of attitudes: Life Purpose, Existential Vacuum, Life Control, Will to Meaning, Goal Seeking, Future Meaning to Fulfill, and Death Acceptance. The number of questions in each category of the LAP ranges from five (Goal Seeking) to nine (Life Purpose). The questions in the Life Purpose category are designed to determine if an individual is living as he or she desires, and whether he or she feels a reason for being here. The Existential Vacuum category asks questions to determine if people lack meaning in their lives. Goal Seeking questions measure the extent of a respondent's restlessness. The Will to Meaning category is based on Viktor Frankl's (1969) belief that the primary motive of people is to find meaning and purpose in life. Questions in the Future Meaning to Fulfill category seek to determine the strength of an individual's anticipation of a meaningful existence. The Death Acceptance category measures people's freedom from anxiety concerning death.

Procedure

LAPs were mailed from the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) Research Division office by Bruce Greyson to a pool of IANDS members who had had an NDE. A cover letter
sent with the questionnaire stated the purpose of the study to be a desire to know what people had felt as a result of having an NDE. Out of 65 distributed questionnaires, 56 were returned. The high rate of return (86%) is attributed to the respondents’ familiarity with the IANDS organization and its goals. Of those returned, only 28 were usable; the remaining 28 were not adequately completed, presumably because of lack of clarity in the instructions as they were presented on the questionnaire. Subjects were instructed to answer questions in reference to what their attitudes were before and after each question. For each question, a “1” response indicated strong disagreement with the question, while a “7” response indicated strong agreement. Subjects were directed to indicate, for each question, their perception of their attitude toward that item before and after the NDE, using a square and a circle, respectively, to mark their responses. For example:

I am more afraid of death than of old age. 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

In the hypothetical example shown here, that statement was neither agreed with nor disagreed with before the NDE, since the respondent has placed a square around the “4.” The respondent, by circling the “2,” has indicated a reduced fear of death over old age since the NDE, marking a change in attitude from before to after the experience. Of the 56 respondents, half filled out the questionnaire marking only how they felt after the NDE and not before it; thus, only 28 LAPs were considered usable for this study.

RESULTS

The results of the LAP questionnaires are presented both qualitatively and quantitatively. For the qualitative analysis, it was noted for each individual whether his or her response to each question indicated a negative change, no change, or positive change in attitude from before the NDE to after the experience. The modal response (negative change, no change, or positive change) for all the questions in each of the seven LAP categories was then determined for each respondent, and the distribution of responses is presented in Table 1. With the exception of Goal Seeking, in which responses were randomly distributed, each category included a significantly greater number of respondents indicating positive changes since the NDE than indicating negative changes or no change at all.

For the quantitative analysis, the degree of change perceived by
Table 1
Number of Respondents (N=28) Reporting Negative Change, No Change, and Positive Change in Attitude After NDE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LAP Category</th>
<th>Negative Change</th>
<th>No Change</th>
<th>Positive Change</th>
<th>Chi-squared (df=2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life Purpose</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existential Vacuum</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Control</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6.00*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will to Meaning</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>15.33***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Seeking</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Meaning to Fulfill</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9.33**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death Acceptance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22.23***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

***p <.001  
**p <.01  
*p <.05

each individual was recorded, as well as the direction, and the responses summed for all questions in each of the seven categories. Table 2 presents the distribution of varying degrees of change for each LAP category. For example, for the nine questions in the first category, Life Purpose, 6 subjects marked a post-NDE response 1 or 2 spaces in a negative direction from their pre-NDE response; 1 subject marked the identical space for before and after the NDE; 11 subjects marked a post-NDE response 1 or 2 spaces in a positive direction from their pre-NDE response; 7 subjects marked a post-NDE response 3 or 4 spaces in a positive direction from their pre-NDE response; and 3 subjects marked a post-NDE response 5 or 6 spaces in a positive direction from their pre-NDE response. As can be seen in Table 2, responses were skewed significantly in the direction of positive attitude changes in all LAP categories except for Life Control and Goal Seeking, in which categories responses were randomly distributed.

Data regarding attitude change were not significantly correlated with age or sex. Ring (1980) found that NDEs caused by illness had more elements of a prototypical core experience than did
Table 2

Number of Respondents (N=28) Reporting Differing Degrees of Attitude Change After NDE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LAP Category</th>
<th>Negative Change</th>
<th>Positive Change</th>
<th>Chi Squared (df=6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 or 6 spaces</td>
<td>3 or 4 spaces</td>
<td>1 or 2 spaces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Purpose</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existential Vacuum</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Control</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Will to Meaning</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal Seeking</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Meaning to Fulfill</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Death Acceptance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**p < .001
* p < .05

NDEs caused by other near-death events; in the present study, although there was a slight positive correlation between positive attitude change and illness as a cause of the NDE, this association was not significant.

DISCUSSION

These data strongly support the hypothesis that a more positive attitude toward life results from an NDE, and agrees with the findings of previous studies. Of the seven categories on the LAP, Goal Seeking was the only one that showed no significant positive change following the NDE.

Although significant results were obtained, certain methodological problems must be considered. One of the two weaknesses pointed out by Gertrude Schmeidler (1979) is that research on NDE phenomena is retrospective, leaving the data open to contamination in a variety of ways. While the “treatment” (the NDE) may be the cause of the reported attitude change, there are other plausible explanations. Confounding factors such as history, maturation,
selection, measurement, and demand characteristics could not be controlled for, as there was no control or comparison group, and no comparison of attitudes measured before the experience. The other weakness is that both researcher and respondent have knowledge of the “right” answers that support the hypothesis; there were no double blind conditions to prevent either person from biasing the results toward the desired response.

Although the sample for this study did appear to be heterogeneous, it was not random, since the respondents were all volunteers. There may be some NDErs who have no desire to talk about the experience for fear of being perceived as unstable (Moody, 1975). Furthermore, there may be NDEs that are perceived as unpleasant, and thereby do not motivate the experiencers to discuss them.

The research design of the present study was similar to a non-experimental, single-group, once-observed design, in which the “treatment” (the NDE) was introduced and the “performance” (the attitude change) was obtained. Reliability of the results could have been increased by measuring attitudes before the NDE, and by having independent observers corroborate evidence of attitude change in these people.

The LAP appears to be an effective and convenient instrument for measuring some attitude changes in NDErs. Follow-up studies using the LAP would be useful for noting effects over time. Further studies using the LAP would also determine the validity of the present study, as well as demonstrating the utility of the LAP in assessing NDEr attitudes. For example, the Death Acceptance category, as expected from previous findings (Noyes, 1980; Flynn, 1982; Sabom, 1982), showed significant change from before to after the NDE, while the category of Goal Seeking did not. It is possible that some NDErs have had their goals met by the experience, or that the NDE provided new goals that superceded the desire to seek other ones. Further attention to discrepancies among the LAP categories may provide insights into attitude changes following an NDE.

As noted, these data suggest that the NDE may be predictive of an ensuing positive attitude change. One rationale for this effect is that many people who have had an NDE feel that they have had an exceptional revelation about the reality they have known. I do not interpret these results to say that NDErs have more positive attitudes towards life than do other people. In a recent study, Greyson (1983) found that NDErs did not demonstrate a wide array of differences compared to non-NDErs. Rather, they felt that, as a result of the
NDE, their lives had been enhanced in some way where they had once been lacking.

It is also unclear how the changes instilled by the NDE compare with similar effects produced by other dramatic life experiences. Different psychological perspectives on the psychodynamics of attitude change might illuminate what changes, if any, are unique to the NDE. It should also be noted that not all people who experience a near-death event report the same degree of positive feeling. Degrees of attitude change in different people may reflect differences in amount of time clinically "dead," cause of the near-death event (illness, accident, or suicide), and other variables. Some who undergo a near-death event do not experience anything remotely similar to the "core experience" described by Moody (1975) and Ring (1980). While Ring made a useful distinction between CERs and NERs, his NER respondents did feel some degree of positive effect from the near-death event.

In conclusion, the validity of these results is open to interpretation due to the research design, and the positive results obtained may be due to other factors that influence self-report of subjective experiences. However, the consistency of the independent NDE responses is quite high, which implies a causal connection between the NDE and a positive change in attitude. The most adequate test of this hypothesis would be to assess the attitudes of large numbers of people who have not had NDEs, and then reassess attitudes after some have had NDEs. The logistical difficulty of such a design highlights the methodological problems in obtaining verifiable data about near-death phenomena. The present study suggests that the LAP may be a useful tool in the continued scientific analysis of NDEs.

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BOOK REVIEW

Heading Toward Omega: In Search of the Meaning of the Near-Death Experience
by Kenneth Ring
William Morrow, 1984, 347 pp., $15.95

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"We seem to be journeying along Death's road to the Garden of Paradise," said the Prince, but the East Wind never answered a word.

-Hans Christian Andersen
The Garden of Paradise (1974)

Kenneth Ring's early work began to map scientifically the near-death experience (NDE); his new book, as shown by its subtitle, is a "search for the meaning" of the NDE. Based on near-death data, especially on unusually deep experiences studied intensively by the author, Heading Toward Omega speculates boldly on what the near-death phenomenon may portend for the future of humanity. It offers, frankly and unabashedly, a vision of hope. It is, in my view, an example of a growing genre of books comprising what we might call the new literature of hope.

The opening chapter makes several important claims and distinctions. To begin with, Ring asserts that since the onset of near-death research "much of the Western world has come to look at death with open eyes unclouded by fear" (p. 17). While there is reason to believe that NDErs learn to look at death with reduced anxiety, it seems, despite the publicity NDEs have received in the media, somewhat of an overstatement that "much of the Western world" shares this dramatic shift of attitude.

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The change of outlook—however extensive it may be—is due to the emergence of an interior view of death (p. 21). Near-death studies help dramatically to underscore the distinction between externally observable behavior and internally nonobservable experience. The observable spectacle of a dying (or even dead) person is one thing; the invisible experience may (quite literally) be worlds apart. Ring, however, makes a distinction that eludes me. He speaks of a "traditional view," which he identifies with the external view of death, and "all its negativities" (p. 21); i.e., the image of death as the "grim reaper." This seems to suggest that a positive image of death never existed prior to near-death studies, but traditional mythologies of death have their imageries of paradise. Moreover, the rich lore of mediumship, often evidential for the survival hypothesis, also sometimes portrays death as illumination, enlightenment, ecstasy, and so forth.

Chapter 1 raises several methodological points. The meaning of the NDE is perhaps best grasped through the "unusually deep" (p. 26) cases, especially through the aftereffects they produce. Ring likens them to seed experiences. Notably, 72 percent of Ring's subjects were women; women seem to be more willing to discuss and confront the meaning of their psychic experiences and hence are more fertile ground for the near-death seed. One wonders if women in general are more receptive to aspects of the human psyche normally ignored or repressed by men.

There is much one might say about this. I merely note in passing another important gender gap observers say is emerging in recent American politics: more women are aligning themselves with the Democratic party, more men with the Republican. Democratic sentiment is generally concerned with the plight of the poor and with the dangers of an escalating arms race. The gender gap observed in Ring's data may reflect the political gender gap; in short, attitudes toward power and attitudes toward the psyche may be linked in important ways. Since Ring's book speculates on the evolutionary potential of the NDE, the question of gender gap needs to be looked at more closely. Indeed, I have a hunch that the psychospiritual evolution of humankind, if such a thing ever comes about, will be marked by the liberation of aspects of the feminine psyche, held in bondage for millennia by the prevailing patriarchal societies.

On page 29 Ring disarms the critical reader by citing the methodological shortcomings of his study: smallness of and possible bias in the samples, and lack of randomness and controls. Indeed, Ring is open to the charge that his findings are the product of a huge
experimenter effect, especially since, as he frequently reminds us, his subjects also became cherished friends. Thus, in the transcript of an interview with one subject, the interviewer (presumably Ring) says: “And you really did experience the real you in this state, it seems.” And the interviewee responds: “Yeah, I knew at that point that I had met myself” (p. 107). This could be construed as a perfect illustration of experimenter effect.

In defense of Ring, two things may be said. First, an especially fine-tuned receptivity may have been necessary to get the subject to share his or her experience. Examples are cited (and plenty more are available in the literature) in which curt, unreceptive attitudes helped to invalidate the experience and undermine the sense of its importance. Secondly, Ring is dealing with the scientifically elusive domain of meanings. Since an element of social validation is crucial to the meaning-endowing process, one may think of Ring as midwife to the birth of the meaning of his subject's experiences.

Ring stresses that his book is not about the afterlife implications of NDEs (p. 32). The problem is tricky, to be sure, but part of the meaningfulness of the NDE depends on the subjective conviction it produces that there is a life after death. On the last page of the book, Ring asserts the importance of “subjective proof” that NDErs obtain from their experience. Now, subjectivity may suffice for the experiencer, but for a scientist the idea of “subjective proof” is not even coherent. Intense subjective conviction is compatible with sheer error. If indeed we want to construct a new scientific mythology of life and death, we may have to look for ways of bypassing certain inappropriate limitations of traditional scientific method, but we cannot avoid basic questions of truth and falsity. It is either true or false that we survive bodily death; we can suspend asking for a decisive answer to that question, but its disjunctive logic remains unalterable.

Chapter 2 is a brief summary of what is known about the near-death experience and is meant to lead the reader to the next chapter, which states the hypothesis that the NDE is essentially a spiritually awakening experience. Here the author begins to let his subjects speak for themselves. He takes pains to warn the reader to listen attentively, and doing so one indeed detects the stirring afterglow of these brilliant transformative experiences. Descriptions of deep NDEs sometimes suggest comparisons with other sources, perhaps remote from the experiencer's knowledge. The description on page 63, for instance, struck at least this reviewer as remarkably similar
to Plato's theory of knowledge as recollection. Many reports claim a subjective conviction for the existence of God (as others do of immortality). "Thus, NDEs unanimously express the strongest belief possible in God following their experience" (p. 86). I share with Ring the suspicion that these reports reflect encounters with some universal source of being or consciousness—perhaps the same source that is the basis of all claims of transcendent reality.

Other characteristics cited with specific spiritual significance were the experience of pure love, total acceptance of self and others, and readiness to forgive. The chapter ends with a subject's description of the "transmission" of a Golden Light Energy, a direct projection of spiritual energy resulting from the near-death encounter. It is this direct transmission of spiritual energy that, in Ring's view (p. 89), plants the "seed" and sets into motion the process of spiritual unfolding. Again, it would be easy to provide examples and parallels from the world's spiritual traditions of a similar process of direct spiritual transmission.

The chapters that follow detail the aftereffects of this spiritual awakening. Chapter 4 describes the radical personal transformation that often occurs in deep NDEs. First, there is the problem of adjusting to mundane reality after tasting divine perfection. The return is often deflating and frustrating; for one thing, it is difficult to gain a sympathetic ear for one's experience, which in effect starves its growth potential. Compared to the glories glimpsed in near-death epiphanies, ordinary intimate relations may seem hollow. One penetrates more easily the masks of inauthenticity. A case is cited of a man's inability to stomach the violence and false consciousness generally projected on our national television screens. Again, an analogy from Plato springs to mind; in the Allegory of the Cave (Book Seven of the Republic [1955]), it is said that after a person escapes the cave, and comes out into the true light of being, return to the cave is profoundly painful and disorienting.

After NDEs, experiencers often report liking themselves more (p. 102). This item seems perhaps to contrast with the classic conversion experience, where experiencing the numinous often leaves one overwhelmed with a sense of holy humility. Learning to like oneself sounds more like an aspect of self-actualization than of self-transcendence. Ring's interpretation of this effect is that the experiencer, having encountered unconditional love, cannot help coming away with a feeling of enhanced worthiness. In general, subjects report enhanced self-concepts and personal identities; the chapter ends with three vivid illustrative cases.
Chapter 5 details the value changes induced by NDEs. People sometimes suppose that the study of near-death phenomena is morbid and life-negating; the truth, however, as Ring shows in this chapter, is that the aftereffects of NDEs are life-enhancing. One of the chief value shifts noted is an intensified capacity to appreciate the concrete particulars of the natural world. Deep NDEs do not reduce enjoyment of or care for our mundane world. On the contrary, the illumination encompasses both the "beyond" and the "here and now." Nor does the near-death illumination stop at "liking oneself"; it extends to sympathy for others. Ring's data show a trend among his subjects toward attitudes of "helping, compassion, patience, tolerance, love, insight, understanding, and acceptance" (p. 125). Other values diminish, such as the need to impress others and to accumulate material objects, understood as "symbols of worldly success" (p. 131).

These value changes observed by Ring in his near-death subjects are important for a theory of culture. Observers of the human predicament have focused on the denial of death and its distorting existential and political consequences. The dread of nothingness is magically mollified in the struggle to master material reality; humiliated, rendered impotent by the idea of death, one strives to compensate by frantic efforts to make a mark on the world. One tries to immortalize oneself by creating symbols of worldly power and success. The keener the death anxiety, the harder the drive toward "showing off before the Computer of Excellence" (Harrington, 1969). In light of this, the importance of a new scientific mythology, as might be emerging from near-death studies, is clear: the new myth (imagery derived empirically) reopens the door to transcending death, thus easing the need to overplay our hands in the game of worldly existence. Freed from constricting death anxiety, one may now enjoy the world, be receptive toward the being of others, and let go of the will to power.

Discussed in chapter 6, Ring's "Omega" questionnaires were designed to elicit information about the spiritual and religious aftereffects of deep NDEs. Ring found some striking trends: basically, his subjects experienced a deepened spirituality; their direct, inner sense of the presence of the Transcendent was enlivened. As a result, allegiance to the outer, conventional forms of religious life was often markedly attenuated. In line with the liberal trend of transpersonal psychology, one may welcome this data as supporting a philosophy of a universal "religion." This is the sense of Ring's subjects and, one feels, of Ring himself. Deep NDEs provide a type
of empirical backing for the popular (and I suspect ultimately sound) thesis of *philosophia perennis*. Against the more virulent forms of religious fundamentalism ravaging the world today, I can think of no better antidote.

However, a few qualifying remarks seem in order. First, a point of religious history. As Ronald Knox has shown in his masterful study *Enthusiasm* (1950), a tension, if not a conflict, between creative inspiration and the constraints of religious tradition is as old as, and is indeed a permanent part of, Christianity. Historical Christianity, in my view, is an ongoing process of fresh inspiration straining against old and seeking new forms. I would go a considerable step further and say that the dialectic between inward inspiration and outward form plays an essential part in the creative process, whether in religion, science, or art. Forms deaden *and* inspire; many a hack has plied his way through the sonnet, but the same form was a vehicle for some of Shakespeare's finest meditations.

Ring tends to contrast the near-death "enthusiast" or visionary too baldly with what he repeatedly refers to as "mainline" Christians. An unfortunate solecism, "mainline" is slang for absorbing narcotics directly in the blood stream. Ring, of course, means to say "mainstream." But difficulties remain. The current of Christian life today has many diverse and often antithetical tributaries, and everywhere displays the creative tension between inward inspiration and outward form— theology of liberation and the charismatic movement, for instance. Near-death gnosticism is one among many signs of ferment in current upheavals of spiritual life.

More to the point: the mother forms are not to be entirely despised, since they themselves provide conditions for their own creative transcendence. The mother forms of any spiritual tradition are not only oppressive and authoritarian (in a pejorative sense); sometimes they do embody the wisdom of long experience, and help guard against inflated and divisive egoism. Surely, we have to measure the dogmatic claims of NDErs that they just "know" they have met God and that the soul is immortal against the wider tradition of such claims. In a few examples, NDErs speak in an unpleasantly fundamentalist tone. For instance, on page 155 we learn from one enthusiast that "religions per se" are indeed the "antithesis" of the sacro-sanct NDE—an assertion whose ignorance is matched only by its arrogance. Ring is aware of these uncharitable excesses; his own concern is to bring out the universal message of the near-death experience.

Chapter 7 examines NDEs and psychic development. Ring's use of
"psychic" includes (a) phenomena that parapsychologists would call paranormal, such as clairvoyance, telepathy, and precognition and (b) evidence for internal states conducive to the paranormal, such as out-of-body experiences and dreams. As for (a)--psi in a strictly paranormal sense—two remarks may be made. First, Ring’s examples, by and large, are not authenticated; he is happy with reporting on what his subjects believe about their increased psychic development. He does show, however, that belief in psi is increased after the NDE. And since belief is a well-known psi-conducive variable, Ring is justified in concluding that the NDE probably speeds up psychic development in the strong sense. But the actual evidence presented for psi, though suggestive, is weak.

Second, the questionnaire is a bit hazy in phrasing. For example, telepathy is defined as “knowing what somebody else is thinking without that person telling you” (p. 286). Now that is a poor definition of telepathy. First of all, “knowing” is too strong. In any case, I might “know” (guess, infer, sense, intuit) what you are thinking, without you “telling” me anything, just by observing your nonverbal behavior (a wince or a smile may tell me a great deal). I don’t mean to be captious here, but questionnaires must be worded precisely, or else one might be tempted to dismiss the findings. Ring does succeed in showing that NDErs have increased receptivity to the deeper potentialities of the psyche. That, combined with the suggestive examples he gives, and his review of other recent studies of the psi-NDE connection, helps to make the case for a near-death connection with spiritual and psychic development.

Ring notes that the connection between psychic development and spiritual awakening is known to the great spiritual traditions, and suggests that the psychic is a byproduct of the spiritual, an important thesis mainstream psi researchers have tended to disregard. By focusing on the NDE as a matrix for spiritual awakening and psychic development, Ring puts the question of psi in a fresh perspective. Perhaps, as he suggests in the final chapters, this whole awakening process is directed. Perhaps it bears on the evolution of human consciousness. If this were indeed true, then we could hardly overestimate its importance.

Chapter 8 deals with the planetary visions of near-death experiencers, a small but theoretically provocative class of NDEs. In this chapter Ring describes a form of thought (in a spontaneous, secular setting) that we may call the prophetic "archetype." In using this troublesome word, I mean that the pattern seems indigenous to
mind as such: it appears spontaneously among different NDErs, as well as in other cultural and historical epochs. The basic pattern of Ring's near-death prophetic visions appeared among the ancient Hebrew prophets; it recurs in the eschatological literature of Christianity; in current times we observe it in that curious family of psychic oddities called Marian visions as well as in cases of deep UFO visions (Grosso, in press). It is basically a pattern in which, first, collective calamity, and then, a new age of spiritual human solidarity, are envisioned. The visionaries acquire a missionary fervor, their lives are transformed, and they often display unusual psychospiritual powers.

The prophetic pattern seems first to have emerged among the Hebrew prophets: Joel, Micah, Isaiah, etc. Its peculiar function is to address the question of justice. It is an archetype of transformation: not content merely to contemplate the world, it seeks to change it. Prophecy, we might say, is the dynamism of the collective unconscious, entrusted with the psychospiritual evolution of humanity. Wherever it breaks through the crust of the ordinary mind, trapped as the latter is by the concerns of its own personal survival, it creates a powerful psychosocial force. As with all archetypal patterns of human experience, personal variables determine fluctuations of style and expression. Nevertheless, the basic function of the prophetic vision is to warn and transform, the tribe in primitive times, the whole of humanity currently.

Ring's subjects seem almost to refine consciously the older forms of the archetype. For instance, in one case, a near-death prophetic visionary made it a point to say that the painful upheaval to come, which must precede the new age of peace and unity, should not be ascribed to "the vengeance of an indignant God" (which would be the way an Old Testament prophet might put it) but rather to the violation and ignorance of a higher natural law.

Visions of world-renewing calamity tend to occur during periods of cultural stress and transition. These visions may have peculiar psychological dangers in the modern world, which, as every schoolchild knows, is sitting on a nuclear powderkeg. The fundamentalist cast of mind, as it operates through extremist Islamic and Christian factions, increasingly inserts itself into the political process today. The archetypes, as Jung always stressed, are bipolar, having their destructive as well as their creative side. In his essay "Wotan" (1964), he tried to show how certain primeval myths and images psychologically influenced the rise of the Nazi movement. In our
own day, Robert Jay Lifton (Lifton and Falk, 1982) has called attention to the danger of the Bomb itself turning into an imagined path to transcendence. Bearing all this in mind, I cannot help feeling a little uneasy when I learn that, as Ring notes: "The common view of the NDErs who have these PVs is that not only is the scenario inevitable [a scenario that includes a heightened prospect of nuclear war], but, properly understood (in the light of its outcome), it is desirable and necessary" (p. 205). Now while Ring himself does not adhere to a rigidly deterministic interpretation of these prophetic visions, we do need to call attention to a danger here, especially since near-death millenial fantasies may be a symptom of a more widespread tendency. (Suppose the Man with his finger on the nuclear trigger "knows" that global catastrophe is necessary to promote the evolution of the greater consciousness.) As I try to show elsewhere (Grosso, in press), by imagining in realistic detail a post-nuclear-war consciousness, there is little reason to suppose that a new and higher type of humanity will emerge from it. On the contrary, the more plausible scenario is a return to barbarism.

Ring concludes this fascinating, if unsettling, chapter with a discussion of different theories of precognition and opts for a view that, mercifully, leaves the future open.

In chapters 9 and 10, Ring examines the biological and evolutionary import of his findings. Chapter 9 sets forth the kundalini hypothesis and its possible use in the interpretation of NDEs. "The idea that this energy, which is held to be both divine and divinizing, is responsible for humanity's evolution toward higher consciousness is called the kundalini hypothesis" (p. 230). Ring acknowledges that the kundalini concept is outside mainstream modern Western science, and thus offers it in a tentative vein, suggesting it may prove useful in the long run.

Unfortunately, the concept, as it stands, is not entirely clear to me. It seems to combine two diverse categories: the divine, a term either theological or phenomenological, and energy, a physical concept, as it is normally used. Ring says that the kundalini process is known by its "effects" (illumination, sense of burning, possible increased psi ability, etc.), and that these effects are similar to NDE effects. Actually, there are other contexts where these so-called kundalini effects manifest, but in different descriptive frameworks. For instance, I could document at length the same "effects" in the lives and spiritual adventures of the great saints; only there the "energy" is called the Holy Spirit. In Mark (5:30) it is alluded to as dynamis, power. The energy in question is, as Ring knows, a
bioenergy, or vital force, and there are many names for the cause of this family of widely observed psychological and physiological effects: ki energy, orgone energy, odic force, animal magnetism, eros (among the Greek philosophers), elan vital (Bergson), Geist (Hegel), etc. Parapsychologists might speak of psychokinesis, in which physical work seems to be done directly by mental agency.

The hypothesis seems to assert at least three things. First, there exists an energy, or capacity for “work” or change, inner and outer, that is vital and distinct from the energy systems known to physics or chemistry. Although most biologists reject vitalism today, modern Darwinian theory is increasingly under attack, and the idea that new principles of explanation are needed to account for the origin and evolution of life is far less outrageous today than it was, say, thirty years ago.

Second, the hypothesis asserts that this energy somehow changes brain structure, which allows for the occurrence of higher states of consciousness, including the near-death experience. How this might occur is not made clear. One possibility may be this: if the brain, as Henri Bergson (1962) said, is a “filter” of consciousness, a device for adapting to the plane of life; and if, as we may readily assume in near-death experiences, the normal efficiency of the brain is reduced and the filter temporarily dismantled, then we might indeed predict that the NDEr is likely to open up to a transcendent world, a world of mind at large, mind unrestricted by the categories and restraints associated with the normal drive toward personal survival.

In short, once I am past caring about my merely personal survival, I am more likely to experience forms of consciousness that transcend the constraints that normally operate on particular bodies. The kundalini effects would result from the filter breaking down. An individual would then be able to descend into the memory pool of the race, into the collective mind or mind at large. Oriented toward the life of the race, sensing more vividly the universal flow of vital force, one might be free to receive prophetic insight into the future of human evolution.

The third point is that this vital energy lies behind the ascent of evolving consciousness—the subject of Ring’s final chapter on NDEs and evolution. Ring here wonders if the larger meaning of NDEs is that they “collectively represent an evolutionary thrust toward higher consciousness for humanity at large” (p. 255). In this chapter Ring rightly sees the NDE as one among many forms of spiritual awakening, and touches on the thought of Teilhard de Chardin, Rupert Sheldrake, and John White’s visionary projection of Homo
noeticus. This is indeed a heady chapter, and one that I can only offer a few comments on.

If Ring is right, and the near-death consciousness is a potential form of human evolution, its importance would equal the evolution of human language. If language made possible the symbolic community of human experience, the NDE would provide a more immediate access to the life of that community, a kind of sensorium or intuitive awareness lacking in the indirect forms of symbolic consciousness. Symbols harden into formulas, die into dogmas, turn into weapons. The love, so often cited among the effects of near-death transformation, may be the affect (and effect) produced by the evolutionary kundalini energy dissolving the filter of the concept-ridden brain, which would permit us to see the world and our place in it more directly.

Evolution takes place, according to the orthodox theory, to adapt to changes in the environment; evolutionary changes have survival value. Our universally oriented *Homo noeticus* would have greater survival potential in our new manmade environment rigged for mutual assured destruction. Aggressiveness and paranoia, insensitivity to the inner life and needs of others, indifference to justice, love that is ideological rather than cosmic: these must have low survival value in a world primed for atomic holocaust. The problem is not merely the political dynamics of disarmament. The problem is how to effect inner disarmament, how to generate the disposition toward peace. This would call for a new mode of psychospiritual consciousness—for example, the omega consciousness that unfolds after a near-death experience.

Now if indeed life as a whole is guided by a type of transcendent intelligence—an increasingly attractive hypothesis to many thinkers—it must be disposed to prod this higher strain of consciousness into full awakening in humanity, which for better or for worse, has become the custodian of life on earth. Moreover, the archetypal theory of NDEs lends a hand in making a case for their evolutionary potential. Assume that the NDE projects a collective or transpersonal level of human consciousness; as such it would express an alternate type of humanity, a latent form of the total potential human self. The prophetic, mystical, and other near-death related types of archetypal experience express transformations of a new type of human functioning. It is the collective nature of near-death mental functioning that suggests we are observing a process of evolution toward a new type of humanity. Thanks to its holistic tendencies, it would be a type with greater survival potential. NDEs offer a
vivid empirical model for the evolution of consciousness, and Ring has begun to map aspects of this model, using the language of science. This takes the concept of higher consciousness out of the realm of speculation and moves it into the realm of phenomenology and the quantitative methods of science.

There are difficulties, however. For instance, kundalini is said to be a form of bioenergy “coiled” in the lower chakras, but how is this energy to account for evolution, especially the evolution of consciousness? A vital energy, it would seem to me, could at best propel or accelerate an already existing form or function. Evolution proper, by contrast, requires new form and higher degrees of order. Kundalini energy is a questionable candidate for being the agent of evolution, if it is treated mechanistically. Perhaps an analogy will illustrate: to love with passionate intensity is not necessarily to love wisely, nobly, or beautifully. The ascent upward is a more complexly orchestrated affair. We need insight into how this energy works to produce its effects.

Further, we might try to test specific claims. For instance, Gopi Krishna (whom Ring draws on) claims the kundalini energy he experienced so profoundly is a source of creative genius. He has written a mass of poetry and has challenged others to match the speed with which he executed these works. Speed, of course, is a mechanistic notion and has no bearing on the quality of the results. Indeed, I would have to say, in accord with William Irwin Thompson (1974), that Gopi Krishna’s poetry is not evidence that kundalini experiences inspire flights of creative genius; unfortunately, much of his work rarely rises above the level of doggerel.

Finally, I have difficulties with the very notion of the evolution of “higher” consciousness. This higher consciousness includes things such as esthetic awareness of ordinary objects, heightened moral sensibilities, and all-embracing love and empathy for sentient beings. But it is hard to imagine an analogy between biological evolution and the psychospiritual evolution under consideration. For instance, what would an organ for justice or love be like? Will noetic man automatically love his neighbors with his newly evolved organ (however subtle) of love, as currently we automatically see the blue sky with our human evolved eyes? A love not given freely would be mechanistic, and all its higher value would thereby be destroyed. But if love is given freely, it may not be given at all, and thus we are plunged back into a world where the higher type of love is once again a rarity and an anomaly.

Again, the capacity to see color might be a property evolved by
the race; the capacity to use one's color sense creatively the way Van Gogh did was something only an individual man could do. Van Gogh's art is great precisely because it is not collective, marks no mere residue of the whole species, but is the unique product of an unrepeatable, anomalous, personal evolution.

Indeed, if we accept Bergson's notion of duration, it follows that it is the nature of consciousness to evolve. Every personal consciousness is evolving from moment to moment, and every individual is a microcosm of the evolutionary process. From this view, there could never be an omega point, a final state, or even a fixed, defined direction for consciousness to evolve toward. Consciousness is essentially unstable, "free" we might say. Every personal consciousness, expressing a unique perspective on possible experience, is always surging toward novelty. But there could be no summit, no end-point in the process; that would be tantamount to loss of freedom, descent into thinghood. As Pico della Mirandola (1956) said, the peculiar glory of being human is to be permanently suspended between beasthood and godhood. For better or for worse, we remain radically and essentially free to make a heaven of hell or a hell of heaven. This doesn't mean that talk of evolution has no value here, only that we have to be clear about what we mean by evolution in the sphere of consciousness. Talk of evolution, for instance, might yet be useful as part of the rhetoric of self-transformation.

Let me finish with some comments on the idea of a new literature of hope. Heading Toward Omega illustrates, in my opinion, a growing genre, a type of book expressing, as Ring himself says, a cri de coeur, and is in a way a kind of prophecy, garbed in the habit of science, decorated with statistical tables and the caveats of reason. Its function is to warn and transform; cool theoria yields to the burning demands of praxis. Conflict is evident in the style. The author, aware of the scientific shortcomings of his study, nevertheless wants us to listen very carefully to his subjects, urging us to make ourselves receptive to the message. "Listen to this, Humanity!" he seems to be saying, "and allow the seeds to drop into the soil of your consciousness." The style itself is warm, sparkling, often colloquial, always energetic and engaging. This may be protoscience, our raconteur of tales of transformation is saying, but the urgency and importance of the message demands that we pay special heed.

The new literature of hope is consciously opposed to the zeitgeist of despair. It plays up the evidence of what is promising for the
human adventure. It does so in the full consciousness of the growing danger of nuclear war, accenting the idea that we are at a crossroads of history, a point of no return. The new literature of hope is a response to what we might call the evolutionary imperative. It reinforces the belief shared by many that radical change in the quality of life is essential to the survival of life on earth.

It uses science to discover and validate data, which in turn are passionately swept up in the construction of a new holistic mythology of life and death. The final goal is to create a believable Image—with Ring, Death as the Beloved—a stimulant to the right hemisphere of the brain. It acknowledges the need for an integrative myth. Ring, for instance, endorsing John White’s portrayal of Homo noeticus, citizen of the cosmos, presses his data into the service of validating the construct of a higher type of humanity.

In effect, the new literature of hope aspires to eroticize science (in the platonic sense in which the “erotic” represents the quest for the wholeness of human and divine). Is this bad? Well, it depends on how you see the world. Ancient “science,” or knowledge, was tied to the quest for wisdom, for arete or personal excellence, and for happiness in the context of communal life. In that sense it was erotic, and sought the wholeness of inner and outer, individual and social, human and divine. Content to serve the profitable gods of industry and the state, modern science has detached itself from the quest for holistic wisdom.

The new literature of hope uses information, language itself, in a way designed to be an agent of change. Of course, this is nothing new. The prophets, poets, and mystics of old were not impassive observers of life; the rhetoric of the spirit is an ancient phenomenon. The novel twist is for people within the scientific tradition to be turning to forms of spiritual rhetoric. Again, this is not just a current phenomenon; the Renaissance saw many visionary scientific utopias (Bacon, More, Campanella). Each of these authors fashioned utopias of higher humanity from the materials of the emerging science of the day. They failed because they lacked insight into the darkest and the highest potentialities of the human psyche. Ideally, the new literature of hope is neither psychologically naive nor does it neglect the higher potentialities of our inner selves. It is critical as well as constructive. Indeed, it raises questions about the validity of the most basic premises of Western civilization. Thus Marilyn Ferguson, in another example of the genre in question, writes of the emerging network of “Aquarian conspirators”: “Its members have broken with
certain key elements of Western thought, and they may even have broken continuity with history" (1980, p. 23).

Just as a book may itself become an agent of political change, so might certain books be thought of as agents of psychospiritual change. The transformative intent of Ring's book is clear when he says: "And thus it could be that eight million NDErs may be to the world what that hundredth monkey was to his islands. The myth at least gives us hope of possibility and if it should become widely enough shared, it could begin to generate its own reality" (p. 263). The new literature of hope—Ring's Heading Toward Omega is a shining illustration—offers itself as a tool in the evolutionary process itself, as an agent in the field of self-verifying and self-generating truth. Science is often thought of as a passive and impartial recording of truth; perhaps a more creative understanding of truth is essential for survival. Unprecedented forces of destruction threaten life on earth; a radically creative counterforce is essential to meet the challenge. The new literature of hope questions basic conceptions of science, truth, and objectivity. It is a sign of stirring in the conscience of science, an awakening to the need for science to ally itself with the deepest interests of humanity. Kenneth Ring's book helps raise these questions and spur this awakening.

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BOOK REVIEW

The Near-Death Experience: Problems, Prospects, Perspectives
edited by Bruce Greyson and Charles P. Flynn
Charles C. Thomas, 1984, 289 + xiii pp., $29.75

Howard A. Mickel
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The editors of this anthology have both had long-term and intimate contact with the growing field of near-death studies that gives them the necessary experience to produce this collection of articles representing the scholarly state of the art in near-death studies. Bruce Greyson, now Associate Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Connecticut Health Center (Farmington), has contributed numerous articles to the field and is Vice-President of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS). Charles Flynn, Associate Professor of Sociology at Miami University (Ohio), is Secretary of IANDS and is involved in a long-range research project on the aftereffects of near-death experiences (NDEs).

What the editors have done is collect 21 articles that, in general, represent the best and most recent contributions covering the major issues in near-death studies. All of the articles but two have appeared in professional journals or books prior to their inclusion in The Near-Death Experience. The articles date from 1977 to 1983.

While the collection contains articles by scholars from the disciplines of psychology, sociology, philosophy, and religion, the majority of the contributions are by medical researchers, which reflects the dominant focus of the field. Because of this long-awaited contribution designed for the medical community, The Near-Death Experience will in many respects replace Craig Lundahl's A Collection of Near-Death Research Readings (1982) as the scholarly benchmark for the field.

The Near-Death Experience is divided into five parts. Part I, "Intro-
duction to Near-Death Studies," contains social psychologist Kenneth Ring's "Near-Death Studies: An Overview," which presents an excellent review of the developmental history of near-death studies and the implications of NDEs for death education, suicide prevention, and world peace. The article will give the scholar interested in the field a basic introduction to the research issues and literature. The only omission in this otherwise excellent chapter is that there is no reference to negative or "hellish" experiences, which though rare are, in my experience, of deep interest and concern to many medical personnel and laypersons.

Part II, "Dimensions of the Near-Death Experience," focuses in chronological order on the models and analyses of the near-death experience that researchers have developed in the brief history of near-death studies. This section will be of interest to the researcher who wishes to look closely at the scientific base that is developing in near-death studies. In chapter 2, psychiatrist Russell Noyes, Jr. and Donald Slymen present a factor analysis of a sample of persons reporting life-threatening danger. This analysis yielded three distinct factors: (1) depersonalization, (2) hyperalertness, and (3) mystical consciousness. In chapter 3, Ring delineates the ordered temporal sequence of a prototypical NDE based on a sample of 102 persons on the verge of death. Next, Ring describes in chapter 4 his Weighted Core Experience Index, which attempts to distinguish moderate from deep NDEs. Finally, Greyson, in "The Near-Death Experience Scale," presents what he feels is a reliable, valid, and easily administered instrument for clinical and research purposes. This part of the book gives evidence of the growing methodological sophistication in the field.

The third part of The Near-Death Experience deals with "Theories of the Near-Death Experience." This section clearly is not a collection of cozy, party-line contributions. Rather, the editors have arranged the chapters in a dialectical fashion in which the thesis of one chapter is immediately and vigorously challenged by the next chapter, with no clear synthesis on the distant horizon. For example, on the basis of his personal NDE and his work as a neurologist, Ernst Rodin, in chapter 6, argues that the NDE is a "subjective reality" resulting from a toxic psychosis. In the next chapter (7) cardiologist Michael Sabom reviews the discrepancies between a typical NDE report and the characteristics of toxic psychosis.

The next dialogue begins in chapter 9, where psychopharmacologist Ronald Siegel presents a neurophysiological interpretation of the NDE in the longest chapter in the book (43 pages), supported by
the most extensive list of references (177). Siegel interprets the NDE as a dissociative hallucinatory activity of the brain. Chapter 9, "The Near-Death Experience: Balancing Siegel's View," by psychologist John Gibbs, raises questions Gibbs feels cannot be answered by Siegel's model. Another dialogue begins in chapter 11, where astronomer Carl Sagan, in "The Amniotic Universe," views the NDE as a derivative of the experiencer's recollections of his or her birth experience. In the very next chapter (12) philosopher Carl Becker challenges this thesis in "Why Birth Models Cannot Explain Near-Death Phenomena" by reviewing empirical studies that make Sagan's thesis seem unlikely. And so the multidisciplinary dialogue goes on. The challenging intellectual dialectic, involving substantive issues, gives the reader the impression we are on the frontier of a vigorous, new field of study that will have increasing academic, scientific, and practical relevance in the United States.

In chapter 13 Greyson presents a psychodynamic understanding of the NDE and responds to several objections. Greyson takes pains to indicate that the psychological interpretation of the NDE does not rule out other interpretations from a variety of disciplines. Since his paper closes with "Clinical Application," this chapter might well serve to close Part III rather than Michael Grosso's article (chapter 14), since it would provide a transition to Part IV: "Clinical Aspects of the Near-Death Experience."

Philosopher Grosso approaches the meaning of the near-death experience from a Jungian perspective in "Jung, Parapsychology, and the Near-Death Experience: Toward a Transpersonal Paradigm." In a sense, Grosso involves himself in a dialogue with all of the scholars in this collection rather than a single one, for he challenges them in their research on the NDE to do what parapsychologists have been doing for over a century: investigate the problem of human survival. Grosso sees the NDE as a Jungian archetype of death and enlightenment and finds traces of this archetype in mystical experiences, mythology, mystery religions, and psychedelics; in fact, in the spiritual traditions of humankind. The issue of the NDE is of immense importance, Grosso maintains, for if the NDE is simply a subjective hallucination, then the spiritual traditions of humankind are a vital lie, an illusion. Grosso's own view is that from a Jungian perspective the NDE suggests the continuation and even the expansion of consciousness after death.

Part IV, "Clinical Aspects of the Near-Death Experience," may prove to be the most valuable section of this collection because it
fulfills a long-awaited need: it presents in brief compass four articles by care-givers who have had extensive experience in working with patients who report NDEs. In chapter 15, psychiatrist Raymond Moody, Jr. addresses the need for physicians to respect the patient's experience and to avoid countertherapeutic labeling based on ignorance. Emergency care nurse Annalee Oakes in Chapter 16 provides specific nursing intervention methods to ease the recent near-death experiencer's readjustment to a normal life. Anthony Lee, managing editor of RN Magazine, in Chapter 17 draws upon his own experience of cardiac arrest in developing a nursing care plan for reducing stress during near-death events and providing support for post-resuscitation patients. Critical care social worker Kimberly Clark draws from her rather considerable experience in working with more than 100 near-death experiencers and outlines specific social work interventions with patients and their families during and after an NDE. Incidentally, Clark reports one of the most fascinating accounts of an out-of-body experience during an NDE I have ever read. One of Clark's patients reported being out of the body while being driven to the hospital and seeing a tennis shoe on the ledge of the third floor of the hospital. At the patient's urging, Clark went through the patients' rooms on the third floor and found the shoe on the ledge that matched details the patient had earlier reported.

Part V, "Consequences of Near-Death Experiences," presents three chapters on the aftereffects of the NDE, one of the new and promising areas of NDE research. Greyson, in Chapter 19, notes the paradoxical finding that though the NDE would seem to "romanticize" death and make it more attractive for the person who attempts suicide, research indicates that having an NDE greatly reduces the risk that the person will try suicide again. Psychiatrist Noyes, in Chapter 20, approaches the question of "The Human Experience of Death or, What Can We Learn From Near-Death Experiences?" Noyes summarizes the changed attitudes toward death on the part of near-death experiencers. One of the most interesting is a sense of "aliveness," as contrasted with "deadness," that comes as a result of the ego-death/rebirth experience accompanying some near-death experiences. Cautiously bracketing the religious implications, Noyes reflects on how the sense of "aliveness" found in the mystical experience and the NDE might be made available for therapeutic purposes. This suggestion of Noyes has always seemed filled with insight and potentiality, and I am glad that the editors are making this suggestion available to
the variety of researchers that will read *The Near-Death Experience*. In Chapter 21, Flynn reviews the literature and presents his own data on the attitudinal, personality, and belief changes that commonly follow NDEs. Based on the findings that NDEs tend to increase caring and compassion for others and a sense of transcendent reality, and to decrease materialism, Flynn assesses the possibility that the NDE might have an impact in helping to create a more humane world.

In any collection of articles that is intended to present the best and the most representative academic research in a field, it is inevitable that some articles are included and others, for a variety of reasons, are excluded. If I had the opportunity to nominate one additional chapter for Part III, "Theories of the Near-Death Experience," it would be a selection from the work of British psychologist/parapsychologist Susan Blackmore. Blackmore has critically analyzed the literature of spontaneous out-of-body experiences, the occult literature, the experimental research on out-of-body experiences, and the NDE literature as well. She presents a psychological interpretation of the out-of-body experience (and by implication the NDE) and offers testable hypotheses that might confirm her interpretation (Blackmore, 1983).

*The Near-Death Experience* is a well-bound 289-page book. There is no index.

In the foreword to this volume, Sabom, a cardiologist, tells us that in 1976 he read Moody's *Life After Life* (1975). Moody said he was convinced that the NDE had great significance for the medical community and other fields. Sabom had never heard of the NDE before, nor could he find a physician young or old who was aware of the experience from his or her patients' own reports. There have been many changes since 1976. One of the most positive is the publication of *The Near-Death Experience*. Here we find a solid collection of articles that represents the state of the art in near-death studies with a valuable section of clinical application. This collection promises to be an indispensable resource for medical centers, schools of nursing, social work programs, theological seminaries, and other programs that deal with death and dying. I especially recommend the book to faculty who teach death and dying courses. This collection appears to be now, and perhaps for several years into the future, the major scholarly resource for near-death studies.
REFERENCES


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LETTERS

The Life Review in Childhood NDEs

To the Editor:

Nancy Evans Bush’s paper (1983) on retrospective and parent-told childhood near-death experiences (NDEs) is interesting and offers the needed beginning inquiry for a more thorough study of childhood NDEs. Only further investigation of NDEs and related phenomena can begin to determine if cultural conditioning is a primary determinant of near-death experience contents.

In many conversations and interviews with individuals who have had NDEs in childhood, I have heard numerous mentions of both a life review and a sense of judgment, two features of the NDE that Bush found lacking in the accounts she reviewed.

Through careful analysis and in-depth investigation, I think researchers will find the same major elements of the core experience in childhood as in adult experiencers. According to George Gallup, Jr.’s statistics (1982), 11 percent of the people who come close to death report a life review, one of the most often reported elements of the experience he found. I think this is just as frequent for children.

I think further clarification needs to be made as to what is meant by a sense of judgment. Ken Ring wrote that “A sense of (external) judgment is not a typical feature of the core experience, but a self-assessment is frequently made when one comes close to death” (1980, p. 196). If that is the case, the feeling that one did not die because there still was a reason to live, or because the self would not surrender to death, constitutes this sense of being judged.

To illustrate these two elements within the context of a childhood NDE, I shall quote at length from an account of a 43-year-old surgeon who had a near-death experience more than 30 years ago when he almost drowned. This excerpt from a longer interview contains both a sense of judgment and a life review as well as mention of the influence this experience has had on his later development.

I was about 12 years old. I was swimming across a very deep pond. I was about halfway across when I suddenly felt very tired. I panicked because I was only halfway across and I wasn’t certain if I could make it all the way to the nearest shore.
I remember thinking that I would touch down and rest for a few minutes. When I went to touch down, however, I submerged probably 8 to 10 feet. I realized then that I was in trouble. I struggled to the surface of the water and then really began to panic. I lost my ability to stay on the surface and submerged again. I came up again. I remember thinking that I had gone down two times. With that, I lost control and went down a third time. At that point, I thought, "Well, this is it."

Each time I went under I thought I was going to die. When I went down a third time, I had it fixed in my mind that when a person goes down three times, that's it. I can visualize myself opening my eyes under the water and seeing a yellow haze. Part of me at that moment thought, "This is it and I am going to die. I am just going to surrender my body, my will."

Then part of me said, "No, you're not! You are going to work your way back to the surface of the water." And that is what I did.

As I drifted into the depths of the water, I thought of my parents. I thought of the fact that I was young. I thought also about what my life had involved and what it was all about.

I began to see a visual image of a newspaper. I guess my ego was strong because I saw a front page. The headline read something like, "JOHN SMITH DROWNS IN POND!"

Somewhere in here was also a mental picture of my parents being very sad. The thought that this (my death) was going to be a tremendous blow to my parents came to me. I knew that they would be terribly sad. I suddenly felt sad also.

Along with that was a rapid sequence of happy times in my life. I cannot specifically remember what, but it was a kaleidoscope effect, a rippling of thoughts. The rippling of thoughts were positive thoughts about the happy times as a child. One of the happiest times was midsummer and getting up early in the morning and going out to my father's garden to the tomato plants, pulling one of the tomatoes off the vine and then eating it. It was such a warm feeling being there with the birds singing and the color of nature all around me. It was more the feelings that I experienced rather than the specific images.

I think that it was that final kaleidoscope of thoughts about the happy times as a child, the sadness I felt for myself because I really did not want to die, and the sadness I felt for my parents because I thought they would miss me, that sent a surge of energy within me. And with that energy, I struggled back to the surface of the water. I thought I was never going to get to the top but that last surge of adrenalin was enough to get me to the shore.

All of this was probably compressed into seconds. As I think of it, I am impressed by the amount of thought that seems to have occurred in a compact period of time. It's not like you are logically thinking. It's a surging of various energies. And it was that final burst of energy that brought me to the surface.

Coming close to losing my life has been a part of the molding of my becoming a physician and developing my attitude as a physician. Life became a little more dear to me after that experience.

I remember going through medical school, the difference between
those who made it and those who didn't was one of sheer tenacity. That last ditch effort I used to survive in the water came back to me again in medical school and helped me succeed when others would give up.

If a patient of mine wanted to talk about an NDE, I would want to listen to it. I would probably offer some consolation if they think they are crazy and I would acknowledge that the experience is important because they feel it is important. I think that information about the field is something that has to be investigated and shared.

REFERENCES


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Nancy Evans Bush Replies

To the Editor:

I thank Leigh Henderson for bringing to our attention this interesting case of childhood near-drowning.

Although this account includes the recollection of scenes from the boy’s earlier childhood, it remains atypical of the childhood NDEs gathered so far. In addition to the 18 cases presented in the Anabiosis article (Bush, 1983) and Melvin Morse’s (1983) first published case, 3 instances of childhood NDEs have more recently been described in detail by Glen Gabbard and Stuart Twemlow (1984). All have lacked anything resembling a life review. Morse’s ongoing study, not yet published, has produced 9 additional instances of classic NDEs in children, with none of them reporting such a recollection (Morse, personal communication, 1985).

This absence of life reviews in 31 cases is not conclusive evidence that such a review cannot occur in a childhood NDE, but simply suggests that its incidence in adult experiences may be significantly
higher than in children.

The Gallup Poll cited by Henderson dealt exclusively with adults, as did Kenneth Ring's data, which provided the comparative percentages for my Anabiosis article. The apparent rarity of life reviews among children may well be a developmental issue; if so, the relative maturity of the boy in this case (12 years) might have influenced his having experienced a review of incidents from his life. The possibility of there being a developmental component to the experience has, in fact, been an unexpected and intriguing aspect of this early study.

Another issue is whether the account given here is of a near-death experience or a near-death event. The description is clearly one of a close call with drowning. However, the marked absence of all characteristic NDE elements except the life review—itself, as noted, apparently atypical in childhood NDEs—and the strongly cognitive tone of the account suggest that this may be the compelling remembrance of a nearly fatal event rather than memory of an NDE of the sort described by Raymond Moody (1975), Ring (1980), and Michael Sabom (1982).

People who come close to death may be profoundly marked by the experience, often recalling vivid life reviews and other phenomena as described by Albert Heim (Noyes and Kletti, 1972), Russell Noyes and Roy Kletti (1978), and others. The event may produce life-changing results. It is nevertheless important to recognize that the near-death experience is defined by elements not present here. Of these elements, perhaps the most essential are the sense of ineffability or other-dimensionality and the powerful affect (either positive or negative) arising from within the experience itself rather than from the individual's response to being near death.

If one uses Ring's list of NDE characteristics as the basis for a quick differential diagnosis, so to speak, with the other childhood accounts and the one here, the distinction is very clear. (A list of those characteristic elements appears on p. 189 of my 1983 Anabiosis article.) Henderson's case contains the time distortion, speeded-up thought process, and revival of memories frequently found in cases of life-threatening danger; however, of characteristic NDE elements the only one mentioned here is that reported by none of the other children. This account appears to be a classic description of a near-death event rather than an NDE. While irrelevant to the subjective significance of the experience in an individual life, this distinction seems important for researchers in the early stages of establishing the data base.
In regard to Henderson's interpretation that a decision to return to life "constitutes (a) sense of being judged," that is questionable. Etymologically, "judgment" and "decision", while closely related, are not synonymous. Judgment denotes authoritative opinion, evaluation, and interpretation; decision denotes a determination or conclusion. Connotatively, especially in death-related situations, judgment carries the historical Judeo-Christian sense of divine evaluation of one's ultimate merit—of the goodness or badness of one's life and behavior.

Ring's use of the term is clearly related to this sense of the quality of the life and self, made by the experiencer rather than by an external power. "If a judgment was passed," he noted (1980, p. 196), "it was one they (the experiencers) made of themselves" (emphasis in the original). This sense of evaluation, of assessment, was distinguished by Ring from the "decisional crisis," the determination of whether or not to return to life. Although both Moody (1975) and Ring recognized the link between the life review and sense of judgment, neither has ever equated judgment with the decision to return, either conceptually or in the temporal course of the NDE.

Henderson's letter serves to emphasize how interesting these phenomena are and how complex their interpretation can be. I certainly concur with her sense of the need for more in-depth investigation and careful analysis, for only through thorough and meticulous analysis of individual cases can we pick up those fascinating, and perhaps critically important, features overlooked in statistical analyses of larger samples of cases.

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To the Editor:

In her elegant paper "Are out-of-body experiences evidence for survival?" Susan Blackmore (1983) has cast doubt on Michael Sabom's (1982) conclusion that some of his interviewees who had the out-of-body experience (OBE) were able to see the events surrounding their cardiopulmonary resuscitation by nonordinary means and were unlikely to have reconstructed them from the conversations of the medical people attending them and such sources. One of the methods by which Sabom checked the possibility of reconstruction was to ask a "control" group of nonexperiencers whether they could piece together their resuscitation from their general knowledge of the CPR technique. He found that most of them made at least one major error. According to Blackmore, a comparison between experiencers and nonexperiencers, which this method involves, is unfair because the latter group did not have the "auditory and other information" the former group might have had. I fail to understand this criticism. Isn't the purpose of having a control group to compare? For the above-mentioned test to serve any useful purpose, shouldn't the population on which it is carried out be nonexperiencers?

Sabom explained at length the other procedures he adopted and how he identified several items in the OBE accounts that could not have been put together from verbal or visual perceptions the subjects might have made during a semiconscious state. Some notable examples are perceptions of a ventricular aneurysm and its resection (Sabom, 1982, p. 68), the pattern of movement of the needles on the face of the defibrillator (p. 101), and a doctor's attempt to enter the subclavian vein (pp. 107, 110).
What I want to emphasize most is that, first, Sabom showed, for the first time, a reasonably sound way to find out whether OBE subjects see. Until he came on the scene we could only speculate. Secondly, what his study shows is not that all those who have the OBE, which by current definition is a feeling of perceiving the world from a location outside the physical body, actually see, but that there are some cases—or a class of cases—in which accurate perception occurs.

This brings me to the subject of categorization of OBEs. One very broad classification I have found useful is this: single, involuntary OBEs and voluntary OBEs. The difference between the two kinds is that perception is clearer and more accurate in the former than in the latter (Green, 1968, p. 74). Some other investigators have also noted this difference. For example, Paula Smith and Harvey Irwin observed that “experimentally induced OBEs may well be of poor quality and of limited efficacy as a means of obtaining target relevant information” (1981, p. 4). Part of the reason Blackmore concluded that the out-of-body world is completely imaginary seems to be a failure to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary experiences. The kind of inaccuracies in perception she pointed out on page 151 is usually associated with voluntary OBEs (Green, 1968, p. 74).

There are indications in some of the features of the OBE that the whole phenomenon cannot be accounted for by imagination. One I have discussed at some length elsewhere (1982)—pointing out, to my knowledge for the first time, that researchers have not tried to account for it—is the elevated vantage point. Blackmore’s explanation for this feature was that a position above and behind the level of the head is “a most convenient place from which to structure imagined places” (p. 150). I find that explanation unsatisfactory. One reason is that when I close my eyes and try to imagine my room, as she suggested, I find that I mentally see it from the level of my physical eyes. In fact, I find it very difficult to imagine that I am looking down from above my head; when I try to do this, I see a head over my head, not the room. I have tried the experiment with six others without telling them about my experience, and they too saw as if through their physical eyes.

A second and more important reason for my disagreement with Blackmore is this. When we look at an object we see its image projected into space. In the OBE, the opposite happens; that is, perception seems to occur from a point outside the body, in space. There is experimental evidence for this kind of projection in another
sensory modality. Georg von Bekesy (1963, 1967) demonstrated that a series of vibrators applied to the forearm will produce a point perception (on the receptor surface) when the phases of vibration are appropriately adjusted. When the subject wears such vibrators on both forearms for sometime, the point perception (the perception of stimulation) suddenly leaps into the space between the arms. It is noteworthy that many subjects of spontaneous OBEs have described the shift in viewpoint as being abrupt and themselves as being "a point of presence" (Green, 1968, p. 36) or "a point of consciousness" (Moody, 1977, p. 42) in "ecsomatic space." It seems to me that von Bekesy's experiments provide a good reason for looking for a naturalistic explanation for the feeling of seeing from outside (and above) the body.

These experiments may or may not help understand how the OBE subject perceives events and the like, but I think it is premature at this time to conclude, as Blackmore did, that "out-of-body vision has been tested and has not been found" (1983, p. 146). It is true that out-of-body vision seems to imply "eyeless sight" and this sounds impossible, but I prefer to keep the question open. The possibility that there may be more than two visual systems (cortical and tectal) in man (Furst, 1979, p. 68) and the fact that some measure of success has attended an attempt to make a device that by tactile stimulation can produce visual experience of objects in blind persons (White, Saunders, Scadden, Bach-Y-Rita, and Collins, 1970), for example, suggest that there is a great deal more to know about the structures and processes involved in vision than we do now. Attempts to unravel the puzzle of out-of-body vision may cast new light on these and perhaps even lead to means of giving sight to the blind.

By arguing that there may be a physical basis to some of the features of the OBE, I am not suggesting that psychological theories, including Blackmore's approach, are irrelevant. Since man in my view is a psychophysical unity, such theories too may help in our efforts to understand this unique phenomenon.

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Susan Blackmore Replies

To the Editor:

V. Krishnan makes several interesting points. First of all I think he fails to understand my comments on Michael Sabom’s (1982) control group. Yes, the purpose of a control group is to compare, but usually it is most valuable to compare two groups in which everything is held constant except for the variable being studied. In this case there is no obviously ideal control. Sabom’s is certainly a good start, but his control patients did not actually go through the cardiac resuscitation and therefore did not have access to all sorts of important information about it.

That this might be important is clear from some of the errors they made. Sabom wrote, “The most common error was the belief that
mouth-to-mouth breathing would be the routine method of artificial ventilation in the cardiac-arrested, hospitalized patient. In truth, mouth-to-mouth breathing is a rarely used means ...” (1982, p. 120). My point is that the control group might well be expected not to know this, but the actual NDE patients had gone through the resuscitation. If one assumes that they were behaviorally unconscious but still able to feel something, then they might well have felt the electric shocks and other manipulations. If they had been resuscitated by mouth-to-mouth breathing they might have felt this too. The same applies to many of the other errors. If a patient could feel or hear even a little, he would gain quite a lot of information about the procedure and order of events that the control group did not have. I therefore suggested that Sabom’s control group was not ideal, though I must repeat it was a very useful start. We now need other kinds of control groups as well. For example subjects might be put through a fake resuscitation procedure, perhaps under deep relaxation, and then asked to reconstruct a view from above. Different amounts of information could be made available to see how this affected the accounts. But this is a long task. I only suggest it as a possibility for the future.

Crucial to Sabom’s argument is that there are some features that cannot be sensed in this way, such as visual details of the behavior of needles on a defibrillator, which was reported by one NDE patient. This still stands and I totally agree with Krishnan; it is important evidence. The point is that we need to be clear first about how much information a person could gain normally during the resuscitation and secondly whether NDE patients really do acquire information that goes beyond this limit. This is not easy to do but will be necessary if we are to draw strong conclusions about the paranormality of the NDE or its implications for survival.

Krishnan’s second point concerns the difference between single, involuntary and voluntary OBEs. I agree that there are suggestions in the literature that the two are different. And in my own experience they are qualitatively different, but I do not agree that this is a very useful categorization with respect to the accuracy of perception. Krishnan confuses two separate issues, twice. First he confuses the number of OBEs a person has had and whether the OBEs were voluntary or not. And secondly he confuses clarity with accuracy of perception. I shall try to extricate these.

First of all, it is true that single OBEs are rarely voluntary ones, but this does occasionally occur and in any case the rarity of voluntary, single cases tells us very little since both single OBEs and
voluntary OBEs are rare. I have actually been interested in these
differences and therefore asked relevant questions in some of my
surveys. In my random survey of Bristol residents (Blackmore,
1984a) I found 39 people who had had OBEs. Of these only 4
had had voluntary OBEs and these were, as Krishnan would expect,
multiple OBErs. However, only 6 of the 39 had had single OBEs,
so this is not surprising and tells us very little. I also asked about
clarity of perception—whether it was as usual, brighter and clearer
than usual, or vaguer and dimmer than usual. There are no differ-
ences in the reported clarity between those having multiple and
single OBEs or those having voluntary or only involuntary OBEs.
In this survey respondents only gave one answer to the question
on clarity of vision. I did not ask separately about each of their
OBEs, so it is possible that a difference was masked. Certainly
I would like to follow up this difference.

However, what should we conclude if such a difference were
found? It would be very interesting if voluntary OBEs were less
clear than involuntary ones but that would be expected for all
sorts of reasons even if all OBEs were based on imagination. This
is quite separate from any difference in the accuracy of perception.
Contrary to Celia Green's opinion (1968), I have no reason to
suppose that involuntary OBES provide more accurate perception.
Indeed, the kinds of inaccuracies I pointed out on page 151 are
precisely the kind that are reported in involuntary OBEs (and re-
member that involuntary OBEs are by far the majority). One of
the most interesting cases I have investigated was a classical OBE,
occurring quite involuntarily in a Canadian architect, who seemed
to travel across the Atlantic to England. He described the streets
and shops and people he saw in great detail, but his descriptions
were hopelessly inaccurate and could not have derived from the
actual scene at the place he "visited" (Blackmore, 1982). I agree
that we need better categorization of OBEs, but I do not think
that the one Krishnan points out is especially helpful.

I am interested in his next point, about viewpoints in memory.
Certainly some people, like Krishnan, do not imagine or remember
scenes as though from above. However, others, like myself, do so
almost all the time. There is recent work (Nigro and Neisser, 1983)
showing that people differ in this respect. I would predict that this
variable affects the chance of a person having an OBE and have
begun research on this (Blackmore, 1983) but it is too early to say
whether I am right or not. However, it is an example of the ways
in which my approach leads to testable predictions (for others see
Blackmore, 1984b). Clearly Krishnan and I differ in the results we would expect. I hope we shall soon be able to find out who is right.

Finally, I am grateful to him for pointing out the relevance of the fascinating work by Georg von Bekesy (1967). Certainly I totally agree. The work provides an analogy in support of a naturalistic explanation of the shift in viewpoint in OBEs. What I don't understand is that he contrasts naturalistic or physical explanations with psychological ones. The study of the visual system (in natural, physical, and all other aspects) is a fundamental part of psychology. Like Krishnan I hope that we shall be able to understand both visual perception, imagination and the OBE better in relation to each other.

REFERENCES


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Bozzano and Deathbed Visions

To the Editor:

We still have some objections to Ronald Siegel and Ada Hirschman's approach (1984) to historical research in parapsychology, as seen in their response to a previous critique (Alvarado and Stevenson, 1984) of their paper discussing Ernesto Bozzano's work with deathbed visions (Siegel and Hirschman, 1983). Our objections are mainly to the presentation of information and inferences without the bibliographical documentation required in historical papers.

The authors point out in their reply that they "also referred in passing to his [Bozzano's] publications between 1905 and 1910 in Annals of Psychical Science, which included the 1906 paper cited by Carlos Alvarado and Ian Stevenson" (p. 176). However, they presented no references to these papers (other than a secondary one referring to several of them), nor to the 1906 one on deathbed visions, which is not satisfactory from the historical and bibliographical point of view.

In their reply, Siegel and Hirschman said, "We stated that Richet, in a letter to Bozzano, found that the survival theory was the most salient explanation of all the facts" (p. 177), and that the letter they were referring to was the one published by Bozzano (1924). However, the original article makes no reference to a letter, saying only that Richet "was eventually converted to the survival theory by Bozzano," and that the "source of that conversion" (p. 196) was Bozzano's (1923) monograph on deathbed visions. Furthermore, the letter here referred to does not express conviction of survival by Richet. Perhaps clearer evidence for Richet's conversion to survival may emerge in the future, but we cannot help being puzzled by the way the historical evidence is handled here: affirmations are made without quoting relevant sources, and contradictions between the initial paper and the later reply are apparent.

In the initial paper it was said that Bozzano "became attracted to parapsychology through the work of Eusapia Palladino during the early 1890s" (p. 195). In the reply Siegel and Hirschman said "We agree that Bozzano was influenced by Eusapia Palladino but we never stated they had sittings in the early 1890s, only that Bozzano was attracted to parapsychology and Palladino during the early 1890s" (pp. 176-177). However, our critique centered on the issue of Bozzano becoming interested in parapsychology because of Palladino. The evidence indicates that Bozzano was interested in the field before he had contact with Palladino.
Regarding Bozzano’s influences on British and American psychical researchers, we think the problem is more complex than the lack of translations into English. Our point was that other factors, such as the opinion these researchers had of Bozzano’s evidential standards, are important in this respect. The reception of ideas and specific lines of research in science is complex and involves many variables, as seen, for example, in Seymour Mauskopf and Michael McVaugh’s (1980) study of some aspects of parapsychology’s history.

In general, our complaint is that the paper here discussed presents diverse statements and inferences without proper bibliographical documentation. Since these are important tools of historical research, we do not think it is unreasonable to ask for more details or express doubts as to several of the statements presented.

REFERENCES


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Ronald Siegel and Ada Hirschman Reply

To the Editor:

On page 196, line 18, of our original note (Siegel and Hirschman, 1983) we cited Ernesto Bozzano's 1906 publication on deathbed visions exactly the way Bozzano did in 1923 (p. 14) when he referred to it, in the introduction to a case study, as his "first monograph" on the subject.

Carlos Alvarado and Ian Stevenson's continuing discomfort with things we neither stated nor inferred reminds us of the dying old man in the above case who kept grasping at the hallucinatory hand of his dead son. As parapsychologists should have learned by now, you cannot shake hands with ghosts of people in the grave, or ghosts of ideas hiding between the lines, despite your frustrated desires to do so.

REFERENCES


THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR NEAR-DEATH STUDIES, INC. (IANDS)

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

As the frontiers of science have broadened, they have come to encompass areas once thought to belong only to the spiritual traditions. Discoveries in high-energy physics, the neurosciences, and psycho-neuro-immunology, in particular, indicate that the "real world" goes far beyond the physical as we have understood it, and that underlying even Newtonian physics are operating "laws" which most closely resemble principles found in the world's great religious and spiritual histories.

Near-death and other transformative experiences strongly buttress these findings from the hard sciences, suggesting that some aspects of human consciousness may not be physiological. Aftereffects in the lives of experiencers consistently demonstrate alterations in understanding and capabilities beyond anything believed scientifically possible.

The nature of the human mind may be quite different from what we have conceived, and, in ways now only dimly understood, consciousness may be integral to the operation of the universe. In the magnitude of their potential impact on Western thought, these developments in twentieth century science exceed anything since the time of Copernicus. They hold both the promise of incomparably greater understanding and the likelihood of personal and cultural disruption until they are better comprehended and integrated into the life of the individual and the belief system of society.

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