

Beyond Death: The Best Evidence for the Survival of Human Consciousness¹

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In the last 150 years, a number of scientists, medical doctors, and other highly qualified investigators have diligently collected a wide variety of data pointing to the continuing existence of some portion of human consciousness after death of the body. This essay will lay out the most pertinent elements of that accumulated data and argue that they strongly support the hypothesis of survival of human consciousness after permanent bodily death. My discussion of the evidence is divided into two parts:

Part I lays out the *third-person evidence for survival*: that is, evidence from the perspective of observers who are still on this side of death but who have experienced something that appears to point to the continued consciousness of someone whose body is no longer alive. This third-person evidence comes from phenomena such as apparitions of the dead, dreams, mediumship, and poltergeists.

Part II looks at *first-person evidence*: evidence from the perspective of observers who have themselves experienced dying and remember maintaining consciousness afterward. This evidence comes not only from people who have had near-death experiences but also from those who remember living previous lives in other bodies and/or being conscious in a disembodied state between lives.

The fact that there is extensive evidence for survival from both third-person and first-person perspectives is extremely important. As I will argue, the extensive cross-validation between these types of evidence cripples the strongest skeptical arguments that have been brought against each category considered alone and makes the hypothesis of survival of permanent bodily death the best explanation for the evidence considered as a whole.

I. Third-Person Evidence for Survival

In 1984, the NORC General Social Survey found that, among Americans who had suffered the death of a spouse, 53% reported experiencing some kind of

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after-death contact.² Results were much the same in Britain. In Wales, 47% of interviewees reported seeing, hearing, and/or feeling their departed spouse (though only a quarter of them ever told anyone else about the experience),³ and a survey of widows in London reported that 46% of them believed they'd had after-death contact with their deceased husband.⁴ If we look beyond those who have lost spouses, surveys show that somewhere between 36-42% of the American public feel they've "really been in touch with" someone who has died.⁵

Clearly, the question is not whether people have experiences that *seem* to be contact from the deceased. They obviously do. It is rather whether these experiences offer any indication of being genuine evidence for the survival of human consciousness beyond the death of the body, or whether they can all be satisfactorily explained in some other way.

In our examination of this third-person evidence for survival, we will look at six main types of apparent after-death contact and the evidential support that each of them gives to the survival hypothesis. We will begin with an in-depth examination of after-death apparitions and then move on to dreams, mental mediumship, physical mediumship and poltergeists, phantom phone calls, and finally conclude with a discussion of meaningful coincidence or "synchronicity."

For each of these phenomena, we'll look at a range of evidential characteristics they present, including occurring before the experiencer has been informed of the death, being observed by multiple people and by those with no emotional connection to the deceased ("bystanders"), showing goal-directed behavior, exhibiting interactivity, providing verifiable new information, and showing continuity with the way these phenomena have been used for psychic communication by living people. We'll also look at the strengths and weaknesses of some of the alternative hypotheses used to explain apparent contacts with the dead.

² This survey did not ask respondents to specify whether the experienced contacts were with the deceased spouse or with someone else. Andrew M. Greeley, *Religious Change in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 105.

³ W. Dewi Rees, "The Hallucinations of Widowhood," *British Medical Journal* 4 (Oct 2, 1971): 37-41, accessible at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1799198/pdf/brmedj02669-0049.pdf>.

⁴ Peter Marris, *Widows and Their Families* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958).

⁵ The NORC General Social Survey asked this question in four different years, with the following percentage of positive responses: 42% in 1984, 40% in 1988, 36% in 1989, and 40% in 1991. See NORC's GSS online Data Explorer: <https://gssdataexplorer.norc.org/variables/319/vshow>.

1. Apparitions

Let's start with one of the most common types of ostensible after-death communication: apparitions. The late Icelandic psychologist Erlendur Haraldsson, one of the preeminent investigators of after-death communication in the last few decades, reported that visual experiences of the deceased constituted 67% of the cases he collected of apparent contact with the dead while in a waking state.⁶ But apparitions aren't only a visual phenomenon. Many apparitions are heard to speak, and others actually touch the perceiver. According to one of Haraldsson's informants, the apparition "held out her hand, grasped my fingers hard and said: 'Hello there.' ... I had seen spirits before, [but] I had never seen the like of this and never touched one, not one which seemed to be of flesh and blood."⁷ While such lifelike apparitions could conceivably be very vivid hallucinations, several pieces of evidence count in favor of at least some apparitions' being genuine contacts with the consciousness of the deceased.

Apparitions Occurring Before Knowledge of the Death

One of the strongest pieces of evidence that apparitions are not mere hallucinations induced by grief or wishful thinking is the fact that people often see an apparition before they were even informed of the death of the person involved.

Cases like this go all the way back to the earliest years of parapsychological research. For instance, in 1860, Robert Dale Owen published his personal investigation of the case of a British military captain, Captain Wheatcroft. Wheatcroft was stationed in India, but on the night of November 14-15, 1857, he apparently appeared to his wife beside her bed back in Cambridge, England. She said that she saw him bent forward, as if suffering, and that he appeared to be trying to speak but no sound came out. After a minute or so, he vanished. This experience led the captain's wife to suspect he'd been killed or badly wounded, but it wasn't until the following month that she got word her husband had died on November 15. When she heard this, however, she felt sure that the date she was given was wrong and that her husband must have died the previous day, November 14, *before* she saw him appear. Wheatcroft's lawyer also subsequently discovered that another woman of his acquaintance had experienced an apparition of a man corresponding to the captain's description, bent over in pain, and that this apparition had happened around 9pm on November 14. This, too, seemed to support the idea that

⁶ Erlendur Haraldsson, *The Departed Among the Living: An Investigative Study of Afterlife Encounters* (Guildford, UK: White Crow Books, 2012), 2.

⁷ Haraldsson, *The Departed Among the Living*, 212.

there was a problem with the reported date of death. Indeed, a few months later, a man who was an eye-witness to Wheatcroft's death confirmed that he had in fact died on November 14. This was the date inscribed on his grave in India, and the British War Office records were subsequently corrected to reflect this.⁸

Here's another carefully investigated case in which an apparition provided otherwise unknown information about the death of the person involved. A 17-year-old girl named Minnie Wilson was living at a convent in Belgium when she received an unexpected visit from her godfather. He came up to her while she was kneeling at prayer in a chapel (and possibly in a trance-like state). "I thought something was wrong as he had such a pained expression," Minnie recounted in her written statement. "[H]e took my hand and said he had done something very wrong and that it would help him a great deal to have me to pray for him; then he told me he had been refused by the woman he loved and that he had shot himself in his despair." In fact, Minnie's godfather had died three days before in London, in precisely the way his apparition described. Minnie had not yet been informed of the death, as the convent in which she lived did not allow newspapers, and her mother did not write to her about it until three days *after* the apparition. Even then, her mother did not tell her the circumstances of her godfather's death. It was Minnie herself who, on her next visit home to England, insisted that her mother tell her whether her godfather had taken his own life because a woman wouldn't love him. Her mother then confirmed this was true.⁹

While these cases are somewhat exceptional in the amount of detail relayed by the apparitions, experiencing an apparition before being informed of a death is itself very common. Haraldsson reports that, of the 449 cases of apparent encounters with the dead that he collected, one out of every nine happened within 24 hours of the death, and in 86% of those cases, the person having the experience did not yet know that the death had occurred.¹⁰

⁸ Robert Dale Owen, *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World* (London: Trübner & Co., 1860), 299-303, accessible at <https://books.google.com/books?id=dHtDCYn4d7AC&printsec=frontcover&hl=fr#v=onepage&q&f=false>. A few additional details of the case, including the full names of those to whom Owen refers by initials, are included in Edmund Gurney, Frederic W. H. Myers, and Frank Podmore, *Phantasms of the Living*, vol. 1 (London: Trübner & Co., 1886), 420-4 (Case 166), accessible at <https://archive.org/details/phantasmsoflivin01gurn/mode/2up>.

⁹ William F. Barrett, "G. 283. Apparition seen soon after death," *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 13 (May 1908): 228-34, accessible at <https://archive.org/details/journalofsociety13sociuoft/>.

¹⁰ Haraldsson, *The Departed Among the Living*, 41.

Apparitions to More Than One Person

More evidence that apparitions cannot all be explained merely as hallucinations induced by grief or wishful thinking comes from cases where the apparition appears to multiple people, as in the Captain Wheatcroft example cited above. In the 89 apparition cases Haraldsson collected in which an additional living person was in a physical position from which they should have been able to see it, 41 of them did—almost half.¹¹ Also, when multiple people see an apparition, they report perceiving it from varying angles, as though the apparition were a true three-dimensional object.¹² This suggests that at least some apparitions may be objectively located in space but that not all people are equally capable of detecting them.

Apparitions to Bystanders, Including Animals

In fact, while some people have never experienced an apparition, others report seeing them frequently, even when the people appearing have little or no connection to them. Haraldsson quotes a man who says he frequently sees the deceased and mentions one time waking up in the night to see his wife's mother's stepfather standing by his wife's side of the bed. His wife's mother's stepfather had been dead many years, and they'd never met in life.¹³ It seems he was probably present out of some concern or attachment to the wife, and the husband just happened to perceive him. Such apparitions to bystanders are another strike against the wishful thinking hypothesis, as a "bystander" in this case is someone with no real emotional connection to the deceased and presumably no particular desire to encounter them.

Consider another case from Haraldsson's book. A young man named Gisli Frimannsson was staying at Hjorsey in Iceland when one night he woke up to see "an elderly man from the district...standing on the middle of the floor." The apparition stayed for some time before "disintegrating" and disappearing. The next evening, Frimannsson got word this man had died. When he spoke to the man's widow, she said she had a dream right after her husband's death where he said to her, "I have already been to Hjorsey, but no one was aware of me there except Gisli."¹⁴

¹¹ Haraldsson, *The Departed Among the Living*, 201.

¹² Hornell Hart, "Six Theories about Apparitions," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 50, part 185 (May 1956): 153-239, pp. 207-12.

¹³ Haraldsson, *The Departed Among the Living*, 15-6.

¹⁴ Haraldsson, *The Departed Among the Living*, 44. Frimannsson's testimony can also be found in Hafsteinn Björnsson, *Sögur ur safni Hafsteins midils* (Reykjavik, Iceland: Skuggsja, 1972).

Sometimes the bystanders who experience an apparition are animals. In another case of Haraldsson's, a woman was trying to herd her sheep into a particular pen, but they refused to go in. "They just shied away," she says, "so I went to find out what was wrong. And there he [her brother Erik, who had died at 16] stood in the doorway of the sheep shed. I told him sharply to go to God and stop wandering about here on earth. Then he left and the sheep entered the pen."¹⁵

Anecdotes about cats and dogs reacting to apparitions abound. Bill and Judy Guggenheim's 1995 book *Hello from Heaven!* contains the account of a woman named Tina whose brother Rudy had died a year previously. Tina recounted, "I was in the kitchen doing my housecleaning. All of a sudden, our cat shot out of the family room! Her hair was standing on end and she was hissing. ... At the same time, our little dog was backing out of the family room, barking and growling with his hair standing up! They prompted me to look, and when I did, I saw my brother, Rudy, sitting in the rocking chair!" Tina notes that she would have thought she was hallucinating if she hadn't also seen the reactions of the animals.¹⁶

Apparitions to Multiple People in Different Locations Unaware of Each Other's Experience

Although we do have to consider the possibility of collective hallucination, this explanation seems particularly unlikely in cases where an apparition is perceived by multiple people who are in different physical locations and unaware of each other's experiences as they are happening. The Captain Wheatcroft case gives us one example of this, and we find another such case in Joyce and Barry Vissell's book *Meant to Be*, where Myrna L. Smith gives a detailed account of the way in which her deceased husband appeared separately to her and each of her two sons on the night between Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Smith saw her husband by the Christmas tree in the living room, and each of her boys saw their father in their own bedroom. Each boy mentioned the event before they knew of anyone else's experience, and two of the apparitions were noted as happening around 3am.¹⁷

¹⁵ Haraldsson, *The Departed Among the Living*, 207-8.

¹⁶ Bill Guggenheim and Judy Guggenheim, *Hello from Heaven! A New Field of Research—After-Death Communication—Confirms That Life and Love Are Eternal* (New York: Bantam, 1995), 336-7.

¹⁷ Joyce Vissell and Barry Vissell, ed., *Meant to Be: Miraculous True Stories to Inspire a Lifetime of Love* (Berkeley, CA: Conari Press, 2000), 177-9.

In another case, the “apparition” was olfactory rather than visual. Parapsychologist Loyd Auerbach was one of three men who at the same time all inexplicably smelled cigar smoke and connected it to their mutual friend Martin Caidin, recently deceased and a big smoker of cigars. At the time of the anomalous smell, Auerbach was in his car, his friend Bob was flying in a Cessna three time zones away in New Jersey, and the third man was flying in a plane over Florida.¹⁸

Apparitions Providing New, Verifiable Information

As we’ve seen, one type of new, verifiable information that can be provided by an apparition is that the person appearing is recently deceased, as well as the manner in which they died. But sometimes the information provided is about someone other than the one doing the appearing. For instance, a widower named Gary confided in researcher Dianne Arcangel that he was starting to have a lot of vivid after-death encounters. He was puzzled in particular by something that had happened while he was washing his car in preparation for trading it in. He told Arcangel, “I saw my wife standing there as plain as day. She said, ‘Don’t bother. Just enjoy your family and friends because you’ll be with me soon.’” Gary was in great health and actually starting to enjoy life again, so he didn’t know what to make of his wife’s comment. Nevertheless, only hours after Gary told her this story, Arcangel got a call from Gary’s work informing her he’d just been killed in a car accident.¹⁹

In another case, a woman named Lois Miller had gotten up to go to the bathroom during the night, and when she returned to bed, she suddenly saw her deceased mother near her, surrounded in light. “She was facing toward my father’s bedroom,” says Miller, “and she was motioning to him to come with her.” Miller’s father died unexpectedly two days later, while taking a nap in his recliner.²⁰

Non-Survival Hypotheses That Could Explain Apparitions

While hallucination induced by grief and/or wishful thinking is not a sufficient explanation for the above types of apparitions, that doesn’t mean that survival of death is the only remaining option. Some parapsychologists have suggested that apparitions could

¹⁸ Janis Heaphy Durham, *The Hand on the Mirror: A True Story of Life Beyond Death* (New York: Grand Central, 2015), 133-4.

¹⁹ Dianne Arcangel, *Afterlife Encounters: Ordinary People, Extraordinary Experiences* (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads, 2005), 110.

²⁰ Louis E. LaGrand, *Messages and Miracles: Extraordinary Experiences of the Bereaved* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 1999), 97.

be a sort of telepathic projection that the dying person produced before they were dead.²¹ That is, even when the apparition is experienced hours or days later, the leave-taking message could have been generated by the dying person's consciousness while they were still alive and not made its way into the receiving person's conscious awareness until sometime later.

However, this is not a good explanation for apparitions with multiple simultaneous percipients, as it seems unlikely that all of the persons involved would have had their internal blocks to receiving the telepathic message removed at exactly the same time. It also seems unlikely that a dying person would have sent telepathic messages specifically to the people or animals who would happen to be bystanders when the person they were emotionally connected to received their delayed telepathic communication. Furthermore, the telepathic residue hypothesis has difficulty explaining apparitions that come to people who never knew the deceased, or who hadn't even been born by the time the deceased died.²² And the telepathic residue hypothesis is stretched to the breaking point when it comes to the great number of apparitions that occur many years after the associated death.²³ For example, half of the apparitions in Haraldsson's collection occurred more than a year after death, and 18% occurred *more than ten years later*.²⁴

To account for these sorts of cases, we might formulate a new hypothesis. Let's call it the "hologram hypothesis." On this hypothesis, what the dying person creates in their last moments is not a telepathic message to specific loved ones but rather a semi-physical object of some kind that can later appear at a particular place and pass on a message by looking/sounding like the deceased person. This would be something like a psychic hologram of the person that would outlast the death of their physical body. The hologram's objective rather than telepathic nature would explain why it is sometimes

²¹ See, for example, the working hypothesis offered in Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, *Phantasms of the Living*, 201-2, 510-1, accessible at <https://archive.org/details/phantasmsoflivin01gurn/>. In a later work, Myers explains why this hypothesis is not adequate to explain all apparitions of the dead. See Frederic W. H. Myers, *Human Personality and the Survival of Bodily Death*, ed. Leopold Hamilton Myers (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1906, 1918), 223ff, accessible at <https://gutenberg.org/ebooks/38492>.

²² For instance, in one case, a five-year-old girl named Lalani who was dying of leukemia began to talk about her interactions with someone named "George," whom no one else in the room could see. Everyone thought she was imagining things until one night when her grandmother went through a photo album with her. Her grandmother turned to a page Lalani had never seen before, and Lalani suddenly exclaimed, "There's George!" The man in the photograph was the grandmother's own godfather, who had died when the grandmother was herself only five years old. Though Lalani had no normal way of knowing it (according to the family), his name was indeed George. Maggie Callanan, *Final Journeys: A Practical Guide for Bringing Care and Comfort at the End of Life* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2008), 224-5.

²³ See F. W. H. Meyers, "On Recognised Apparitions Occurring More Than a Year After Death," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 6 (1890): 13-65, accessible at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015013709350>.

²⁴ Haraldsson, *The Departed Among the Living*, 53.

perceived by bystanders and why apparitions sometimes happen long after the death of the person involved.

One problem with the hologram hypothesis is the fact that, as we've seen, apparitions sometimes provide new information that was not only unavailable to the experiencer of the apparition but also unavailable to the deceased person while they were dying. But perhaps an even bigger problem is that the hologram hypothesis can't explain the many apparitions that are actually *interactive*.

Interactive and Goal-Directed Apparitions

It's true that apparitions are frequently quite brief, often amounting to little more than a prolonged look before the apparition disappears. In fact, in half of the accounts collected by Haraldsson, the experience lasted no more than a few seconds.²⁵ However, there are also many cases of much longer apparitions,²⁶ some of which hold conversations and interact in other complex ways that would seem to require that they be more than a mere freeze-frame of some aspect of the person's pre-death consciousness.

In one case, a woman named Shirley was struggling to figure out how to get the pension money she was owed after her husband died suddenly of a heart attack. Her husband appeared to her, and she heard him speak, although she didn't see his mouth moving. Over several minutes, he took her step by step through the pension paperwork, and her check was subsequently processed without a problem.²⁷

Johann Kuld's deceased wife came to him in their bedroom, opening the door as she entered. She told him not to be scared, and he held her hand, which he said had a normal, warm temperature. He asked her where she'd been. "Soon after I died in the hospital, they let me stay there to look after a woman who was very ill," she said. "Since then, I have been to many places. Now this time is over, I am leaving. I have come to say goodbye." They lay down in the bed together, and she stroked his cheek and whispered to him. He eventually fell asleep, and when he woke up, she was gone.²⁸

²⁵ Haraldsson, *The Departed Among the Living*, 119.

²⁶ In a sample of 347 apparitions appearing to dying people, it was found that more than half of the apparitions lasted longer than five minutes, and 17% lasted longer than an hour. Karlis Osis and Erlendur Haraldsson, *At the Hour of Death* (New York: Avon, 1977), 216.

²⁷ Joel Martin and Patricia Romanowski, *Love Beyond Life: The Healing Power of After-Death Communication* (New York: Harper, 1997), 61-2.

²⁸ Haraldsson, *The Departed Among the Living*, 113. Kuld's account can also be found in J. J. E. Kuld, *Í lífsins ólgusjó* (Reykjavik, Iceland: Ægisútgáfan, 1979).

Dr. Melvin Morse reports in his book *Parting Visions* a case of an interactive apparition that occurred before it was known that the person appearing was dead. A man was out fishing when he noticed his brother-in-law walking down the path toward him. They conversed for several minutes, and then the brother-in-law said he had to go and walked into the woods. Some minutes later, it occurred to the man that his brother-in-law couldn't have actually been there. When he got home, he discovered that, while he'd been out fishing, his brother-in-law had died in a car accident. And that wasn't the only time this deceased man visited his family. "He was a carpenter by trade," says Morse, "and visits his wife's son frequently with helpful suggestions about woodworking projects."²⁹

The longest interaction with an apparition I've found in the literature was investigated in the 1980s by Loyd Auerbach, the same parapsychologist who smelled the anomalous cigar smoke after his friend's death. In this case, a family purchased a home after the death of a woman, Lois, who had lived there her entire life since birth. Soon after the new owners moved in, four different members of the family began seeing the apparition of an elderly woman in the house. But it quickly became clear that the 11-year-old son, Chris, was having the most frequent and extended encounters. He told his parents that Lois had been appearing to him every day, telling him the history of the furniture in the house (some of which they had purchased along with their home) as well as helping him with his homework. (When he got older, she even gave him advice about girls.)

When Auerbach arrived at the house to investigate, the apparitions had been going on for well over a year, and Lois seemed to be present throughout Auerbach's visit, though visible only to Chris. The family, along with Auerbach and "Lois," all sat down in the living room, and everyone proceeded to ask Lois questions about herself, with Chris informing them of her answers. Auerbach recorded all of the information and subsequently verified with a surviving relative the accuracy of the details pertaining to her former life. Auerbach says this experience was a turning point for him. He concluded that it made much more sense to believe that the deceased Lois was actually there communicating with Chris than that Chris was some kind of super-psychic who only got information about this one dead woman, while also occasionally managing to make her visible to his family members.³⁰

In another, older interactive case, an elderly woman named Anne Simson in Perth, Scotland, was visited over and over by the apparition of a woman whom she recognized as someone who used to do business at the barracks near her house. The apparition said

²⁹ Melvin Morse with Paul Perry, *Parting Visions: Uses and Meanings of Pre-Death, Psychic, and Spiritual Experiences* (New York: Villard Books, 1994), 190.

³⁰ Leslie Kean, *Surviving Death: A Journalist Investigates Evidence for an Afterlife* (New York: Crown Archetype, 2017), 253-61.

she was indebted to someone for three and tenpence and to find a Catholic priest, because he would pay the debt for her. Simson finally tracked down a priest named Charles McKay and asked him to take care of the matter. After making some inquiries, McKay found a grocer who told him that the deceased woman in question did indeed owe him a debt. When McKay asked him the amount, the man replied that it was three and tenpence, which the priest immediately gave him. A few days later, Simson came to McKay's house to tell him that she had seen the apparition again, but that this time the woman said she was at peace. This incident apparently impressed Simson so much that she decided to convert to Catholicism.³¹

It's actually not unusual for an apparition to express a goal and take steps toward achieving it. In fact, a 1944 study by E. P. Gibson found that the deceased generally have more apparent motivation to manifest in apparitional form than the experiencers of the apparitions have motivation to perceive them.³² We'll see another excellent example of goal-directed apparitional behavior at the end of the section on mental mediumship.

The Super-Psi Hypothesis

It's been suggested by some that complex interactive apparitions like those described above could be explained by improving on the hologram hypothesis and postulating that an apparition is not the mere psychic residue of a person but a more or less accurate simulation of them and their personality, produced by some combination of psychic residue from the deceased, the psychic ability of still living persons to recreate the appearance and behavior of the deceased (possibly by using telepathy to access other people's memories of them), and perhaps even the incorporation of new information psychically derived from other sources. This is a version of what parapsychologists call the "super-psi" hypothesis: the idea that the survival of the deceased can be convincingly mimicked by the psychic (psi³³) abilities of the living. In the case of apparitions, the idea of super-psi is that the hallucinatory ability of the human mind can combine with its ability to learn information psychically and create the convincing experience of interacting with someone who is deceased, even if their consciousness has in fact ceased to exist.

³¹ Edward Binns, *Anatomy of Sleep, or the Art of Procuring Sound and Refreshing Slumber at Will*, 2nd ed. (London: John Churchill, 1845), 462-3, accessible at https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Anatomy_of_Sleep_Or_The_Art_of_Procu.html?id=gSJeAAAcAAJ.

³² E. P. Gibson, "An Examination of Motivation as Found in Selected Cases from *Phantasms of the Living*," *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 38 (1944): 83-105.

³³ 'Psi'—pronounced like 'sigh'—is the currently preferred scientific term for phenomena such as telepathy, clairvoyance, and psychokinesis.

This hypothesis could have trouble with some of the same cases that the wishful thinking and telepathic residue hypotheses did—namely, apparitions to multiple people, including bystanders—but even there, it’s possible that multiple individuals could psychically influence each other’s hallucinations and coordinate them in a way that mimics survival. The real challenge to the super-psi hypothesis is cases in which there are people who actually remember *being* the apparition in question.

Comparison with Apparitions of the Living

In Part II, we’ll explore apparition cases that are corroborated by people who have near-death experiences or memories of previous lives, but for the moment, let’s look at apparitions of living people—people who are not near death but nevertheless have “out-of-body” experiences (OBEs) in which other people perceive them at a remote location.

One especially detailed case comes from a late-19th-century volume of the *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research*. In October 1863, a man by the name of S. R. Wilmot was sailing from Liverpool to New York when his ship encountered a lengthy storm. After eight days, the weather abated, and Wilmot was finally able to have a restful night of sleep. He recounts,

Toward morning I dreamed that I saw my wife, whom I had left in the United States, come to the door of my state-room, clad in her nightdress. At the door she seemed to discover that I was not the only occupant of the room, hesitated a little, then advanced to my side, stooped down and kissed me, and after gently caressing me for a few moments, quietly withdrew.

Upon waking I was surprised to see my fellow passenger, whose berth was above mine, but not directly over it—owing to the fact that our room was at the stern of the vessel—leaning upon his elbow, and looking fixedly at me. ‘You’re a pretty fellow,’ said he at length, ‘to have a lady come and visit you in this way.’ I pressed him for an explanation, which he at first declined to give, but at length related what he had seen while wide awake, lying in his berth. It exactly corresponded with my dream. ...

The day after landing I went by rail to Watertown, Conn., where my children and my wife had been for some time, visiting her parents. Almost her first question, when we were alone together, was, ‘Did you receive a visit from me a week ago Tuesday?’ ...

My wife then told me that...[on] the same night when, as mentioned above, the storm had just begun to abate, she had lain awake for a long time thinking of me, and about four o'clock in the morning it seemed to her that she went out to seek me. Crossing the wide and stormy sea, she came at length to a low, black steamship, whose side she went up, and then descending into the cabin, passed through it to the stern until she came to my state-room. 'Tell me,' said she, 'do they ever have state-rooms like the one I saw, where the upper berth extends further back than the under one? A man was in the upper berth, looking right at me, and for a moment I was afraid to go in, but soon I went up to the side of your berth, bent down and kissed you, and embraced you, and then went away.'

The description given by my wife of the steamship was correct in all particulars, though she had never seen it.³⁴

In this case, not only does the person who appears in a remote location experience traveling to that place, but she ends up being perceived there by two separate people, including someone to whom she has no emotional connection. Clearly, she is not just a dream in her husband's mind. She's an actual figure in the room, perceived from multiple angles doing exactly the things she remembers.

This account is consistent with more recent reports of out-of-body experiences. For instance, Loyd Auerbach relates having a "very vivid dream" in which he went to visit the house of a friend named Danita. She told him a couple days later that, at the same time as his dream, she saw him in her home and touched him. Her dog also appeared to react to his presence. Two weeks later, a similar episode occurred, this time while Auerbach was in a waking state:

I was at another friend's bachelor party, becoming very bored.... I stood in the kitchen, fixing a drink and feeling a bit strange. Having felt the same way before when I had a few other experiences (my best psychic state appears to be boredom), I suddenly had the sensation of being in two places at once. I was in Mike's kitchen and I was also standing in my friend Danita's living room.... We had a short conversation, partly about the bachelor party, partly about other things, and I recall her saying she knew I was having an OBE and was only "dropping in." I mentioned that I'd write down a few notes when I "got back" to Mike's, and said good-bye. I found paper and pen, wrote a few notes (time, conversation details, etc.), which coincide with what Danita remembered about the situation.³⁵

³⁴ Eleanor Sidgwick, "On the Evidence for Clairvoyance," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 7 (1892): 30-99, pp. 42-3, accessible at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015030996824&view=1up&seq=64>.

³⁵ Loyd Auerbach, *ESP, Hauntings and Poltergeists: A Parapsychologist's Handbook* (New York: Warner Books, 1986), 43-4.

Another case of apparent physical contact during an OBE comes from the classic 1886 volume *Phantasms of the Living*, in which the Rev. P. H. Newnham reported a very clear and vivid dream in which he visited his fiancée’s family and put his arms around his fiancée’s waist, at the top of the staircase just as she was going to bed. He woke from the dream just before his clock struck 10 pm. The next morning, he wrote a letter to his fiancée with a detailed account of his dream. The same morning, she wrote him her own letter, in which she asked, “Were you thinking about me, very specially, last night, just about 10 o’clock? For, as I was going upstairs to bed, I distinctly heard your footsteps on the stairs, and felt you put your arms round my waist.”³⁶

In 1956, Hornell Hart and his collaborators published a study in which they compared apparitions of the deceased to apparitions of living OBEs. After comparing the rates of incidence of 23 basic traits in living-person OBE apparitions to their rates of incidence in apparitions of the deceased, they concluded that the evidence pointed to these two types of apparitions’ being the same phenomenon.³⁷

So, not only do reciprocal apparitions of OBEs demonstrate that, during our lives, we have a degree of consciousness that’s not limited to the physical location of our body, but they also support the view that apparitions of those who

have died—which show the same characteristics—are expressions of that same non-local consciousness, unlimited by the death of the body with which it was previously associated.

2. Dreams

Along with apparitions, dreams are a very common means by which people believe themselves to have contact with their departed loved ones. The wishful thinking hypothesis can be hard to dismiss with regard to most dreams, but some do contain elements that can be independently verified, as we are about to see.

I’ll first point out that many of those who believe they’ve had contact with their deceased loved ones in dreams remember these encounters as being much more vivid than an ordinary dream, to the point where they often don’t think they should be called “dreams” at all. “I was asleep,” says one such experiencer, “but I was not dreaming.” This man says he encountered his deceased daughter in a place “beyond” dreaming and

³⁶ Gurney, Myers, and Podmore, *Phantasms of the Living*, 225-6 (Case 35).

³⁷ Hart, “Six Theories,” 235.

that leaving it felt like the opposite of waking from a dream. The realm where they met “was like being in the middle of eternity.”³⁸ This feeling of a hyper-real dream is not in itself proof of anything, but it is one small piece of evidence that the process that creates these dreams of after-death contact may not be entirely the same as the process that creates our normal experiences during sleep.

As with apparitions, stronger evidence for survival is offered by dreams that happen before the death is known,³⁹ provide information the dreamer wouldn’t otherwise have had, and/or happen to more than one person at a time. Let’s look at some examples that fit both of these last two categories.

A month or two after his father’s death, Robert Waggoner had multiple dreams in which his father was showing him a suit in his (the father’s) closet, apparently wanting Robert to get something important out of the pocket. Waggoner didn’t want to bother his mourning mother about the matter, but when he heard from his niece that she had *also* had a dream about his father wanting her to get something out of the closet, he decided to investigate. Even though much of his father’s clothing had already been donated to charity, there were one or two suits left, and in one of their pockets was discovered a whole set of cherished family photos.⁴⁰

In a case collected by Dianne Arcangel, two people who had never met both had repeated dreams of the same deceased person, a man named Murphy who had owned a vacuum cleaner shop. He had been a mentor to one of them and a father or stepfather to the other. Both of them described the same setting in their repeated dreams: a house in oddly vivid/fluorescent colors with a picket fence and a sign in the yard that read, “At Peace with Jesus.” Furthermore, they both saw Murphy standing on the sidewalk with the sign to his left. The dreamer who’d been mentored by Murphy, a man by the name of Charles Vance, says that Murphy repeatedly asked him to tell his widow to look at a specific location in their house—“in the hall, at the dead end, just south of the bedroom to the right of the light socket”—because he’d left something inside the wall there. When Vance finally got up the courage to share this message with Murphy’s widow, she opened the wall in that location and discovered a stash of thousands of dollars that no one knew

³⁸ Annie Mattingley, *The After Death Chronicles: True Stories of Comfort, Guidance, and Wisdom from Beyond the Veil* (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads, 2017), 130.

³⁹ For an excellent example, see David Ryback with Letitia Sweitzer, *Dreams That Come True: Their Psychic and Transforming Powers* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 78-9.

⁴⁰ Robert Waggoner, *Lucid Dreaming: Gateway to the Inner Self* (Needham, MA: Moment Point Press, 2009), 209; and personal correspondence, 26 May 2021.

Murphy had ever had.⁴¹ Besides being a tandem dream that provides new information, this dream also comes to a bystander, someone who was not a family member of the deceased and was not the primary intended recipient of the information communicated.⁴²

There are even tandem dreams that demonstrate some level of interactivity and the evolution of the deceased's consciousness through time. In another case collected by Arcangel, the deceased demonstrated evolution of consciousness by the adoption of a new strategy in pursuit of his goal. A woman named Debra dreamed of her deceased stepfather coming to say goodbye. When she told her mom about the dream, her mom "became very pale, saying, 'I dreamed about him too, but I told him I was afraid. I said, 'Go tell Debbie.'"⁴³

Interactivity and the adoption of a new strategy by the deceased is also evident in the following case collected by David Ryback and described in his book *Dreams That Come True*. A single mother and her two children (one of whom was Ryback's informant for this case) were all ill and needed the help of the mother's parents to move to a warmer climate. However, the mother and her father were in one of their frequent periods of not speaking to each other, and so she refused to ask him for help. Then one night she dreamt that her deceased grandmother came to her door and said, "Bill [the father] will help, if you just let him know. Call him." The young woman refused, insisting her father would have to make the first move. She woke up thinking how weird it was that her grandmother had referred to her dad as "Bill" instead of "Wilbur," the name she'd always called him while she was alive.

A couple days later, she got a letter from her dad, asking her to call. They patched up their relationship, and both the woman's parents came to help her move. On the road to their new home, she asked her mom whether her grandmother had ever used the name "Bill" to refer to her father and learned that she had started calling him this about three months before she died. The young woman then decided to tell her mother about her dream. When she did, she discovered that, on the same night, her father had also had a dream visit from her grandmother, where she told him it was urgent he contact his daughter and said it was up to him to make the first move, because his daughter wouldn't do it. That's when he got up to write the letter his daughter soon received.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Arcangel, *Afterlife Encounters*, 77-80.

⁴² For another example of a bystander dream with independent verification, see Andrew Paquette, *Dreamer: 20 Years of Psychic Dreams and How They Changed My Life* (Winchester, UK: O-Books, 2011), 112-3.

⁴³ Arcangel, *Afterlife Encounters*, 51.

⁴⁴ Ryback with Sweitzer, *Dreams That Come True*, 131-2.

One final point with regard to dreams: as with living people who remember appearing to others during out-of-body experiences, there are living people who remember appearing to others in dreams and whose appearances have been confirmed by the dreamers in question.⁴⁵ For example, dream researcher Fariba Bogzaran reports that she intentionally set out to dream of visiting an old friend who lived in another country and whom she hadn't seen in almost 20 years. She succeeded in dreaming about the old neighborhood where they'd grown up together, and then she decided to try making her way to her friend's new house, which she'd never visited in waking life. "I find the street where she lives and walk towards her house," says Bogzaran. "The color of the door is pale blue. I ring the bell and she opens the door. I am overjoyed to see her. We cry and hug each other with overwhelming emotion. Embracing her feels absolutely real. The intensity of the experience wakes me up." The next morning, Bogzaran wrote a letter to her friend with a detailed description of the dream. On the same day, her friend wrote her own letter, describing her own dream that included greeting Bogzaran at the front door.⁴⁶

Dreams like the above show that it's possible to interact with other people's consciousness through dreams and make it all the more plausible that dreams of the deceased are sometimes genuine communications.

3. Mental Mediumship

As mentioned in the section on apparitions to bystanders, some people seem to be particularly gifted at perceiving the deceased. People with this gift often find that the deceased routinely come to them asking them to pass along messages to their loved ones, and people who frequently act as go-betweens for the living and the dead are called "mediums." In this section, we'll look particularly at mental mediums, those whose focus is on receiving information rather than producing physical manifestations.

Along with the investigation of apparitions, investigation of mediumship was one of the primary avenues of research undertaken by the Society for Psychical Research after its founding in Britain in 1882, as well as by its American offshoot, the American Society for Psychical Research, founded three years later. Over the following few decades, many highly qualified investigators carefully controlled, observed, and recorded sessions given by mediums in Europe and the United States. Much of this historical material is summarized by psychologist Alan Gauld in his 1982 book *Mediumship and Survival*,⁴⁷ and important additional analysis is given by philosopher Stephen E. Braude in his 2003 book *Immortal Remains*. Braude concludes that "the best cases are difficult to

⁴⁵ For an example in addition to the one described below, see Waggoner, *Lucid Dreaming*, 182-3.

⁴⁶ Stanley Krippner, Fariba Bogzaran, and André Percia de Carvalho, *Extraordinary Dreams and How to Work with Them* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 91.

⁴⁷ Alan Gauld, *Mediumship and Survival: A Century of Investigations* (London: Heinemann, 1982), accessible at <https://www.esalen.org/ctr/mediumship>.

interpret as unambiguous evidence of survival. Without exception, they present a frustrating mixture of (a) material suggesting survival, (b) material suggesting psi among the living, and (c) apparent rubbish.”⁴⁸ We’ll look here at some of the reasons Braude draws this conclusion and at some of the strongest reasons to think mediumship does offer additional evidence for survival, despite its mixed record.

One of the most evidential mediums of the late 19th century was Leonora Piper, a trance medium extensively studied by both American and British researchers. Piper was investigated first by the psychologist William James and five years or so, Piper appeared to be channeling a deceased acquaintance of Hodgson’s, George Pellew. Of the 150 people brought to Piper to be introduced to “G. P.,” 30 of them were people he knew in life, and Piper’s trance personality recognized 29 of the 30.⁴⁹ The only one who wasn’t recognized (at least not immediately) was a woman who had still been a girl when she last saw Pellew but was now eight or nine years older.⁵⁰ “G. P.” was only one who wasn’t recognized (at least not immediately) was a woman who had still been a girl when she last saw Pellew but was now eight or nine years older.⁵¹ “G. P.” was found to be a very realistic portrayal of the deceased Pellew, and some of those who had known him most intimately in life were entirely convinced that they were conversing with him beyond the grave.⁵²

Nevertheless, Piper also had many non-evidential sessions or portions of sessions, and it seemed fairly obvious that several of her “control” personalities—that is, purported spirits of the deceased who claimed to facilitate her communications with other deceased persons—did not correspond to actual previously existing persons. For instance, her first control was a Native American girl who went by the unconvincing name “Chlorine,”⁵³ and a long-time control called “Dr. Phinuit” claimed to be a deceased French physician but had scant ability to speak French and couldn’t be found among the records of the schools he claimed to have attended.⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Stephen E. Braude, *Immortal Remains: The Evidence for Life after Death* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 54.

⁴⁹ Frank Podmore, *The Newer Spiritualism* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1911), 180, accessible at <https://archive.org/details/newerspiritualis00podmrich/page/n1/mode/2up>.

⁵⁰ Hodgson, “A Further Record,” 324-5.

⁵¹ Hodgson, “A Further Record,” 324-5.

⁵² Podmore, *The Newer Spiritualism*, 180.

⁵³ Hodgson, “A Record of Observations,” 46-7.

⁵⁴ Hodgson, “A Record of Observations,” 50-2.

There is also evidence that some of the information Piper seemed to convey from the deceased actually came from a telepathic connection with the minds of the living. On more than one occasion, she told sitters information that turned out to be false but that nevertheless accorded with what the sitters believed at the time of their sessions. In one case, this was about the location of a problematic lump on the arm of the sitter's brother.⁵⁵ In another, it was claims about the untrustworthiness of two of the sitter's acquaintances, which the sitter himself somewhat suspected at the time of the session but which later proved incorrect in both cases.⁵⁶

On the other hand, there were many *more* cases in which Piper gave correct information that wasn't known to anyone present. For instance, during her visit to England in 1889, physicist Sir Oliver Lodge cataloged 41 separate pieces of information that she gave to various sitters on various occasions, all of which turned out to be correct despite not being consciously known to the sitter at the time of the session.⁵⁷ Even in these cases, of course, it's possible that the information was derived from clairvoyance, or perhaps from telepathy with unconscious memories in the sitter's mind.

More recently, controlled, multiple blinded studies of mediums have confirmed that some mediums are indeed able to receive information from a source outside their five senses.⁵⁸ However, the possibility remains that this information is derived from sources other than the surviving consciousness of the deceased. Questions about the source of mediumistic phenomena extend even to cases in which mediums take on the deceased's mannerisms, speak a foreign language known by the deceased but not by the medium, or exhibit some other ability or skill unique to the deceased. One particularly impressive case involved a chess match between grandmaster Victor Korchnoi and, ostensibly, the deceased grandmaster Geza Maróczy, manifesting through German medium Robert Rollans.⁵⁹ In a 2007 article in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, Vernon M. Neppe argues that Maróczy's surviving consciousness is the best explanation for deceased grandmaster Geza Maróczy, manifesting through German medium Robert

⁵⁵ Frederic W. H. Myers, Oliver Lodge, Walter Leaf, and William James, "A Record of Observations of Certain Phenomena of Trance," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 6 (1890): 436-659, p. 581, accessible at <https://books.google.dj/books?id=1moAAAAAMAAJ>.

⁵⁶ Myers et al., 569-71.

⁵⁷ Myers et al., 649-50.

⁵⁸ See Julie Beischel, *Investigating Mediums* (Tucson, AZ: Windbridge Institute, 2015); and Gary E. Schwartz with William L. Simon, *The Afterlife Experiments: Breakthrough Scientific Evidence of Life after Death* (New York: Atria, 2002).

⁵⁹ Wolfgang Eisenbeiss and Deiter Hassler, "An Assessment of Ostensible Communications with a Deceased Grandmaster as Evidence of Survival," *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 70, no. 2 (April 2006): 65-97.

Rollans.⁶⁰ In a 2007 article in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, Vernon M. Neppe argues that Maróczy's surviving consciousness is the best explanation for Rollans' performance,⁶¹ but Stephen Braude counters that the medium could have chosen his moves based on telepathic information received from his opponent, or extrasensory perception from some other source.⁶²

Despite the hit-or-miss nature of much mediumistic communication and the possibility of even correct, paranormally derived information coming from sources other than the surviving consciousness of the deceased, I believe mediumship does offer some important additional evidence for life after death, particularly in those cases that reflect the way an autonomous mind would behave: for instance, by popping up unexpectedly and in a manner that doesn't reflect the wishes of those they're communicating with. We saw one example of this in the case of the apparition of Lois who repeatedly appeared to the boy Chris. Lois had an attachment to the house in which Chris lived, but Chris didn't appear to have any pre-existing motivation to communicate with her.

When unsolicited visitors show up in a mediumship setting, they're called "drop-in communicators." Anecdotal examples abound. For instance, medium Marcia Mitnick of Hudson, New York, writes that she was once receiving communications from three spirits calling themselves Willy, John, and Steve. It was only six months later, when she met her new boyfriend, that she discovered these were his best friends, all of whom had been killed in Vietnam.⁶³ In another case, a patient of psychiatrist Dr. Stanislav Grof became an impromptu medium during a therapy session that involved the use of the hallucinogen LSD. Under the influence of the drug, the patient began to feel the presence of discarnate beings who were urgently trying to communicate messages. One of them called himself Ladislav and asked the patient to contact his parents and tell them he was okay. He gave his parents' name, the city in Moravia where they lived (Kroměříž), and even a phone number. When Grof dialed the number and asked to speak with Ladislav, the woman on the other end tearfully said that her son Ladislav passed away three weeks ago.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Wolfgang Eisenbeiss and Deiter Hassler, "An Assessment of Ostensible Communications with a Deceased Grandmaster as Evidence of Survival," *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 70, no. 2 (April 2006): 65-97.

⁶¹ Vernon M. Neppe, "A Detailed Analysis of an Important Chess Game: Revisiting 'Maróczy versus Korchnoi,'" *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 71, no. 3 (2007): 129-47.

⁶² Stephen E. Braude, *Crimes of Reason: On Mind, Nature, and the Paranormal* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 172.

⁶³ Sophy Burnham, *Angel Letters* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), 125.

⁶⁴ Stanislav Grof, *When the Impossible Happens: Adventures in Non-Ordinary Realities* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2006), 177-8.

In addition to such anecdotal cases, there are some highly documented examples of drop-in communication.⁶⁵ One of the most impressive is a case investigated by Erlendur Haraldsson. Indridi Indridason was a famous Icelandic medium active in the early 20th century, and careful minutes were kept of many of his sessions. In 1905, a spirit began to speak through Indridason who was not recognized by any of the people in the room. He first appeared on the night of November 24 and, in Danish, told those present that he was a manufacturer by the last name of Jensen and that he had just been in Copenhagen and seen a factory fire. About an hour later, he communicated again and told them that the fire had been gotten under control. A month later, newspapers arrived in Iceland confirming that a lamp factory had caught fire that same night in Copenhagen and that it took somewhere between a half hour and an hour to get under control.

That wasn't all. Almost 80 years later, Haraldsson discovered the minutes of several more sessions featuring Jensen. In one of them, Jensen provided more details about himself, including his given name (Emil) and the fact that he was a bachelor with no children but did have siblings, all of whom were still living. Haraldsson went to Copenhagen to investigate and discovered that, of all the businesspeople in Copenhagen in the late 1800s, there was only one manufacturer named Emil Jensen. He was a childless bachelor whose siblings were all alive when he died, and his address was two doors down from the lamp factory that caught fire.⁶⁶

Here we have a communicator whose statements clearly match the facts about a once-living person, but someone that no one in the room had any particular interest in speaking to and whose identity was not finally verified until more than a hundred years later. While it's still *possible* that the medium could have gotten this information strictly from clairvoyance and telepathy with the living, it's hard to see why he would have had a motive for simulating Jensen's appearance so faithfully. It looks much more plausible that these communications came from the surviving consciousness of Jensen himself.

Other aspects of mediumistic communication also provide key bits of evidence that they are truly conveying messages from the deceased. Anyone familiar with mediumship, through personal experience or the literature, will recognize the following as common features.

- The deceased often begin communicating with the medium before the sitter (the person with an emotional connection to them) arrives, and they sometimes stay after as well.

⁶⁵ For examples besides the one described below, see David Fontana, *Is There an Afterlife? A Comprehensive Overview of the Evidence* (Ropley, UK: O-Books, 2004), Ch. 8; as well as Braude, *Immortal Remains*, Ch. 2.

⁶⁶ Erlendur Haraldsson and Loftur R. Gissurarson, *Indridi Indridason: The Icelandic Physical Medium* (Hove, UK: White Crow Books, 2015), 29-46. Haraldsson also describes this case in his chapter "Possible Evidence of Survival," in Kean, *Surviving Death*, 294-304, pp. 294-300.

- The deceased who show up are not always the people the sitter was expecting. For instance, French journalist Stéphane Allix went to multiple mediums seeking communication from his deceased father. He was surprised that, in addition to the presence of his father, two of the mediums also reported the presence of his great uncle, whom he had no intention of contacting.⁶⁷
- The deceased will sometimes correct a false belief held by the sitter. In a case reported by Gary Schwartz, medium Laurie Campbell correctly spelled the name of a relative of the sitter, but the sitter thought it was an error until he looked into it.⁶⁸
- Sitters often feel a sense of the “presence” of their deceased loved ones, as do many people who report episodes of spontaneous after-death communication.
- The personality of the deceased often comes through strongly. For instance, people who were dominating in life will often dominate the conversation from the other side.⁶⁹

These phenomena could theoretically be imitated through telepathy and clairvoyance—the super-psi hypothesis again—but viewed as a whole, it’s hard not to see them as evidence that some mediums are doing exactly what they experience themselves as doing: talking to the dead. The frequent non-conformity to expectations in mediumship cases suggests that there is another consciousness involved besides that of the sitter and that of the medium—a consciousness with an independent agenda and the motivation to get that agenda heard.

Furthermore, as Julie Beischel’s research at the Windbridge Institute documents, mediums experience themselves as receiving information from “independent, volitional beings,” which is not how they experience information when they’re doing psychic readings that don’t involve people who’ve passed on.⁷⁰ Is it possible that mediums just want to believe that some of their psychic information comes from the spirits of the deceased, and so frame it that way to themselves? Beischel notes that many mediums begin having these experiences when they’re small children and have no reason to see

⁶⁷ Stéphane Allix, *Le Test: Une Expérience Inouïe: La Preuve de l’Après-Vie?* (Paris: Albin Michel, Livre de Poche, 2015), 24-5, 184-6. An English translation of this book is also available: Stéphane Allix, *The Test: Incredible Proof of the Afterlife*, trans. Grace McQuillan (New York: Helios, 2018).

⁶⁸ Schwartz with Simon, *The Afterlife Experiments*, 232.

⁶⁹ Schwartz with Simon, *The Afterlife Experiments*, 196.

⁷⁰ Beischel, *Among Mediums*, 140.

them as coming from the dead rather than some other (potentially less scary) source.⁷¹ Also, when Beischel tested mediums by asking them to do readings on people without knowing if they were living or deceased (and without the experimenter knowing, either), in 83% of the cases, the mediums accurately reported the living or deceased status of the person.⁷²

Finally, there's one more way mediumship reinforces the evidence for survival: the way it interlocks with experiences of apparitions and other after-death phenomena. An excellent example comes from Robert Dale Owen's 1871 book *The Debatable Land Between This World and the Next*. There he reports on the experience of an acquaintance of his, a Miss V, who experienced an apparition while staying at her aunt's house by the Hudson River, where one particular bedroom had the reputation of being haunted. Miss V once had occasion to sleep in the haunted room, and in the middle of the night, while the bedroom door was locked, Miss V woke up to see the figure of a servant in the room with her. The figure bent over her and tried, unsuccessfully, to speak. When Miss V hid her face under the sheets, the apparition disappeared.

Sometime later, Miss V was staying with a friend who engaged in communicating with spirits. Out of curiosity, Miss V decided to join in. During one of their sessions, a message arrived from a source that identified itself as "Sarah Clarke," a name neither of them knew. "Sarah Clarke" said that she used to be housekeeper for Miss V's aunt's family and that she had appeared to Miss V when she'd been at her aunt's house. She said that, while alive, she had stolen some items from the house, including a silver sugar bowl, and that she had been returning over and over to her room at the house, hoping to ask for forgiveness for her crime.

As soon as she was able, Miss V asked her aunt about these details and discovered that her aunt's family had indeed had a housekeeper named Sarah Clarke, some 30 or 40 years ago. The housekeeper had seemed very trustworthy, so she had never been suspected of stealing, even when objects went missing, such as a silver sugar bowl. When Miss V revealed to her what Sarah Clarke had supposedly said from beyond the grave, the aunt said that, if it was true, she was more than happy to forgive the theft. As Owen himself noted, the most remarkable thing was that, from that time on, the bedroom was no longer haunted. The apparition never appeared to anyone again. (Owen also emphasized that he was personally acquainted with the persons involved in this story and guaranteed their truth.)⁷³

⁷¹ Beischel, *Among Mediums*, 134-35.

⁷² Beischel, *Among Mediums*, 139.

⁷³ Robert Dale Owen, *The Debatable Land Between This World and the Next* (London: Trübner & Co., 1871), 226-8, accessible at https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Debatable_Land_Between_this_World_an.html?id=mY8ZAAAYAAJ.

4. Physical Mediumship and Poltergeists

We now turn to the topic of physical mediumship, in which mediums claim to cooperate with the deceased in making physical manifestations of their presence. These apparent manifestations can include knocking sounds, table levitations, the levitation of the mediums themselves, the playing of musical instruments, and even the materialization of disembodied hands and feet. While there is persuasive evidence that paranormal phenomena of these sorts have sometimes occurred, it is not clear how much additional evidence these physical manifestations provide for survival, beyond what is provided by the mental mediumship aspects of a sitting.

There are two primary reasons for this. First, there is the fact that perhaps the single most well-attested, carefully studied physical medium in the Western world of the last two centuries appears not to have claimed the aid of spirits in producing the bulk of his phenomena.⁷⁴ Daniel Dunglas Home was extensively studied by the investigators of his day and produced some of the most amazing feats of any physical medium in the West, under good lighting and without once being caught attempting fraud of any kind.⁷⁵ The fact that Home did not appeal to spirits to produce his phenomena and that his most distinguished investigator, William Crookes, attributed them to Home's own psychokinetic (PK) abilities casts substantial doubt on the hypothesis that impressive paranormal physical phenomena must be due to the action of the deceased. Even one of the best-reputed physical mediums of our own day, Stewart Alexander, though he believes that his phenomena are produced by spirits, admits that "it is the evidential information transmitted at a physical séance that, in my view, is the absolute acid test of such mediumship."⁷⁶

The second reason that physical effects alone are ambiguous evidence for survival is the fact that study of poltergeist phenomena has led investigators to the conclusion that many of the sounds and object movements attributed to "noisy ghosts" can be traced back to the unconscious PK abilities of the living, since the phenomena produced by ostensible poltergeists often appear dependent on the presence of a particular living individual and seem to express that person's repressed emotions.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Ian Stevenson, "Are Poltergeists Living or Are They Dead?" *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 66, no. 3 (July 1972): 233-52, p. 234.

⁷⁵ An excellent account of Home's phenomena can be found in Stephen E. Braude, *The Limits of Influence: Psychokinesis and the Philosophy of Science* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 70-108.

⁷⁶ Stewart Alexander, "A Life in Two Worlds," in Kean, *Surviving Death*, 345-56, p. 354.

⁷⁷ William G. Roll, *The Poltergeist* (Garden City, NY: Nelson Doubleday, 1972), 11, 174.

There are even cases in which poltergeist-like effects have been linked to living people who are not physically present.⁷⁸ In most of these cases, the living person is not conscious of the particular physical effects they are causing. For instance, in a case reported in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, Fred W. Rose attempted to psychically visit a friend of his, Mrs. E, by vividly imagining himself walking to her house and then through its various rooms. He did this on at least two different occasions and did not warn Mrs. E ahead of time on either one. The second time, he actually succeeded in producing an apparition of himself in front of Mrs. E, but the first time, the only sign of anything abnormal during the period in question was the fact that the electric bell linking Mrs. E's bedroom with her maid's room went off over and over without being pressed. Mrs. E was right next to the button at the time and would have seen if anyone else had touched it.⁷⁹

In that case, Mr. Rose had not specifically intended to activate the electric bell, but in this next one, the living agent concentrated on the particular effect she wanted to produce. With the help of a written record she made at the time of the event, this woman reports that, at 11pm on July 30, 1985, she began to think angry thoughts about an ex-lover who'd treated her poorly. "For an hour," she says, "I thought vengeful thoughts about the 'swine' and imagined all his pictures falling off the walls of his room." A couple weeks later, she spoke to him and learned about a recent occasion when he'd been in his room talking to a friend and a wind gust suddenly threw open the door and blew his pictures off the walls. Because the weather had otherwise been so calm that night, the man and his friend joked that it must have been a ghost. When the woman asked him when this happened, he said it was on July 30 around midnight.⁸⁰

This evidence that a living agent can intentionally produce physical phenomena at a remote location shows that deceased agents are not the only possible explanation for such events. And yet at the same time it also demonstrates that these phenomena can be intentionally directed by a consciousness that is not embodied at that location, which opens the door to the possibility that the deceased could create effects in the very same way.

⁷⁸ For examples in addition to those described, see Matthew Manning, *The Link: Matthew Manning's Own Story of His Extraordinary Psychic Gifts* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1974, 1975), 120; Sylvia Hart Wright, *When Spirits Come Calling: The Open-Minded Skeptic's Guide to After-Death Contact* (Nevada City, CA: Blue Dolphin Publishing, 2002), 71; Trish MacGregor and Rob MacGregor, *The Synchronicity Highway: Exploring Coincidence, the Paranormal, & Alien Contact* (Hertford, NC: Crossroad Press, 2013), 119; and Robert H. Hopcke, *There Are No Accidents in Love and Relationships: Meaningful Coincidences and the Stories of Our Families* (Asheville, NC: Chiron Publications, 2018), 181-7.

⁷⁹ "L. 1076. Experimental Apparition," *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 7 (1895-6): 250-5, accessible at <https://archive.org/details/journalofsociety07sociuoft/>.

⁸⁰ Brian Inglis, *Coincidence: A Matter of Chance—or Synchronicity?* (London: Hutchinson, 1990), 95-6.

And there do seem to be examples of physical phenomena that provide independent evidence for the survival of specific deceased people. Sometimes this is because, before dying, the person promised to produce a specific physical effect after death. One could argue that the power of suggestion could cause living agents to unconsciously use their own PK abilities to create the effect in question, but this seems less plausible in cases where the promised effect happens before those witnessing it are informed of the death of the relevant person.⁸¹

In an Italian case, a fellow by the name of Benjamin Sirchia had told his friend Dr. Vincent Caltagirone that if Sirchia were to die first and discover that his consciousness went on, he would return to Caltagirone to give him some kind of proof. During this conversation, they were sitting at Caltagirone's dining room table, so Caltagirone suggested that his sign be breaking something located in that room—for example, the light suspended above the table. Seven months later, Sirchia died. But before being informed of his death, Caltagirone (as well as his sister who lived with him) began to hear knocking sounds coming from the light above the table. These sounds continued for four or five nights until finally the crystal lampshade broke in two. It was only a couple days later that Caltagirone ran into an acquaintance who told him that Benjamin Sirchia had died—three to five days before the first knocks on the dining room lamp began.⁸²

Other physical phenomena are plausibly attributed to the dead because they manifest as a result of requests made to the dead person⁸³ or because they are accompanied by apparitions.⁸⁴

Psychologist David Fontana investigated and personally observed an interactive stone-throwing poltergeist that would oblige requests to aim at particular objects. On three occasions, one of the observers of the poltergeist events also saw the apparition of a young boy in the location where the physical events were concentrated, and on two of these occasions, the apparition was immediately followed by a flying stone or other

⁸¹ In addition to the case described below, see the case of a breaking ring in Alice Johnson, "Coincidences," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 14 (1899): 158-330, pp. 242-3, accessible at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=njp.32101075888329>; and a case in which the promised manifestation had two parts—door knocks followed by a light going on or off—in Helen Speakman, "Manifestation Posthume," *Revue Scientifique et Morale du Spiritisme* (1 May 1920): 141-5, accessible at <https://sites.google.com/spiritisme.net/encyclopedie-spirite/revues-spirites/revue-scientifique-et-morale-du-spiritisme>.

⁸² Ernest Bozzano, *Les Phénomènes de Hantise*, trans. C. de Vesme (Paris: Éditions Exergue, 1932, 2000), 114-7.

⁸³ Lisa Smartt, *Words at the Threshold: What We Say as We're Nearing Death* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2017), 159-60; and Carol Bowman, *Return from Heaven: Beloved Relatives Reincarnated within Your Family* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 203.

⁸⁴ Stevenson, "Are Poltergeists Living or Are They Dead?"; and Titus Rivas, Anny Dirven, and Rudolf H. Smit, *The Self Does Not Die: Verified Paranormal Phenomena from Near-Death Experiences* (Durham, NC: IANDS Publications, 2016), 145-8.

object.⁸⁵ Other times, a connection to the deceased is inferred from the fact that the same types of poltergeist phenomena are separately observed by two people connected to the deceased who don't know anything about each other's experiences when they happen.⁸⁶

Poltergeists have also been reported to provide information that was only known to the deceased. A widow named Iris was frustrated because her recently deceased husband had always taken care of paying the taxes, but after his death, she had no idea where to find their local tax bill or even what it looked like. When she started tearfully berating him for leaving her in this situation, she saw the thick, hardback appointment book on his desk open all by itself. On the opened page sat the bill she was looking for.⁸⁷

5. Phantom Phone Calls

Somewhat related to physical mediumship and poltergeist phenomena are ostensible electronic communications from the deceased. The content of many purported electronic communications is too ambiguous to be evidential, but there is at least one type of electronic communication that is both clear enough and common enough to merit discussion here: apparent phone calls from the dead. Besides three entire books dedicated to this topic—D. Scott Rogo and Raymond Bayless's *Phone Calls from the Dead*,⁸⁸ Callum E. Cooper's *Telephone Calls from the Dead*,⁸⁹ and Laurent Kasprovicz's French

⁸⁵ Fontana, *Is There an Afterlife?*, 64-80.

⁸⁶ Paul Davids and Gary E. Schwartz with John Allison, *An Atheist in Heaven: The Ultimate Evidence for Life after Death?* (Reno, NV: Yellow Hat Publishing, 2016), 97-8, 132-3.

⁸⁷ Guggenheim and Guggenheim, *Hello from Heaven!*, 206.

⁸⁸ D. Scott Rogo and Raymond Bayless, *Phone Calls from the Dead: The Results of a Two-Year Investigation into an Incredible Phenomenon* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1979).

⁸⁹ Callum E. Cooper, *Telephone Calls from The Dead: A Revised Look at the Phenomenon Thirty Years On* (Portsmouth, UK: Tricorn Books, 2012).

volume *Des coups de fil de l'AU- DELÀ?*⁹⁰—I have come across examples of phantom phone calls in at least 11 Other sources.⁹¹

Typically, in these cases, someone answers a ringing phone and hears their deceased loved one speaking to them from the other end of the line. The message is usually very short, although sometimes an actual conversation takes place. The voice of the deceased is generally (but not always) recognizable. As with apparitions and dreams, these calls sometimes come to more than one person at approximately the same time, and they sometimes come to friends or neighbors of those for whom the calls appear to be intended, as if to emphasize that the calls are not just figments of a grief-fueled imagination.

Consider a case reported by Dr. John Lerma. A hospice patient of his named Mary Esther had just passed away, and the nurses were attempting to call her son, but his line was continually busy. While Lerma was at the nurses' station asking for an update on their attempts, the phone rang. The caller ID said the call was coming from Mary Esther's room. The nurse answered but quickly passed the phone to Lerma. She appeared frightened by what she'd heard on the other end. Lerma says he heard a lot of static and a faraway voice that repeated the phrase, "Tell my son I'm okay." The nurse said it sounded just like Mary Esther. They then rushed into her room to see who might have placed the phone call but saw no one there besides her dead body. Thirty minutes or so later, Mary Esther's son arrived at the hospital. He said he, too, had gotten a call from his mother. It had happened after her death but before he was aware she'd died. She told him over and over, "I am okay. I love you. Don't worry about me."⁹²

⁹⁰ Laurent Kasprovicz, *Des Coups de Fil de L'AU-DELÀ? Enquête sur un Phénomène Paranormal Incroyable: Sa Folie, Ses Caractéristiques et Son Explication* (2018). For an English-language review of the book, see Sharon Hewitt Rawlette, "Essay Review: Phone Calls from the Dead? Exploring the Role of the Trickster," *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 34, no. 1 (2020): 116-26.

⁹¹ In addition to the case from John Lerma described below, see Laura Joplin, *Love, Janis* (New York: Villard, 1992), 312; Guggenheim and Guggenheim, *Hello from Heaven!*, 187-94; Arcangel, *Afterlife Encounters*, 31, 37-8; Jean-Jacques Charbonier, *Les 7 Bonnes Raisons de Croire à l'Au-delà* (Paris: Guy Trédaniel, J'ai Lu, 2012), 152-3; Erlendur Haraldsson, review of *Telephone Calls from The Dead: A Revised Look at the Phenomenon Thirty Years On*, by Callum E. Cooper, *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 27, no. 2 (2013): 353; Elisa Medhus, *My Son and the Afterlife: Conversations from the Other Side* (New York: Atria, 2013), 32; Geneviève Delpech, *Te Retrouver: L'amour Plus Fort que la Mort* (Paris: Editions First, 2017), 104; Scarlett L. Heinbuch, *Waking Up to Love: Our Shared Near-Death Encounter Brought Miracles, Recovery and Second Chances* (Cardiff, CA: Waterside Press, 2018), 31; Mary Helen Hensley, *Understanding Is the New Healing: Miraculous Recoveries from Physical and Emotional Trauma* (Love Never Dies, 2019), 127; and Brent Raynes, *John A. Keel: The Man, the Myths, and the Ongoing Mysteries* (2019), 95, 195.

⁹² John Lerma, *Into the Light: Real Life Stories about Angelic Visits, Visions of the Afterlife, and Other Pre-Death Experiences* (Pompton Plains, NJ: New Page Books, 2007), 172-3.

This next case, taken from Kasprovicz's book, is an example of a more extended conversation, one in which the deceased passed along important information about a dangerous medical situation.⁹³ An American man named Russell Reynolds had just been driven to a motel in Boise, Idaho, to prepare for undergoing open-heart surgery the next morning. His caregiver was with him in the motel room when the phone rang. She answered but got an odd look on her face and told Reynolds it was for him. Reynolds had no idea who it could be since he hadn't told people about his trip. A male voice on the other end of the line asked if he was Russell, and when he said yes, the man told him not to go see his surgeon the next day. "It's not your turn to die," he said. Reynolds asked who was speaking, and the man replied that his name was Oscar. The only Oscar that Reynolds knew was a coworker who'd died of cancer the year before. Reynolds could hear a bunch of other voices in the background of the call and asked where Oscar was. Oscar replied, "I'm between heaven and earth." Then he again repeated that Reynolds shouldn't have the surgery, that it wasn't his turn to die, and the line went dead.

Reynolds went to the hospital the next day as planned but asked to speak to his surgeon. A few minutes later, Reynolds noticed the surgeon pacing outside his room. When he finally came in, he told Reynolds the surgery was going to be postponed. Another doctor spoke with Reynolds later and explained that the surgeon who'd been scheduled to operate on him had lost his last three patients. Reynolds then had open-heart surgery a week later with a different surgeon, and there were no issues.⁹⁴

6. Synchronicity

We now come to the final form of apparent after-death contact I'm going to present in this essay: meaningful coincidence, which psychiatrist C. G. Jung famously called "synchronicity."⁹⁵ I've left this topic until the end of Part I because its strength is best appreciated in the context of all the other third-person evidence we've examined. After-death synchronicities can be highly meaningful—even life-changing—for those who have them, but their connection to the deceased is often difficult to convey to others, in part because these experiences are not blatantly paranormal but also because their meaning frequently depends on details of the deceased's personality and the way in which the synchronicity responds to the thoughts and emotions of the living person at the time they experience it. Nevertheless, when viewed within the context of all the other evidence for survival, synchronicities do provide additional reason to conclude that the

⁹³ For another case with a medical warning, see Arcangel, *Afterlife Encounters*, 37-8.

⁹⁴ Kasprovicz, *Des Coups de Fil de l'AU-DELÀ?*, 36-7. Russell Reynolds' testimony is also featured in Jenny Smedley, *SUPERnaturally True* (Ropley, UK: O Books, 2009), 34-5.

⁹⁵ C. G. Jung, *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960, 2010).

deceased can continue to interact with the living. I will attempt to illustrate their value with a few examples that include corroboration from a dream or an apparition.

Let's start with a relatively simple case. In her book *The Art of Intuition*, Sophy Burnham describes the experience of a widow named JoAnne Zawitoski. This woman had a dream in which a voice asked her whether she would accept it as a sign that her husband was alive and well if she were to find two objects that she hadn't been able to locate since his death: his class ring and his pocket PC. Zawitoski said yes. That morning, her son found the class ring in the car, and two days later, the pocket PC was found by her husband's boss.⁹⁶

Now here's a slightly more complex case, one involving an apparition. It comes from Dr. Mary Helen Hensley, a chiropractor and metaphysical healer living in Ireland. The incident began when, in the course of one day, Hensley heard two people in two unrelated contexts discussing a location in Ireland she'd never heard of before: Mount Argus. The following morning, Hensley's five-year-old daughter Jemma woke her up and said she had something to show her. Jemma explained that Mr. Burke—a deceased previous resident of their home who frequently appeared to Hensley's daughters—had woken Jemma up to give her a clue about how to fix a terrible cough she had, a cough so violent it often made her vomit. Jemma led her mother to some bricks in the stairwell of their home and pointed to the “clue” the apparition had shown her. Written on one of the bricks were the words “Mount Argus.”

At that point, Hensley decided to call her secretary, who was one of the people who'd talked about Mount Argus the day before. The secretary explained that Saint Charles of Mount Argus was a healer of ailments of the chest. While the relevance of this fact made it seem as though the deceased Mr. Burke really had intended to help Jemma in some way by giving her this clue, Hensley wasn't sure what to do about it. The next day, a man she had only met a few times brought her an unexpected gift, saying, “Something told me you could use this.” The gift was a relic of Saint Charles of Mount Argus. Hensley put it under her daughter's pillow that night and reports that her daughter never had her awful coughing fits again.⁹⁷

This next case is an excellent illustration of the intricate, multi-level meanings that synchronicities are capable of conveying. It comes from author and film director Paul Davids and is related in his book *An Atheist in Heaven*. A week Davids spoke at a tribute for his late friend Forrest J Ackerman, Davids was alone in his house when he printed a document from his computer and looked over it briefly before tossing it on his bed and

⁹⁶ Sophy Burnham, *The Art of Intuition: Cultivating Your Inner Wisdom* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, 2011), 187.

⁹⁷ Mary Helen Hensley, *Promised by Heaven: A Doctor's Return from the Afterlife to a Destiny of Love and Healing* (New York: Atria, 2015), 261-8.

going into the adjoining bathroom. When after he came out of the bathroom, he discovered that, in the time he'd been gone, a line on the first page of the document had been blacked out with ink, which was still wet. By going back to his computer and viewing the file he had printed, Davids could tell that the line that had been obliterated consisted of four words: "Spoke to Joe Amodei."

The document Davids was reviewing was a list of business calls and meetings he kept for tax purposes, and Joe Amodei was a man he'd only ever had this one conversation with. If the obliteration of the phrase involving his name was supposed to be a message of some kind, it didn't make sense to him. He did suspect, though, that his deceased friend Ackerman might somehow be involved, so he made a call to Ackerman's former assistant. He thought he might be able to take a look at some manuscripts Ackerman had edited and compare them with the mysterious ink obliteration. When Davids eventually carried out this comparison, he found strong similarities. Blacking out phrases was one of Ackerman's editing techniques. However, before Davids could ask Ackerman's assistant about procuring any of his manuscripts, the assistant told Davids there was something he had to tell him.

A few days before Davids' ink incident, the assistant had had a dream in which Ackerman visited him and discussed his recent tribute. The assistant told Davids, "I'm a skeptic, Paul, you know that, but it was as if Forry [Ackerman] really came and spoke to me." When he said this, Davids realized the connection with the words blacked out by the ink. Ackerman's assistant was named Joe Moe. The words "Spoke to Joe Amodei" came incredibly close to describing what Ackerman had actually done when he *spoke to Joe Moe*. In fact, punning and finding names within names had been two of Ackerman's favorite pastimes. Furthermore, while he was still alive, Ackerman had promised Davids that, if it turned out there was life after death (which Ackerman was convinced there wasn't), he would "drop him a line" from the other side. The obliteration of this four-word line of Davids' document seemed like a pun on the idea of "dropping a line." So, not only did the ink obliteration appear to confirm the reality of Joe Moe's dream visitation from Ackerman but it also provided evidence for the survival of important aspects of Ackerman's personality.⁹⁸

I will add that synchronicities also display many of the other evidential characteristics we've seen in previous categories of phenomena. In addition to the cases already described, which include examples of synchronicities providing new information and showing goal-directed behavior, there are synchronicities that occur before

⁹⁸ Davids and Schwartz with Allison, 31-2, 41-53. Scientific analysis of the ink obliteration can be found in Ch. 5 of the same book.

knowledge of the death of the person involved,⁹⁹ synchronicities that happen to multiple people who are unaware of each other's experiences,¹⁰⁰ and synchronicities that demonstrate the ability of the deceased to respond directly to requests.¹⁰¹ I have also found a brief reference in one source to two living people who seemed to be able to consciously create synchronicities for one another,¹⁰² which suggests that synchronicities might also be susceptible to conscious control by the deceased.

7. Summary of Third-Person Evidence

In the table below, I've summarized the third-person evidence for survival and used checkmarks to indicate the evidential qualities demonstrated by each phenomenon we've examined.

		Third-Person Phenomena					
		Apparitions	Dreams	Mental Mediumship	Poltergeists	Phantom Phone Calls	Synchronicity
Evidential Qualities	Before knowledge of death	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Multiple percipients unaware of each other	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Perceived by bystanders	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	New information	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Goal-directed behavior	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Interactivity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Living people have consciously communicated this way	✓	✓	*	✓		†

Figure 1. Evidential Qualities of Third-Person After-Death Phenomena

⁹⁹ Example: A bracelet associated with the deceased broke at precisely the time of death, though in a different location. Burnham, *Angel Letters*, 95.

¹⁰⁰ Example: During the week following the death of a mutual friend, five different people all had synchronistic encounters with the same (dated) song that was an obsession of the deceased. Joachim Soulières, *Les Coïncidences* (Paris: Dervy, 2012), 51-7.

¹⁰¹ Example: A woman received a blank voicemail message on her phone and told her deceased son, "Scotty, if that's you, you have to do better than one blank message." Later that day, she received 95 blank messages. Laura Lynne Jackson, *The Light Between Us: Stories from Heaven, Lessons for the Living* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015), 200.

¹⁰² Mattingley, *The After Death Chronicles*, 72.

Notes: *There are many cases in which it seems living people have communicated through mediumistic phenomena such as table tipping, automatic writing, planchettes, and trance.¹⁰³ Many of these messages include verifiable details about the living person's activities and/or a sense of their personality, but in almost none of them do the communicators have a conscious memory of transmitting the messages. I have found only two notable exceptions, and in each of these cases, those receiving the message were misled as to its source.¹⁰⁴

†As mentioned at the end of the section on synchronicity, I have found one possible example of living people consciously communicating through synchronicity, but details are lacking.

As the figure makes clear, the weight of the third-person evidence goes far beyond that of any individual case or phenomenon. The case for survival is considerably strengthened by the fact that such a great variety of contacts with the deceased exist and that all of these different categories of phenomena nevertheless exhibit similar evidential characteristics, across many people and contexts. We should not forget either the sheer ubiquity of such contacts. As we saw in the introduction to Part I, 36-42% of Americans feel they've been in touch with someone who's dead. And we've now seen good reason to believe that some of these contacts are much more than wishful imagination.

But so far we've looked at only one side of the coin. It's now time to turn to first-person evidence for life after death: the experiences of those who actually remember dying—and what came next.

II. First-Person Evidence for Survival

As previously mentioned, one of the hypotheses offered to explain away the apparent third-person evidence for survival is the super-psi hypothesis: the idea that living people use their unconscious psi abilities (clairvoyance, telepathy, psychokinesis) to simulate apparent contact with the deceased. However, extremely strong evidence that ostensible communications with the deceased are more than mere super-psi simulations comes from the huge quantity of first-person evidence for survival. In the end, we don't have to rely solely on apparitions, dreams, and readings from mediums to assure us that life continues beyond death. We can talk to people who have actually experienced it.

¹⁰³ Alexandre Aksakof, *Animisme et Spiritisme*, trans. Berthold Sandow (Paris: P.-G. Leymarie, 1895), Chapter IV, Part A; Frederic W. H. Myers, "The Subliminal Consciousness. Chapter VII: Motor automatism," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 9 (1894): 26-128, especially pp. 48-61, accessible at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=njp.32101075888279>; and S. G. Soal, "A Report on Some Communications Received Through Mrs. Blanche Cooper," *Proceedings of the Society for Psychical Research* 35 (1926): 471-594, pp. 560-89, accessible at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=inu.30000108461215>.

¹⁰⁴ Aksakof, 475-6; and J. Valckenier Suringar, "A Case of Thought-Transference," *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research* 21 (December 1923): 170-5, accessible at <https://archive.org/details/journalofsociety21soci/>.

This second part of the essay will be divided into three sections: Near-Death Experiences, Memories of Previous Lives, and Memories of the Intermission Period Between Lives. Among many other evidential aspects of these phenomena, we'll find one particular type of case that destroys any remaining plausibility had by the super-psi hypothesis: the multiple instances of people who remember dying (whether in this life or a previous one) and remember communicating from their disembodied state, through an apparition, a dream, or some other means.

1. Near-Death Experiences

Almost everyone is familiar with near-death experiences (NDEs), in which people momentarily die (or come close to dying) and then, upon regaining consciousness, describe having had experiences such as floating out of their bodies, seeing the whole scene from up above, going into a tunnel where they met deceased loved ones, seeing a review of the events of their life, and even entering a beautiful, light-filled realm where they met God. Surveys indicate that somewhere between 4 and 15% of the general population has had a near-death experience,¹⁰⁵ and among those who have survived cardiac arrest, more than one study has found the proportion of those experiencing an NDE to be as high as 23%.¹⁰⁶ While attempts to explain NDEs without appeal to survival of bodily death abound, none of these purported explanations is able to account for all of the characteristics of these experiences.

Verified Perception During Cessation of Brain Function

One of the most common skeptical explanations for near-death experiences is that they are the mere hallucinations of a dying brain. That is, (1) the body of the person having the near-death experience is not actually dead during the experience, just dying, and (2) their experience is just a hallucination created by the brain in this extreme state. One of the most important pieces of evidence that refutes this explanation is the existence of cases where NDErs report seeing or hearing events that can be verified to have taken place *while they were in cardiac arrest and without brain function*.

¹⁰⁵ George Gallup, Jr., with William Proctor, *Adventures in Immortality: A Look Beyond the Threshold of Death* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982); Hubert Knoblauch, Ina Schmied, and Bernt Schnettler, "Different Kinds of Near-Death Experience: A Report on a Survey of Near-Death Experiences in Germany," *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 20, no. 1 (2001): 15-29; and Mahendra Perera, Gayan Padmasekara, and John Belanti, "Prevalence of Near-Death Experiences in Australia," *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 24, no. 2 (2005): 109-16.

¹⁰⁶ Nancy L. Zingrone and Carlos S. Alvarado, "Pleasurable Western Adult Near-Death Experiences: Features, Circumstances, and Incidence," in *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty Years of Investigation*, eds. Janice Miner Holden, Bruce Greyson, and Debbie James (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009), 17-40, 35.

Titus Rivas, Anny Dirven, and Rudolf H. Smit have collected a number of cases of verified paranormal perception during NDEs in their 2016 book *The Self Does Not Die*, and they devote an entire chapter to cases of awareness and perception during cardiac arrest.¹⁰⁷ One example involves a man who was found “unconscious, stone cold, and apparently clinically dead out in a meadow.” Medics tried to resuscitate him on the way to the hospital but were unsuccessful. On arrival at the hospital, his body was “ashen gray, with livor mortis (in which blue-black discoloration occurs where blood pools in the lowest areas of the corpse) and blue lips and nails.” He had no blood circulation and no heart rhythm.¹⁰⁸ Rivas, Dirven, and Smit emphasize that activity in the cortex of the brain ceases about 15 seconds after cardiac arrest, eliminating the possibility of any complex conscious experience.¹⁰⁹ By the time this man was brought into the hospital, he had been in cardiac arrest for a great deal longer than 15 seconds. At the hospital, a nurse removed the man’s dentures before continuing resuscitation efforts. It then took an additional hour for those resuscitation efforts to be effective enough for the patient to be transmitted to the ICU. About a week later, the patient spoke to the nurse who had removed his dentures and said that he had watched the nurse remove them. Not only that, but he said he’d seen the nurse put them on the pull-out shelf of a cart that had lots of bottles on it. The nurse confirmed this was what he had done: he’d put the man’s dentures on the pull-out shelf of the crash cart.¹¹⁰

In another case, exceptionally well-documented, a woman named Pamela Reynolds was undergoing surgery for a brain aneurysm when she had an NDE. Throughout the procedure, Reynolds was under anesthetic, had her eyes taped shut, and had loud clicks and white noise playing in her ears through earbuds, but she nevertheless found herself able to perceive events going on in the room around her. Reynolds experienced herself as floating above her body and over the surgeon’s shoulder, and she was later able to accurately describe the specific type of saw used by the surgeon as well as the case that contained its interchangeable blades. She also reported hearing someone remark that the arteries in her right groin were too small and then someone else suggest the left groin. She was surprised by this conversation as she hadn’t known that her brain operation would involve draining the blood from her body through her groin. Nevertheless, the exchange she described had taken place, even though multiple persons who had been present in the operating room at the time confirmed that there should have been no way for her to perceive these things. Interestingly, Reynolds never reported

¹⁰⁷ Rivas et al., *The Self Does Not Die*, 55-126.

¹⁰⁸ Rivas et al., *The Self Does Not Die*, 63.

¹⁰⁹ Rivas et al., *The Self Does Not Die*, 55.

¹¹⁰ Rivas et al., *The Self Does Not Die*, 63-4.

hearing the loud clicks that were playing directly into her ears at the volume of a lawn mower or a subway train going through a station. That is, her perceptions of sound did not seem bound to what was being received by her ears.¹¹¹

Now, the verified perceptions just described occurred in an early stage of Reynolds' surgery. What is even more impressive than this is what she experienced near the *end* of the procedure, because by that time, not only was she completely anesthetized, but her body had been cooled to a severely hypothermic temperature, her heart and breathing had been stopped, and blood was drained from her head. It was during *this* part of the procedure that Reynolds reported perceiving two more things she shouldn't have been able to. The first was that the operating room staff was listening to the song "Hotel California," and the other was that they "shocked" her twice while restarting her heart. One of the neurosurgeons in attendance confirmed that the staff had indeed listened to "Hotel California" and that her heart had to be restarted twice. This is not a number that could have been easily predicted, as the number of necessary attempts varies.¹¹²

Some might argue that perceptions like those of the dentures and of Reynolds' resuscitation efforts could be obtained by the NDEr *after* resuscitation, by using psi to look into the past and see what happened while they were unconscious. However, it's hard to see any independent motivation for this hypothesis, beyond the desire to cling to the notion of brain-dependent consciousness at all costs. Furthermore, if time is no barrier to our capacity for psi, this implies that our consciousness can transcend time, and in that case, it's not clear that the concept of death—of our being alive at one time and dead at another—is even coherent. If we can access the past psychically, then there is an important sense in which survival necessarily exists, as the "past" consciousness of our loved ones is still accessible to us in the present.

Increased Paranormal Perception

Another strike against the hallucination explanation for NDEs is the sheer number of cases in which NDErs experience *increased* perceptual abilities. While it frequently can't be verified that this increased perception happened precisely at a time when their bodies were in cardiac arrest or had no brain function, the mere fact that, while their bodies were compromised in some way, they were able to experience *more* than they would be able to when their body is functioning normally is a crucial indication that perception and bodily function do not always go hand in hand, and can even be inversely correlated.

¹¹¹ Janice Miner Holden, "Veridical Perception in Near-Death Experiences," in Holden, Greyson, and James, 185-211, pp. 198-9.

¹¹² Rivas et al., *The Self Does Not Die*, 95-103.

For instance, in a case reported by Dr. John Lerma, an 82-year-old man had an NDE in which he experienced floating out of his body in the hospital trauma room. From a position near the ceiling, he saw a coin sitting on the right corner of the eight-foot-high cardiac monitor. He could see that it was a quarter dating from 1985. After he was resuscitated, he asked his doctor, Lerma, to check whether the quarter was really there, so he could know whether his experience had been real. Using a ladder, Lerma verified that the 1985 quarter was just where the patient had seen it.¹¹³

In another case, this one reported by Drs. Kenneth Ring and Madelaine Lawrence in their article “Further Evidence for Veridical Perception during Near-Death Experiences,” a patient at Hartford Hospital in Connecticut reported having an NDE in which she was pulled upward through the floors of the hospital until she was up above the roof looking at the city skyline and her attention was drawn to a red shoe. A skeptical physician later went onto the roof and discovered a red shoe there.¹¹⁴

Other NDErs have had verified perceptions of things as unexpected as their wife and daughter discussing taking cuttings from a tree in a hospital courtyard,¹¹⁵ a person they thought was a health nut buying a Snickers bar from a vending machine,¹¹⁶ both of their grandmothers suddenly taking up smoking,¹¹⁷ and details about the amputation of a leg in a nearby operating theater.¹¹⁸

Janice Miner Holden reviewed 93 reports of physical events observed during NDEs and found that 86 were fully accurate, 6 contained some error, and only 1 was entirely wrong.¹¹⁹ Some researchers have attempted to do controlled studies of perception during cardiac arrest by placing hidden targets high up on hospital shelves, out of the

¹¹³ Lerma, *Into the Light*, 10-2.

¹¹⁴ Kenneth Ring and Madelaine Lawrence, “Further Evidence for Veridical Perception during Near-Death Experiences,” *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 11, no. 4 (1993): 223-9, pp. 226-7, accessible at <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc799169/>.

¹¹⁵ Rivas et al., *The Self Does Not Die*, 45.

¹¹⁶ Tricia Barker, *Angels in the OR: What Dying Taught Me About Healing, Survival, and Transformation* (New York: Post Hill Press, 2019), 14.

¹¹⁷ Rivas et al., *The Self Does Not Die*, 44.

¹¹⁸ Rivas et al., *The Self Does Not Die*, 59.

¹¹⁹ Holden, “Veridical Perception,” 197.

normal visual field of patients. So far, these studies have only had 12 patients who reported leaving their bodies during an NDE, and none of them reported noticing the target.¹²⁰

Apparitions of NDErs

Further evidence for the reality of expanded perception during NDEs comes from cases in which NDErs had the experience of perceiving events at a location other than that of their body and someone at that location *also perceived an apparition of the NDEr*. Rivas, Dirven, and Smit catalog four such cases.¹²¹

In one of these, reported by critical care physician Dr. Laurin Bellg, a young man was so estranged from his dying mother that she refused to allow him into her hospital room. He was hanging out in a nearby bar when he was amazed to see her walk in. He started to go to her, but other people passed between them, and afterward she was gone. Around the same time, the woman (whose body was actually still lying in her hospital bed) woke up and told her daughter, “I had the strangest dream. I dreamed that I was in a bar and I saw my son sitting at a table crying, and he got up to start coming to me. And I got scared and I woke up.”¹²²

In another case cataloged by Rivas, Dirven, and Smit, this one investigated by Dr. Melvin Morse and Paul Perry, Olga Gearhardt of San Diego, California, was receiving a heart transplant. Her whole family had gathered at the hospital during her surgery, except for her son-in-law, who had a phobia of hospitals. At 2:15am, the new heart would not beat properly and then stopped completely. The resuscitation process took hours, but finally her new heart was persuaded to function properly. Meanwhile, the son-in-law, at home, woke up at 2:15am to see Olga standing at the foot of his bed. She was so lifelike that he thought it was actually her, that her plans must have changed and, instead of getting surgery, she had come to his house. He asked her how she was doing, and she told him, “I am fine, I’m going to be all right. There is nothing for any of you to worry about.” When she disappeared, he got up and wrote down the time and what she had said. The next morning, when Olga came out of surgery, she mentioned “the strange dream” she’d had, which appears to have been a near-death experience. She not only had the experience of being out of her body watching the doctors operate, but she went to her family in the waiting room and tried to communicate with them. Unable to get through,

¹²⁰ Bruce Greyson, *After: A Doctor Explores What Near-Death Experiences Reveal about Life and Beyond* (New York: St. Martin’s Essentials, 2021), 72-3.

¹²¹ Rivas et al., *The Self Does Not Die*, 158-65.

¹²² Laurin Bellg, “Patient NDEs in the ICU,” February 2014, The Monroe Institute Professional Seminar, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xdScjvc14xE>, starting at 31:08 in the video.

she then decided to go to her son-in-law at his home, where “she was sure she had stood at the foot of her son-in-law’s bed and told him that everything was going to be all right.”^{123, 124}

These cases of reciprocal apparitions don’t just provide evidence for the reality of the near-death experience but also give us further evidence with regard to apparitions of the dead. The fact that apparitions of those *near* death are experienced in much the same way as apparitions of the deceased and that NDErs have been able to report back on their subjective experience of being at the location in question makes it even more plausible that apparitions of the deceased (some of which occur long after death) also reflect their conscious presence.

Perception of Future Events

A final important point regarding paranormal perception during NDEs is that about a third of those NDErs who report experiencing a life review recall that that review contained visions of *future* as well as past life events,¹²⁵ and at least some of those future events have then taken place, even when they were still 20 or 30 years in the future at the time of the NDE. In a case reported to Kenneth Ring, a 10-year-old had an NDE in which he received the information “You will be married at age twenty-eight” and “You will have two children.” Eighteen years later, during the year following his twenty-eighth birthday, he met and married his spouse, and they went on to have two children.¹²⁶

A related phenomenon is that NDErs sometimes report meeting their future children during their NDEs and/or meeting the future children of other people.¹²⁷

¹²³ Morse with Perry, *Parting Visions*, 22-4.

¹²⁴ In addition to the two other cases of reciprocal NDE apparitions cited in Rivas et al., other reciprocal apparitions of the dying can be found in William Barrett, *Deathbed Visions: How the Dead Talk to the Dying* (Guildford, UK: White Crow, 1926, 2011), 65-73; and Frederick George Lee, ed., *The Other World; or, Glimpses of the Supernatural*, vol. 2 (London: King & Company, 1875), 64-6, accessible at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015056731816&view=1up&seq=76>.

¹²⁵ Survey conducted by Bruce Greyson, reported in Kenneth Ring and Evelyn Elsaesser Valarino, *Lessons from the Light: What We Can Learn from the Near-Death Experience* (Needham, MA: Moment Point Press, 1998, 2006), 151.

¹²⁶ Kenneth Ring, *Heading Toward Omega: In Search of the Meaning of the Near-Death Experience* (New York: William Morrow, 1984, 1985), 185-7.

¹²⁷ See Lee Nelson, *Beyond the Veil*, Vol. 1 (Orem, UT: Cedar Fort, 1988), 37-9; Betty J. Eadie with Curtis Taylor, *Embraced by the Light* (Carson City, NV: Gold Leaf Press, 1992), 145; Pierre Jovanovic, *Enquête sur l'Existence des Anges Gardiens* (Paris: Éditions Filipacchi/Société Sonodip, J'ai Lu, 1993), 99; Sarah Hinze, *We Lived in Heaven: Spiritual Accounts of Souls Coming to Earth* (Rexburg, ID: Spring Creek Book Company, 2006), 110, 112; Sarah Hinze with Laura Lofgreen, *The Memory Catcher* (Provo, UT: Spring Creek Book Company, 2012), 120-3; and Sarah and Brent Hinze, “Visions of Future Children in Near-Death Experience,” 2012 IANDS Conference in Scottsdale, AZ, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdSL-HCx14o>, 29:13-33:27.

I'm not aware of any cases that provide strong objective verification of this beyond the fact that, when these children are born, the NDErs recognize them as the ones they saw in their NDE, but the mere fact that NDErs report these interactions with future children dovetails with memories some children have of a pre-birth existence, memories we'll explore in the sections *Memories of a Previous Life* and *Memories of the Intermission Period Between Lives*.

Shared Death Experiences

Yet another strike against the “hallucination of a dying brain” explanation for NDEs and a point in favor of their portraying objective aspects of reality is the fact that near-death experiences can often be shared by others. Sometimes these are other people who are near death at the same time,¹²⁸ but generally they're perfectly healthy people. Often the shared death experience happens when they're in the other people who are near death at the same time,¹²⁹ but generally they're perfectly healthy people. Often the shared death experience happens when they're in the same room with the dying, but if there's a strong emotional bond, they may share the dying experience even at a distance. The experience generally includes one or more typical NDE elements: floating out of the body, seeing the deceased loved ones of the dying person, encountering a light, even sharing in the dying person's life review.

Dr. Raymond Moody, who is famous for popularizing NDEs with his 1975 bestselling book *Life After Life*,¹³⁰ in 2010 co-wrote a book called *Glimpses of Eternity* that is dedicated to this related phenomenon of shared death experiences. Moody reports that, in giving lectures around the world, he has found that 5-10% of the members of his audiences have had a shared death experience, which is only slightly less than the percentage of his audience members who've had NDEs.¹³¹

An especially evidential aspect of shared death experiences is the fact that, just like apparitions and dreams of the deceased, they sometimes happen simultaneously to multiple living people present at a death. For instance, Moody relates the experience of four siblings and a sibling-in-law who all perceived some of the same extraordinary phenomena while they were gathered around their dying mother. At first, all they saw

¹²⁸ See, for example, Fontana, *Is There an Afterlife?*, 395-6.

¹²⁹ See, for example, Fontana, *Is There an Afterlife?*, 395-6.

¹³⁰ Raymond A. Moody, Jr., *Life After Life: The Investigation of a Phenomenon—Survival of Bodily Death* (New York: HarperOne, 1975, 2001).

¹³¹ Raymond Moody with Paul Perry, *Glimpses of Eternity: An Investigation into Shared Death Experiences* (London: Rider Books, 2010), 51.

was a bright, unearthly light, but just after their mother took her last breath, vivid, cloud-like lights gathered and formed themselves into a bridge-shaped entranceway. The children then saw their mother come out of her body and go through this portal. It was a joyful experience for them, and one of them even heard “beautiful music,” though the rest did not.¹³²

In another multiply shared death experience, two sisters who were by their mother’s side as she was dying of lung cancer saw the room start to swirl. When it stopped, they found themselves standing beside a much younger version of their mother and started to see scenes from her life. Many of them were from before the girls were born—like their mom’s first boyfriend and her heart-breaking breakup. They even discovered more recent events they’d known nothing about, like the fact that their mother had a crush on her widowed neighbor. One of the sisters says, “What we saw was so real that we thought we had died too. For months it was beyond belief until we finally accepted it.”¹³³

The fact that multiple healthy individuals can perceive NDE phenomena as someone is dying shows that these phenomena are not mere side effects of drugs or physiological changes that occur as the brain shuts down. They appear instead to be real events that nevertheless can’t be perceived by everyone.

The Value of Eye-Witness Testimony

We have now seen some of the independently verifiable aspects of near-death experiences, but the evidentiary value of NDEs doesn’t stop there. While aspects verifiable by third parties are important corroborations of the objective quality of the experiences, there is so much more to the near-death experience than what can be verified by an independent observer, and we would miss a lot by not listening carefully to all aspects of the testimonies of those who have had the experience themselves.

To begin with, those who have had a near-death experience are almost universally convinced of the reality of life after death¹³⁴ and see their fear of death vanish.¹³⁵ That is,

¹³² Moody with Perry, *Glimpses of Eternity*, 13-14.

¹³³ Moody with Perry, *Glimpses of Eternity*, 15.

¹³⁴ Greyson, *After*, 131; and Cassandra Musgrave, “The Near-Death Experience: A Study of Transformation,” *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 15, no. 3 (1997): 187-201, p. 194. Accessible at: <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc799346/>.

¹³⁵ Ring and Valarino, *Lessons from the Light*, 127.

those who have actually *had* the experience—including those who were previously die-hard atheist physicalists¹³⁶—are sure that consciousness goes on after permanent bodily death.

Another aspect of NDErs' accounts that weighs against the hallucination hypothesis is the fact that 71% of NDErs say that their NDE memories are clearer and more vivid than those of other events.¹³⁷ In fact, one common observation made by NDErs is that the experience was “realer than real.”¹³⁸ Compared to what they experience in the NDE, normal life seems like a dream.

NDErs also commonly report that, during the NDE, they not only perceive more, with 360-degree vision and the ability to perceive events at a distance in space and time, but they also describe their thinking as being faster and clearer. Dr. Bruce Greyson reports in his 2021 book *After* that, among more than a thousand NDErs he's surveyed in his 45 years of studying the phenomenon, “half described their thinking during the NDE as clearer than usual, and almost as many described it as faster than usual.”¹³⁹ The vast majority of his NDErs who described experiencing life reviews reported them as “more vivid than ordinary memories.”¹⁴⁰ Some even noted that they were able to perceive more detail in their life review than when the events actually happened to them. An NDEr named Tom Sawyer, for instance, reports that, during one scene of his life review, he was able to perceive things so clearly that he could have counted the number of mosquitoes present.¹⁴¹ An NDEr named Peggy says that, during her NDE, “I did not have the limited consciousness I have on earth. It felt like I had 125 senses to our normal five. You could do, think, comprehend, and so on, you name it, with no effort at all. It's as if the facts are right before you in plain sight with no risk of misinterpretation because the truth just *is!* Nothing is hidden.”¹⁴² Another woman, a Canadian anthropologist, reports that, during

¹³⁶ See, for example, Howard Storm, *My Descent into Death: A Second Chance at Life* (New York: Doubleday, 2005); and Eben Alexander, *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012).

¹³⁷ Greyson, *After*, 95-6.

¹³⁸ Jens Amberts, *Why an Afterlife Obviously Exists: A Thought Experiment and Realer than Real Near-Death Experiences* (Winchester, UK: iff Books, forthcoming), Ch. 4; Marie Thonnard et al., “Characteristics of Near-Death Experiences Memories as Compared to Real and Imagined Events Memories” *PLoS ONE* 8, no. 3 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0057620>; and Arianna Palmieri et al., “‘Reality’ of Near-Death-Experience Memories: Evidence from a Psychodynamic and Electrophysiological Integrated Study,” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* (June 19, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2014.00429>.

¹³⁹ Greyson, *After*, 31.

¹⁴⁰ Greyson, *After*, 41.

¹⁴¹ Greyson, *After*, 40.

¹⁴² Ring and Valarino, *Lessons from the Light*, 45.

her NDE, “I could see the tiles on the ceiling and the tiles on the floor, simultaneously: three hundred degree [*sic*] spherical vision. And not just spherical. Detailed! I could see every single hair and the follicle out of which it grew on the head of the nurse standing beside the stretcher.”¹⁴³

Some NDErs feel they suddenly understand huge quantities of information about the universe, only some minor portion of which they are able to retain when they return to their body. According to surveys conducted through the Near-Death Experience Research Foundation website, 30.7% of NDErs felt that, during their NDE, they understood everything “about the universe.”¹⁴⁴ In fact, experience in an NDE is so different from normal experience that NDErs have trouble even describing it. NDEr Steve Luiting reports, “The language spoken [during the NDE] was much, much more complex and could literally encapsulate experiences. Even the memories when coming back into my body flattened, simplified, and became symbols of what really happened. I believe this flattening happens simply because the human brain can’t understand a world so much more complex and possibly so alien.”¹⁴⁵

It’s intriguing to consider the idea of “super-survival,” the idea that our post-death selves may actually be a significantly enhanced version of the selves we currently experience ourselves as having. As one NDEr has said, “Our identity will continue to be—in a greater way.”¹⁴⁶ But whether or not our consciousness is in fact enhanced after the death of our bodies, the most important point to recognize here is the sheer number of near-death experiencers (again, 4-15% of the general population) and their overwhelming conviction that what they’ve experienced is indicative of survival of consciousness after the permanent death of the body. As philosopher Jens Amberts emphasizes in his forthcoming book *Why an Afterlife Obviously Exists*, “at least some NDErs were equally as skeptical of the existence of an afterlife or of the idea that NDEs are or can be indicative of an afterlife as we may be now, and at least some of them also shared the intensity of that skepticism, and at least some of them also shared whatever justifications we may think or feel that we have for that skepticism. And yet, the NDE thoroughly and justifiably convinced them that there really is an afterlife....”¹⁴⁷ When so many eye-witnesses with reasoning faculties similar to our own all say the same thing, we do well

¹⁴³ Ring and Valarino, *Lessons from the Light*, 63.

¹⁴⁴ Jeffrey Long with Paul Perry, *God and the Afterlife: The Ground-Breaking New Evidence for God and Near-Death Experience* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016), 23.

¹⁴⁵ Greyson, *After*, 48.

¹⁴⁶ Ring and Valarino, *Lessons from the Light*, 276.

¹⁴⁷ Jens Amberts, *Why an Afterlife Obviously Exists: A Thought Experiment and Realer than Real Near-Death Experiences* (Winchester, UK: iff Books, forthcoming), end of Ch. 6.

to pay attention—especially when these reports offer us a glimpse into a state of being that, to the rest of us, is the equivalent of a locked room. Rather than insist that it's impossible for what's in that room to be different than what we experience outside it, we would do well to take seriously the testimony of those who have the relevant firsthand knowledge.¹⁴⁸

At the same time, despite all the compelling evidence from NDEs that consciousness doesn't depend on a functioning brain, it's still true that NDEs are not actually testimonies from people whose bodies are permanently dead, but only people whose bodies are provisionally, reversibly dead. Despite their conviction otherwise, it is still logically possible that their experiences do not accurately reflect what we will experience when our bodies permanently die and degrade. For first-person experience of what happens in that case, we have to turn to another source: those who have memories of experiencing the permanent death of their previous body.

2. Memories of Previous Lives

Memories of having lived a previous life in a different body don't get nearly as much press as near-death experiences, even though the literature documenting the accuracy of past-life memories is much vaster and more thorough than the literature on verified paranormal perception in NDEs. Much of the documentation related to memories of previous lives is due to the monumental work of the late Dr. Ian Stevenson of the University of Virginia School of Medicine, who beginning in the 1960s spent several decades traveling the world conducting extremely thorough investigations into the past-life memories spontaneously reported by young children.¹⁴⁹

Similar work, with similar results, has been conducted on a smaller scale by several other researchers, including Satwant Pasricha,¹⁵⁰ Antonia Mills, Jürgen Keil,

¹⁴⁸ This analogy is developed in great and convincing detail by Amberts.

¹⁴⁹ For an excellent overview of Stevenson's work, see Ian Stevenson, *Children Who Remember Previous Lives: A Question of Reincarnation*, rev. ed. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2001). For examples of the meticulousness with which he documented individual cases, see Ian Stevenson, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*, 2nd ed. revised and enlarged (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1980). For a more popular introduction to Stevenson's work, written by journalist Tom Shroder, who accompanied Stevenson on some of his final research trips, see Tom Shroder, *Old Souls* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999).

¹⁵⁰ Satwant Pasricha, *Claims of Reincarnation: An Empirical Study of Cases in India* (New Delhi: Harman Publishing House, 1990).

Erlendur Haraldsson,¹⁵¹ Jim B. Tucker,¹⁵² and James G. Matlock.¹⁵³ These researchers have sought to determine whether there are actual deceased people whose lives correspond to the past-life memories children report, how closely the children's memories correspond to the details of these people's lives, and whether the children could have learned these details in some non-paranormal way. For many of these cases, the correspondences between the memories and the lives of the deceased are so accurate and detailed, and the possibility of the children learning such details in a normal way so remote, that the best explanation appears to be some sort of "reincarnation": the continuation of a deceased person's consciousness in a new body. By 2001, the University of Virginia already had in its collection over 2,500 cases that investigation showed to be suggestive of reincarnation.¹⁵⁴

There has also been a lot of interest in the past 70 years in retrieving past-life memories through hypnosis.¹⁵⁵ However, the number of hypnotic regression cases in which the existence of the specific individual remembered has been verified is much smaller than the number of spontaneous cases where this has been achieved,¹⁵⁶ and there is debate within the parapsychology community over the accuracy of memories evoked by hypnosis.¹⁵⁷ For this reason, I'll restrict my attention in this essay to spontaneously occurring memories.

¹⁵¹ Antonia Mills, Erlendur Haraldsson, and H. H. Jürgen Keil, "Replication Studies of Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation by Three Independent Investigators," *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research* 88 (1994): 207-19; and Erlendur Haraldsson and James G. Matlock, *I Saw a Light and Came Here: Children's Experiencers of Reincarnation* (Hove, UK: White Crow Books, 2016).

¹⁵² Jim B. Tucker, *Life Before Life: Children's Memories of Previous Lives* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2008); and Jim B. Tucker, *Return to Life: Extraordinary Cases of Children Who Remember Past Lives*, reprint ed. (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2015).

¹⁵³ Haraldsson and Matlock, *I Saw a Light*; and James G. Matlock, *Signs of Reincarnation: Exploring Beliefs, Cases, and Theory* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).

¹⁵⁴ Stevenson, *Children Who Remember Previous Lives*, 261, note 2.

¹⁵⁵ See Morey Bernstein, *The Search for Bridey Murphy* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1956); Ruth Montgomery, *Here and Hereafter* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Crest, 1968); Jeffrey Iverson, *More Lives Than One? The Evidence of the Remarkable Bloxham Tapes* (London: Pan Books, 1976, 1977); Edith Fiore, *You Have Been Here Before* (New York: Ballantine, 1978); Helen Wambach, *Reliving Past Lives: The Evidence Under Hypnosis* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978); Peter Moss with Joe Keeton, *Encounters with the Past: How Man Can Experience and Relive History* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1979); Brian L. Weiss, *Many Lives, Many Masters: The True Story of a Prominent Psychiatrist, His Young Patient, and the Past-Life Therapy That Changed Both Their Lives* (New York: Touchstone, 1988); and Carol Bowman, *Children's Past Lives: How Past Life Memories Affect Your Child* (New York: Bantam, 1997).

¹⁵⁶ Matlock, *Signs of Reincarnation*, 221.

¹⁵⁷ For an overview of the debate surrounding past-life regression, see the section "Fantasy and Fact in Past-Life Regression Under Hypnosis" in Matlock, *Signs of Reincarnation*, 213-23.

One of the most striking cases of past-life memory investigated in the United States in the last couple of decades is that of a boy named James Leininger,¹⁵⁸ who at age two began having terrible nightmares during which he would scream, “Airplane crash on fire! Little man can’t get out!” Over the following months, James began talking about the content of his nightmare while awake. His parents asked him for more details about what had happened to the plane he was in, and James said it was shot, by the Japanese. Later, James added that his plane was a Corsair.¹⁵⁹ James also told his parents that he had flown his plane off a boat. When asked for the name of the boat, James replied, “*Natoma*.” His dad said that the name sounded Japanese, and James looked “perturbed” at this comment. He corrected his father, telling him it was American.

James’s father, Bruce, had strong Christian convictions and at the time of James’s first comments had a negative reaction to the idea that they might be indicative of reincarnation. However, Bruce was open-minded enough to try to investigate the things his son was saying. Through a web search, he discovered that there had indeed been a U.S. escort carrier named “*Natoma Bay*” in the Pacific during the Second World War.

Over the following months and years, James went on to produce further details about his apparent memories of another life. When asked who the little man in the plane was, James would say either “me” or “James,” which didn’t seem very helpful. When they asked if there was anyone else in the dream with him, he gave the name Jack Larsen and said that Jack was a pilot, too. At another time, James saw a picture of Iwo Jima in a book and said, “My airplane got shot down there, Daddy.” And, on still another occasion, James told his dad that his plane had been hit at the front of the engine, right in the propeller.

¹⁵⁸ *NEW NOTE*: Subsequent to the original online publication of the present essay in November 2021, Michael Sudduth published “The James Leininger Case Re-examined” in the *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 35, no. 4 (2021): 933-1026. This article documents ways in which James Leininger could have obtained his knowledge of World War II aircraft and battle conditions from normal sources available to him during his early childhood, as well as casting doubt on the timeline that placed James’ specific statements about James Huston’s life *before* the discovery of verifying data by his father. Jim Tucker, the most prominent investigator of the Leininger case, is scheduled to publish a response to Sudduth in the March 2022 issue of the *Journal of Scientific Exploration*. In the meantime, I wish to note that, though the information presented by Sudduth appears to substantially reduce the evidentiality of the Leininger case, there are other cases of past-life memory in which the same doubts do not arise. See, for instance, the case of Ryan Hammons, who gave many personal details (recorded in writing prior to verification) about the life of someone who was so obscure that only substantial digging by investigators uncovered his identity. See Tucker, *Return to Life*, 88-119, and Kean, *Surviving Death*, 51-79.

¹⁵⁹ James had been to a flight museum when he was 22 months old, not long before his nightmares began, and he had been enthralled by the World War II exhibit. At that time, however, there was no Corsair on display there, as museum staff later confirmed to Jim Tucker when he investigated the case.

Bruce eventually learned that pilots from *Natoma Bay* had participated in the Iwo Jima operation and that only one pilot had been killed during it: a pilot named James Huston. When Bruce was finally able to get his hands on the aircraft action report for the day of Huston's death, he saw that, flying right next to Huston was a pilot named Jack Larsen. Bruce was also able to talk to four men who had actually seen Huston's plane go down that day. They all confirmed that Huston's plane had been hit head-on, in the engine.

James had also reported that "Little Man" had two sisters, Ruth and Annie, and he specified that Ruth was four years older than Annie, who was four years older than he was. It turned out that James Huston did have two older sisters with these names, and their ages were spaced in the way he indicated.

One thing James said that didn't seem to be quite right was the fact that his plane had been a Corsair, as there had never been any Corsairs flying from *Natoma Bay*. James Huston had died in an FM-2. And yet it was later discovered that James Huston had flown a Corsair *before* coming to *Natoma Bay*. His surviving sister Anne had a couple of pictures of him in front of a Corsair, and it was confirmed that Huston had previously tested the Corsair for the Navy.¹⁶⁰

This case has been carefully researched by Dr. Jim Tucker of the University of Virginia School of Medicine's Division of Perceptual Studies, among other researchers. And while it is certainly one of the most strikingly detailed of the American cases of apparent past-life memories, it is far from the only one of its kind. As previously mentioned, similar cases have been collected and studied in countries all around the world, and they show remarkable consistency in their features. For instance, children nearly always begin speaking about their memories of another life between the ages of two and five, and they generally stop talking about them between five and eight years old,¹⁶¹ although there are some adults who retain spontaneous past-life memories as well.¹⁶² Another consistency is that past-life memories tend to be of things that happened close to the end of the previous life, and almost 75% of children with past-life memories make statements about how they died.¹⁶³

¹⁶⁰ Tucker, *Return to Life*, 63-87.

¹⁶¹ Stevenson, *Children Who Remember*, 105-9.

¹⁶² In addition to several examples among Ian Stevenson's cases, see Jenny Cockell, *Across Time and Death: A Mother's Search for Her Past Life Children* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993); and Stéphane Allix, *When I Was Someone Else: The Incredible True Story of Past Life Connection*, trans. Jack Cain (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 2017, 2021).

¹⁶³ Stevenson, *Children Who Remember*, 110.

Another frequently recurring feature of these cases is the presence, not just of verbally expressed memories, but of *behaviors* that match what would be expected of the person in the previous life. Phobias are one example. Ian Stevenson wrote that, out of 252 cases he studied in which the death of the previous person was violent, in 50% of them, the child remembering the death had a corresponding phobia (for instance, a fear of water if they remembered drowning).¹⁶⁴

Other behaviors reported in children with past-life memories are more idiosyncratic reflections of the past personality they remember. A young girl named Rylann O'Bannion was afraid of thunderstorms and told her mother she'd died in the backyard when there was a loud noise and the rain shocked her. On another occasion, Rylann said she remembered seeing a plane crash when she was standing in the yard. She also remembered the name "Jennifer" and said the year 1971 felt "familiar" to her. These clues helped Rylann's mother discover a girl named Jennifer Shultz who had died outside her home when a plane crashed into her neighborhood during a thunderstorm. This Jennifer had been born in 1971. In addition to her memories that matched Jennifer's death, Rylann also exhibited behaviors that were later discovered to match Jennifer's. They both had the unusual habit of opening and closing the drawers in their bathroom vanities, not to take anything out of them but just to look inside. And both girls created owls from yarn that they then perched on sticks. This commonality can't be chalked up to a fad in children's crafts, as Rylann and Jennifer were born almost four decades apart.¹⁶⁵

More evidence for the validity of children's past-life memories comes from the fact that psychological testing of the children who have these memories has not revealed any connection with psychopathology.¹⁶⁶ In fact, these children have higher-than-average intelligence¹⁶⁷ and are less suggestible than other children, as measured by the Gudjonsson Suggestibility Scale.¹⁶⁸

Another interesting statistical fact is that, among cases in which the death remembered is a natural (non-violent) one, the lives remembered are roughly 50% male and 50% female. However, among cases in which the death remembered is "unnatural" (a murder, a suicide, or an accident), 73% percent of the cases are of male lives. This matches the general statistics on unnatural deaths in the United States, where

¹⁶⁴ Stevenson, *Children Who Remember*, 116.

¹⁶⁵ Matlock, *Signs of Reincarnation*, 1-33.

¹⁶⁶ Jim B. Tucker and F. Don Nidiffer, "Psychological Evaluation of American Children Who Report Memories of Previous Lives," *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 28, no. 4 (2014): 585-96.

¹⁶⁷ Tucker and Nidiffer.

¹⁶⁸ Erlendur Haraldsson, "A Psychological Comparison Between Ordinary Children and Those Who Claim Previous-Life Memories," *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 11, no. 3 (1997): 323-35, p. 331.

72% are male. That is, these children's memories, evaluated as a whole, accurately reflect sex differences in manner of death in the population at large.¹⁶⁹

The sheer number of past-life memories that have been verified as accurate combined with the overall consistency of the phenomenon points to past-life memories being much more than the product of childhood imagination. Thousands of children have memories of lives that did take place in another body. But does this automatically mean the survival hypothesis is true? It has been suggested by some that these children are not actually identical with or inhabited by the surviving consciousness of the people whose lives they remember but instead are just accessing those people's memories by some not-yet-understood process that doesn't involve the continuing consciousness of the deceased. The idea is that either these children are psychically accessing the past or are psychically accessing "dead" memories.¹⁷⁰

Little is known about the mechanisms by which these memories present themselves to the consciousness of the children who have them, but whether or not these children are wholly identical with the people whose lives they remember, it is clear that at least *part* of the consciousness of those people lives on in these children. In the strongest cases, these children not only share the memories of the deceased but also multiple aspects of their behavior/ personality¹⁷¹ and even physical characteristics.¹⁷² Many continue to have emotional attachments to people the deceased knew, in some cases still being in love with their former spouses.¹⁷³ Since memories, personality, and interpersonal attachments are three of the primary characteristics we're interested in seeing survive beyond our death, it is hard not to see these children's memories and

¹⁶⁹ Tucker, *Return to Life*, 136-7.

¹⁷⁰ See the "thought bundle" or "thought pool" hypothesis suggested in Jürgen Keil, "Questions of the Reincarnation Type," *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 24, no. 1 (2010): 79-99, pp. 96-7.

¹⁷¹ For more details on this phenomenon, see Matlock, *Signs of Reincarnation*, 136-48.

¹⁷² For an excellent overview of physical characteristics apparently transmitted by reincarnation, see Matlock, *Signs of Reincarnation*, 148-59. For the most extensive study of this subject to date, see Ian Stevenson, *Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects*, 2 vols. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997); as well as Stevenson's shorter, more readily available work, *Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997).

¹⁷³ Matlock, *Signs of Reincarnation*, 145. Matlock cites three cases of intense continued attachment to previous spouses, two from Antonia Mills, "Back from Death: Young Adults in Northern India Who as Children Were Said to Remember a Previous Life, With or Without a Shift in Religion (Hindu to Muslim or Vice Versa)," *Anthropology and Humanism Quarterly* 31 (2006): 141-56, pp. 144-6; and one case from Stevenson, *Reincarnation and Biology*, vol. 1, 213.

behavior as a kind of survival, even if only partial. (It bears remembering, too, that survival, even while we are still in the same living body, is almost always “partial,” in the sense that we are continually forgetting the previous events of our lives and changing our personality and behavior to a greater or lesser degree.)

Furthermore, these children generally identify themselves with the person whose memories they carry.¹⁷⁴ For instance, the mother of one child with previous-life memories was trying to help him put them behind him and live in the present, and so she told him, “Ryan, you do know that you are not that man in the picture anymore. We just want you to be Ryan.” According to Tucker, who investigated the case, her son responded “that he was not the same as the man in the picture on the outside but that on the inside he was still that man.”¹⁷⁵ (There are, however, some cases in which people with memories of previous lives feel some separation from that other personality, in some cases even referring to them in the third person. See, for example, the case of Kilden at the beginning of the next section, who alternates between third- and first-person pronouns.)

Also, it’s important to note that near-death experiencers corroborate children’s memories of previous lives in various ways. For instance, many NDErs report learning about reincarnation during their NDEs.¹⁷⁶ Mary Helen Hensley, for example, was the daughter of a Baptist minister and as a young person never gave the idea of reincarnation a second thought. Nevertheless, when she had an NDE at age 21, she saw a play-by-play review of her current life as well as suddenly remembering **MANY LIVES SHE’D LIVED BEFORE**. She says, “Of the many things that I can remember [from the NDE], there is one that I feel compelled to convey with certainty—I think it is important to state that reincarnation is a *fact*.”¹⁷⁷ Another NDEr reports, “After my NDE, I understood that

¹⁷⁴ Matlock, *Signs of Reincarnation*, 200.

¹⁷⁵ Tucker, *Return to Life*, 99.

¹⁷⁶ NDE researcher Kenneth Ring writes, “Quite a few of them become more open to or believers in some form of reincarnation.” Ring and Valarino, *Lessons from the Light*, 127. In addition to the examples cited below, see Barbara R. Rommer, *Blessing in Disguise: Another Side of the Near-Death Experience* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 2000), 6, 28-9, 160; and Cathleen C.’s NDE recounted online at https://www.nderf.org/Experiences/1cathleen_c_nde.html. NDEr Betty J. Eadie writes in *Embraced by the Light* that she learned “we do not have repeated lives on this earth” (p. 93), but on her website, she clarifies this statement, saying, “There is a form of reincarnation but not as we understand it here. ... [W]e do not come back to this earth for repeated lives until we get it ‘right.’ ... There are those who do return to this world when it serves our Heavenly Father’s purposes and they come back as teachers” (<https://embracedbythelight.com/qa/qa.htm>).

¹⁷⁷ Hensley, *Promised by Heaven*, 11.

this life here is only one of many we have to go through. We are bound to be born here time after time [until] we are good enough to go to other dimensions permanently.”¹⁷⁸

In addition, there are a few accounts of NDErs who, while apparently out of their bodies but still hanging around the physical world, remember attempting to jumpstart the reincarnation process by entering the bodies of newborns.¹⁷⁹ Here’s an excerpt from an NDE account published in a London newspaper in 1935:

Then suddenly I was again transported—this time it seemed to be against my wish—to a bed-room, where a woman whom I recognized was in bed, and two other women were quietly bustling around, and a doctor was leaning over the bed. Then the doctor had a baby in his hands. At once I became aware of an almost irresistible impulse to press my face through the back of the baby’s head so that my face would come into the same place as the child’s. The doctor said, “It looks as though we have lost them both.” And again I felt the urge to take the baby’s place in order to show him he was wrong, but the thought of my mother crying turned my thoughts in her direction, when straightway I was in a railway carriage with both her and father.¹⁸⁰

Interestingly, the NDEr went on to report that he recognized the woman in labor as a neighbor of his. Upon reviving in his own body, he told his parents that the neighbor’s baby was dead because he couldn’t get into its body. They discovered afterward that the woman in question had indeed delivered a stillborn baby that day (and had herself died, just as the NDEr observed during his experience).

3. Memories of the Intermission Period Between Lives

Accounts from NDErs in which they retain consciousness between the time of death and the time at which they attempt to enter a new body lead naturally to what is perhaps the strongest piece of evidence that past-life memories indicate actual survival of consciousness: the fact that many children with past-life memories also retain memories of the intermission period between the old life and this one. If consciousness were wholly dependent on the brain and these children were just psychically accessing the past consciousness of the deceased, we would expect the consciousness they were accessing

¹⁷⁸ Ring and Valarino, *Lessons from the Light*, 137.

¹⁷⁹ In addition to the case I quote in the main text, see Ian Stevenson’s brief description of another such case in Shroder, *Old Souls*, 92-3; and the further cases noted in Ian Stevenson, *Cases of the Reincarnation Type, Vol. III: Twelve Cases in Lebanon and Turkey* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1980), 12.

¹⁸⁰ Emily Williams Cook, Bruce Greyson, and Ian Stevenson, “Do Any Near-Death Experiences Provide Evidence for the Survival of Human Personality After Death? Relevant Features and Illustrative Case Reports,” *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 12, no. 3 (1998): 377-406, p. 387.

to end abruptly at the moment of the previous death, and yet many of their memories continue far beyond that moment. They not only correlate with NDErs' experiences of the period immediately surrounding death but also contain accurate observations about funerary events, other deceased people they remember meeting while in a disembodied state, and events that happened in their future family's life before their birth, or even their conception. As we'll see, some of those with intermission memories even remember having contact with their loved ones after death, by coming to them in dreams or manifesting as apparitions or poltergeists.

According to two studies, memories of the period between death and rebirth show up in about 20% of cases of past-life memory,¹⁸¹ though researchers Ohkado Masayuki and Ikegawa Akira suggest they may be underreported.¹⁸² An analysis of Burmese cases of past-life memory conducted by Poonam Sharma and Jim Tucker shows that intermission memories are significantly correlated with a higher number of verified statements about a previous life, including names. As Sharma and Tucker put it, "their reports of events from the intermission period seem to be part of a pattern of a stronger memory for items preceding their current lives."¹⁸³ In other words, the fact that intermission memories correlate with verified statements about previous lives lends credibility to the intermission memories, which often can't be verified (but sometimes can, as we'll soon see).

It's worth mentioning, too, that memories of the intermission period aren't only found among people with past-life memories. Anecdotes regarding "pre-birth memories" abound, and books dedicated to the topic include Elisabeth Hallett's *Stories of the Unborn Soul*,¹⁸⁴ Sarah Hinze's *We Lived in Heaven*,¹⁸⁵ and Wayne W. Dyer and Dee Garnes' *Memories of Heaven*.¹⁸⁶ Ohkado and Ikegawa compared stand-alone intermission

¹⁸¹ James G. Matlock and Iris Giesler-Petersen, "Asian Versus Western Intermission Memories: Universal Features and Cultural Variations," *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 35, no. 1 (Fall 2016): 3-29, p. 6; and Poonam Sharma and Jim B. Tucker, "Cases of the Reincarnation Type with Memories from the Intermission Between Lives," *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 23, no. 2 (Winter 2004): 101-18, p. 102.

¹⁸² Ohkado Masayuki and Ikegawa Akira, "Children with Life-between-Life Memories," *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 28, no. 3 (2014): 477-90, 485.

¹⁸³ Sharma and Tucker, 116.

¹⁸⁴ Elisabeth Hallett, *Stories of the Unborn Soul: The Mystery and Delight of Pre-Birth Communication* (San Jose: Writers Club Press, 2002).

¹⁸⁵ Sarah Hinze, *We Lived in Heaven: Spiritual Accounts of Souls Coming to Earth* (Rexburg, ID: Spring Creek Book Company, 2006).

¹⁸⁶ Wayne W. Dyer and Dee Garnes, *Memories of Heaven: Children's Astounding Recollections of the Time Before They Came to Earth* (Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, 2015).

memories with those that accompanied past-life memories and found no notable differences in content.¹⁸⁷

It's also true that some adults retain detailed memories of a pre-birth existence. Two book-length first-person accounts written by adults are Toni Maguire's *Memories of the Light* and Roy Mills' *The Soul's Remembrance*.¹⁸⁸ And, as with memories of previous lives, many apparent memories of the intermission period have been evoked in adults through hypnotic regression.¹⁸⁹ However, all the memories I'll describe in this essay occurred spontaneously without hypnosis.

Experiencing NDE-Like Events: Floating Up, A Funnel, Guides, Expanded Perception

Let's start with cases of children who not only have a vivid memory of their death in a previous life but also recall what happened immediately afterward. Many of their descriptions, though fairly simple, bear a strong resemblance to NDEs.

For example, Rylann O'Bannion, the girl who remembered dying when a plane crashed in her backyard during a thunderstorm, told her mom at the age of three, "It was raining a lot. There was a loud noise, then the rain shocked me. I floated up to the sky then."¹⁹⁰

In another case, a Brazilian girl named Silvia mixed Italian words into her speech from the time she started talking, even though no one around her spoke Italian. She also had a fear of airplanes flying overhead. This fear appeared linked to her memories of living in a place she called the "*capitolio*," where planes would drop bombs. Like Rylann, she was three years old when she told her grandmother about a boy who was carrying a bomb that blew up and hurt her and her friend. "Then my friend and me, we went up and up," she said. Her grandmother asked if she meant up the stairs of the

¹⁸⁷ Ohkado and Ikegawa, "Children with Life-Between-Life Memories," 484.

¹⁸⁸ Toni Maguire, *Memories of the Light: A Story of Spiritual Existence before Physical Birth* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2000, 2012); and Roy Mills, *The Soul's Remembrance: Earth Is Not Our Home* (Seattle, WA: Onjinjinkta Publishing, 1999).

¹⁸⁹ Helen Wambach, *Life Before Life* (New York: Bantam, 1979); Joel L. Whitton and Joe Fisher, *Life Between Life: Scientific Explorations into the Void Separating One Incarnation from the Next* (New York: Warner Books, 1986); Michael Newton, *Journey of Souls: Case Studies of Life Between Lives* (Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn, 1994); Michael Newton, *Destiny of Souls: New Case Studies of Life Between Lives* (Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn, 2000); Michael Newton, *Life Between Lives: Hypnotherapy for Spiritual Regression* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 2004); and Michael Newton, ed., *Memories of the Afterlife: Life Between Lives: Stories of Personal Transformation* (Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn, 2009).

¹⁹⁰ Matlock, *Signs of Reincarnation*, 4.

capitolio, but she said, “No, Grandma, we went up, high up there.” When her grandmother asked what happened next, Silvia replied, “I don’t know. Then I came here.”¹⁹¹

Another Brazilian child, Kilden, had more precise memories of his death. He announced to his mother, again around the age of three, that his name was “Alexandre” (this was in fact Kilden’s middle name) and he was “the priest.” A decade ago, his mother had been friends with a priest she called Alexandre, and he had died in a car accident—or so she had heard at the time. Her friendship with the deceased priest was the reason she had given her son the middle name Alexandre. Now Kilden not only insisted that his true name was Alexandre, not Kilden, but also said that, when he had been a priest, he was hit by a truck when he was riding a motorcycle. He fell over, hit his head, and died. When his mother checked the facts of her friend’s death, she discovered he had indeed been hit by a truck while on a motorcycle. He’d fallen on his head and died in the hospital the next day.

Years later, around age 13, Kilden heard about a man who died after falling off a ladder, and he started explaining to his mother what happens when someone has an accident like that:

The person who suffered the accident arrives and is put in a room full of instruments. The doctors connect them.... Then the equipment is connected to the chest and the head, and the doctors keep trying to save the life of the person. At this point the person flies into a corner of the ceiling, watching the doctors’ fight to save him. Then a big hole like a funnel appeared in the corner of the wall near me, trying to suck me [in]....

His mother interrupted to ask if he was talking about himself or someone else. He said, “I think it was me. I saw my body and the doctors trying to save me.” He then continued his description, changing again between the third and first person:

When he was sucked through the hole into the tunnel, he saw a strong light at the end, so strong that I turned my head to one side. The light was very bright, and the hole closed behind him, near the wall. At that moment the doctors saw the screen on their machine stop.¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Guy Lyon Playfair, *The Flying Cow: Exploring the Psychic World of Brazil* (Guildford, UK: White Crow Books, 2011), 159-63.

¹⁹² Haraldsson and Matlock, *I Saw a Light*, 204-8. This case is also written about in Hernani Guimarães Andrade, *Reborn for Love* (London: Roundtable, 2010).

Other children have after-death memories of being escorted by guides of some kind. Jim Tucker reports that a boy named Kenny who had detailed memories of dying in a vehicle accident “said that after he died, another spirit, probably the driver of the vehicle, took him by the hand, and the two of them were with other spirits in what seemed to be a huge hall.”¹⁹³

Three-year-old Stephen Ramsay remembered fighting as a soldier in a jungle-like place and dying when a plane “came down and hurt my tummy.” “That was when I died,” he said. “My tummy got hurt and it was bleeding.” Stephen said he then fell asleep, and when he woke up, he was still in the trees, but his tummy felt all better. Then, he says, “[a] lady came to see me. ... She was a nice lady and she told me to follow her. She took my hand and took me with her.” He gave an extended description of the place where the lady took him: a place where people rested after dying and waited until it was time for them to be born to new parents.¹⁹⁴

This next account comes from someone who retained past-life memories into adulthood. The Venerable Chaokhun Rajsuthajarn, a Buddhist abbot in Thailand, published his description of his memories in 1969, before NDEs had been widely written about. But his account of what happened at the moment of his death sounds very much like the experience many NDErs report of being able to go anywhere instantly and perceive anyone just by thinking about them, while at the same time having difficulty communicating with those still in living bodies.¹⁹⁵ Regarding the time just after his death, when he was still realizing that he was dead, he wrote,

I felt stronger and could move much more rapidly from place to place. My body was light, as if it had no weight. I was so glad that I rushed up to join the conversation of my relatives. But no one noticed me. I grabbed this one's hand and pulled that one's arm, to draw their attention. Still, no one did anything. ... I could not make them understand [that I was all right].

They were crying and moaning. Some of them went to tell other relatives and friends in the neighborhood. The latter were now pouring into the house. At that moment, I felt as if I were omnipresent: I could simultaneously see people coming in from two or three different directions. Moreover, I could be there to receive them all at the same time. I could also hear their voices as well as see things quite clearly.

¹⁹³ Tucker, *Life Before Life*, 13.

¹⁹⁴ Mary Harrison and Peter Harrison, *The Children That Time Forgot* (1983, 1989, 2014), 70-1.

¹⁹⁵ For an example of a similar account from an NDEr, see Anita Moorjani, *Dying to Be Me: My Journey from Cancer to Near Death, to True Healing* (Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, 2012), Ch. 7.

*Far distant places appeared to be near, because I could move very rapidly from place to place. I could immediately be there to hear or see. There seemed to be no obstacle at all.*¹⁹⁶

Perceiving Events Surrounding the Funeral or Burial

Those who remember dying in a previous life also sometimes remember viewing their funeral and/or burial. In some cases, they mention something unexpected that was done with their body that can then be verified.

In one of Ian Stevenson's cases, a young Thai woman remembered that her previous body—that of a mere baby—wasn't buried in the village cemetery as it should have been, but rather outside of it. She confronted the undertaker responsible, and he admitted to having done this thing that apparently no one else knew about.¹⁹⁷

In a Sri Lankan case, a girl named Disna Samarasinghe remembered her body being buried near an anthill, which was indeed true of the body of the person whose life she remembered. Disna was also able to point out the location of her unmarked grave.¹⁹⁸

This next case comes from Hertfordshire, England, and was reported by Mary and Peter Harrison in their book *The Children That Time Forgot*. It involves a young girl, Mandy Seabrook, who appeared to be the reincarnation of her sister who had died at the age of five months. Even though the family never spoke about her deceased sister, when Mandy was two years old, she started recounting memories of having been this other child. One day, while riding past the cemetery where her sister was buried, two-year-old Mandy exclaimed, "Look, Mummy! That's the place you put me in the ground that time, and you nearly fell on top of me, remember?" At the time of the burial, her mother had been taking medication to help her deal with the shock, and she had been so out of sorts that she had lost her balance at the graveside and almost fallen into the hole with the coffin. Mandy also said she'd been buried with a silver bracelet and a fluffy yellow ball. Her mother remembered the existence of the bracelet and the yellow ball, but she only remembered the former being in the casket. Nevertheless, when questioned, an older sibling confessed to having slipped the yellow ball under the dead baby's body.

¹⁹⁶ Ian Stevenson, *Cases of the Reincarnation Type, Vol. IV: Twelve Cases in Thailand and Burma* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1983), 176.

¹⁹⁷ The case of Pratomwan Inthanu in Stevenson, *Cases of the Reincarnation Type, Vol. IV*, 158-9.

¹⁹⁸ Ian Stevenson, *Cases of the Reincarnation Type, Vol. II: Ten Cases in Sri Lanka* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1977), 105-6.

One other interesting aspect of this case is that, when Mandy was six, she asked her mother, “Do you remember the night I died? There was a bright star shining in the sky.” When her mother thought back, she realized that she *had* in fact noticed a star out over the garden, unusually bright and low, and had mentioned it to someone else at the time. Mandy continued, “That was my star. It was my way of telling you that I would be back.” This is the only case I’ve come across in which a child remembered using a sign or synchronicity to communicate after death in their previous life.¹⁹⁹

Appearing as Apparitions and in Dreams

Each of the non-survival explanations for apparitions of the dead that we explored in Part I proposed that, though these apparitions *appeared* to be the presence of the deceased, their consciousness was not actually present. The strongest argument against all of these non-survival explanations for apparitions of the dead—including the super-psi hypothesis—is the existence of apparitions where the person doing the appearing *retained a first-person memory of doing so*.

Ian Stevenson investigated a case in which a Burmese woman, Daw Kyin Htein, experienced an apparition of a family friend a few months after his death in a plane crash. The apparition happened one night as she was returning from a trip to the outhouse. When she saw her deceased friend, she invited him to reincarnate into her family. Then she went to sleep and had a dream of him as well, one in which his mother and sister (both still living) asked him to go with them but he Ian Stevenson investigated a case in which a Burmese woman, Daw Kyin Htein, experienced an apparition of a family friend a few months after his death in a plane crash. The apparition happened one night as she was returning from a trip to the outhouse. When she saw her deceased friend, she invited him to reincarnate into her family. Then she went to sleep and had a dream of him as well, one in which his mother and sister (both still living) asked him to go with them but he declined. The mother of the deceased also apparently had a dream—it’s not clear if it was on the same night—in which her son said he was going to live with U Ba Hein, Daw Kyin Htein’s husband.

Soon after this, Daw Kyin Htein conceived a son, Maung Yin Maung, who had memories of being her deceased friend. Furthermore, at the age of 12, he reported to Stevenson that he remembered being near Daw Kyin Htein’s home after his death. He saw someone he thought was her coming out of an outhouse. He remembered “showing himself” to this person as an apparition, and he remembered her inviting him to become her child. He also remembered communicating with his former personality’s mother and

¹⁹⁹ Mary Harrison and Peter Harrison, *The Children That Time Forgot* (1983, 1989, 2014), 13-8.

sister. They asked him to be reborn with them, but he said he was going to be reborn into Daw Kyin Htein's family instead.²⁰⁰

As this example shows, sometimes apparitions of the dead double as apparitions to future parents. Although dreams seem to be a more common form of communication with future parents,²⁰¹ it's not unheard of for parents to see waking apparitions of their future children. However, I know of only one other case in which someone retained a first-person memory of appearing in this way to a future parent.²⁰²

Intermission memories also offer corroboration for dreams of the deceased. In another Burmese case investigated by Stevenson, a woman dreamt that her deceased husband told her he'd left some money (a 5-kyat note) wrapped in a white handkerchief inside a small box of basket work. She then found the box, the handkerchief, and the money. Later, a Burmese boy was born who, around age three, began recalling a past life that matched that of this woman's husband. He also remembered coming to his wife in a dream after death and telling her where to find 5 kyats wrapped in a white handkerchief. The boy wanted to know if his former wife had had such a dream, and she confirmed it.²⁰³

In one more Burmese case, a grown man with past-life memories remembered how, after dying, he'd been guided by an old man dressed in white, first to the house where he'd lived before dying and then to another house nearby, which belonged to the family of the village headman, to whom he was subsequently reborn. In his memory, the old man asked him to wait outside at the first house, and at the second one, after first being told to wait outside, he was then told to enter and that he must stay there. As it happened, this man's wife from his former life had a dream a week after his death in which an old man in white appeared to her and said he was sending her husband to the house of the village headman. When his wife went to the headman's wife the next morning to tell her about her dream, she discovered that the headman's wife had *also* had

²⁰⁰ Case of Maung Yin Maung in Stevenson, *Cases of the Reincarnation Type*, Vol. IV, 277-94.

²⁰¹ "Announcing dreams" are so common in reincarnation cases that Stevenson listed them as one of the five typical characteristics of such cases. See Stevenson, *Children Who Remember Previous Lives*, 99-101.

²⁰² The case of the Ven. Chaokhun Rajsuthajarn in Stevenson, *Cases of the Reincarnation Type*, Vol. IV, 177-8.

²⁰³ The case of Maung Zaw Thein Lwin in Ian Stevenson, *Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects*, Vol. I: *Birthmarks* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 255. For another case of a dream of the deceased which, though not remembered by the apparent reincarnation of the deceased, had its content nevertheless confirmed by them, see the case of Veer Singh in Ian Stevenson, *Cases of the Reincarnation Type*, Vol. I: *Ten Cases in India* (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1975), 328-9.

a dream. In that one, a man had told her that he was bringing the recently deceased man to be in her family. Then the man went outside and brought the deceased man in before ultimately disappearing.²⁰⁴

Behaving As a Poltergeist

Memories of contact with the living during the intermission period aren't limited to apparitions and dreams, either. I've come across two cases where people remembered being involved in poltergeist phenomena, both of them from India. In the first case, a child in Uttar Pradesh reported that, after his death in a previous life, he hung out near his previous family's house and sometimes took their food. The family in question confirmed that they noticed food inexplicably disappearing during that time.²⁰⁵ In the other case, a boy named Veer Singh reported that, after dying, he stayed in a tree outside his former family's home. One day, he got annoyed at two women who were playing in a swing hanging from a branch of his tree. Realizing he might kill them if he broke off the branch the swing was attached to, he waited until the swing was low in its arc and then caused the wooden seat to break. His father from his previous life remembered an accident like this occurring after his son's death.²⁰⁶

Encountering Other Spirits of the Deceased

Another important element found in both NDEs and intermission memories is memories of meetings with others who have died. There are many accounts of young children reporting familiarity with relatives who died before they were born, and these claims can sometimes be independently verified.

In a case that Jim Tucker investigated alongside Ian Stevenson, a boy named Patrick Christenson had some memories of his deceased half-brother's life and also had three scars in locations where his half-brother had been deformed.²⁰⁷ Furthermore, Patrick said that, while in heaven, he spoke with a relative of the family named "Billy the Pirate" who told him he'd died in the mountains after being shot at close range. Patrick's mother had never heard of anyone like this in her family, but afterward she learned of a cousin with the nickname "Billy the Pirate" who had died just as Patrick reported.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ The case of the Venerable Sayadaw U Sobhana in Ian Stevenson, *Cases of the Reincarnation Type*, Vol. IV, 244-5.

²⁰⁵ Stevenson, "Are Poltergeists Living," 237.

²⁰⁶ Stevenson, *Cases of the Reincarnation Type*, Volume I, 328-9.

²⁰⁷ Tucker, *Life Before Life*, 52-54.

²⁰⁸ Tucker, *Life Before Life*, 172.

There's also the case of James Leininger, the boy who remembered being James Huston, a World War II pilot shot down in the Iwo Jima operation. Between ages three and six, James received three G. I. Joe dolls as presents, and he gave them the names Billie, Leon, and Walter. His family was surprised by the unusual names, and when they asked him about it, he said he gave them those names because that was who met him in heaven. It turned out that only 10 men from James Huston's squadron on *Natoma Bay* were killed prior to his own death. Three of them were named Billie, Leon, and Walter, and their hair colors matched those of James's G. I. Joe dolls, with Billie's hair being brown, Leon's blond, and Walter's red.²⁰⁹

Cases like this provide not only first-person evidence for the pre-birth existence of the child who has the memory but also third-person evidence for the continuing, disembodied consciousness of the deceased person they remember encountering in the intermission period.

Perceiving Pre-Birth Events

It's also very common for intermission memories to include observations of events in the life of the family the child will later be born into, events that occurred before the child's birth—or, in many cases, even before their conception. In Ohkado and Ikegawa's investigation of 21 Japanese children with memories from a pre-birth existence, 15 of the children (71%) reported being able to see what was happening on earth before they were born.²¹⁰

In one of Ohkado and Ikegawa's cases, a child told her mother, "I saw you in a gorgeous white dress. You were holding a dog." The mother clearly recalled that, after her wedding but while she was still wearing her wedding dress, she had returned to a room where her dog was being kept and held it.²¹¹

In a case collected by researcher Carol Bowman and reported in her book *Return from Heaven*, a two-year-old remembered hovering over his mother before his birth and seeing her cut her finger and go to the hospital for stitches. He even mentioned that she'd been wearing a yellow dress. All of this was true, but he couldn't have seen the dress after he was born because it had gotten blood on it and his mom had thrown it away immediately afterward.²¹²

²⁰⁹ Tucker, *Return to Life*, 85-6.

²¹⁰ Ohkado and Ikegawa, "Children with Life-Between-Life Memories," 482.

²¹¹ Ohkado and Ikegawa, "Children with Life-Between-Life Memories," 483.

²¹² Bowman, *Return from Heaven*, 180.

In another book by Bowman, Hilda Swiger tells about a trip to Epcot with her four-year-old grandson Randy. It was Randy's first trip to the resort, but when they went into a certain restaurant, he insisted that his dad was about to sit in the wrong place. Randy pointed to a table and said, "That's where you sat before." Not long after Randy was conceived, the family had come to Epcot, and they'd sat at that table. When his dad asked how he knew this, Randy said, "Oh, I was following you and Mommy around that day when you came here before I was born."²¹³

James Leininger's parents report that, when he was four years old, he told his dad, "When I found you and Mommy, I knew you would be good to me." His dad asked *where* he'd found them, and James replied it had been in Hawaii. "It was not when we all went to Hawaii," he said. "It was just Mommy and you. ... I found you at the big pink hotel. ... I found you on the beach. You were eating dinner at night." James' parents had once stayed at a pink hotel in Hawaii, five weeks before he was conceived. On their last night, they'd eaten dinner on the beach in the moonlight.²¹⁴

According to two studies, approximately half of those who have intermission memories recall something about how they came to their parents.²¹⁵ There are even cases that include memories of the events directly surrounding conception, and these memories sometimes persist into adulthood, as the next few examples demonstrate.

One grown woman remembered her whole life having a vision of herself floating above her parents in a mountain cabin, feeling love and excitement. As an adult, she finally decided to mention her vision to her mother and described in detail the cabin she'd seen. It turned out this was the place her mother and father had secretly made love for the first time, a week before their wedding, although they'd always said she'd been conceived on the wedding night.²¹⁶

An older gentleman named Rennie, who had a distinguished career as a U.S. Air Force pilot and intelligence officer, reports that when he was seven, he mentioned to his mother that he remembered where he was before he was born. Then he asked her, "Was I placed with you and Dad when you were in the front

²¹³ Bowman, *Children's Past Lives*, 333-4.

²¹⁴ Bruce and Andrea Leininger with Ken Gross, *Soul Survivor: The Reincarnation of a World War II Fighter Pilot* (New York: Grand Central, 2009), 153-4.

²¹⁵ Matlock and Giesler-Petersen, "Asian Versus Western Intermission Memories," pp. 18-9; and Sharma and Tucker, "Cases of the Reincarnation Type," 108.

²¹⁶ Case reported to Rev. Linda Bedre, published in Hallett, *Stories of the Unborn Soul*, 32-3.

seat of a car?” She brushed him off, calling his suggestion “indecent.” But in his mid-20s, he asked his parents about it again. Specifically, he asked if they’d conceived him in the front seat of their 1917 Overland. They were embarrassed to discuss it, but when he told them the details he remembered—how they’d opened the car door and his mother had checked to be sure Rennie’s sister was asleep in the back—they confirmed everything he said.²¹⁷

A 45-year-old woman named Nan also reports a verified conception memory. She remembers her father coming home while her mother was making lunch and taking her into the bathroom. Her mom insisted she needed to put in her diaphragm, but he said not to worry about it. “I can remember that,” says Nan. “I thought, ‘Now is my chance. Here is my door.’” When she was an adult, Nan finally told her mom about this memory and had it confirmed that she and Nan’s father had had sex in the bathroom at lunchtime and that it was the one time they didn’t use a diaphragm.²¹⁸

In contrast to these conception cases, other children don’t seem to find their parents until the pregnancy is some ways along. An Indian Christian named Prashant still had a memory at age 40 of coming down from the clouds toward Earth, “zooming in” until she noticed a kind of market or bazaar where there was a joyful couple singing together while they clasped hands. “The man was wearing a light blue sweater and blue jeans,” she says. “[T]he woman was dressed in a traditional Indian orange sari.” She got even closer to the woman and remembered entering her uterus and what it felt like to be inside the womb. When she was a child, Prashant thought of this memory as a dream, but at age 17, she told her parents about it, and they confirmed that, when Prashant’s mother was four months pregnant with her, they had worn those precise clothes to the engagement ceremony of a friend. It was the only day they’d ever held hands and sung in public, and they were at the New Delhi South Extension market.²¹⁹

²¹⁷ Elizabeth M. Carman and Neil J. Carman, *Cosmic Cradle: Spiritual Dimensions of Life Before Birth*, rev. ed. (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic Books, 2013), 66-8.

²¹⁸ Carman and Carman, 59.

²¹⁹ Carman and Carman, 115.

Finally, I should mention that there are children and adults who remember pregnancies associated with themselves being miscarried or aborted.²²⁰ Often they returned to the same mother in a later pregnancy, or sometimes to another family member.

One of the most detailed memories I've seen in this category comes from a case reported by Elizabeth and Neil Carman in their 2013 book *Cosmic Cradle*. It involves another Elizabeth (not identified as the author of *Cosmic Cradle*) who, as soon as she could talk, told her mother, "I was in your tummy twice. The first time, I washed away. The second time, I came out like a zipper." Her mother had never talked to Elizabeth about her miscarriage. And coming out "like a zipper" seems like a pretty accurate way for a toddler to describe a C-section, which was how Elizabeth had been born.

Many years later, at age 28, Elizabeth still had a vivid memory of the miscarriage. She said,

Mom was taking a shower. She had her hands on her head shampooing her hair. The last thing I saw was her looking down at me; then I went down the drain. I did not feel pain. I remember the strong thump of hitting the shower floor, shaking everything within my core. I recall falling out of her body in slow motion and the emptiness and vastness. I felt exposed, no longer being in the womb, feeling unprotected. The drain was dark; it slowly started closing up, and at that point, I died. Everything stopped. I ceased to have awareness of that experience.

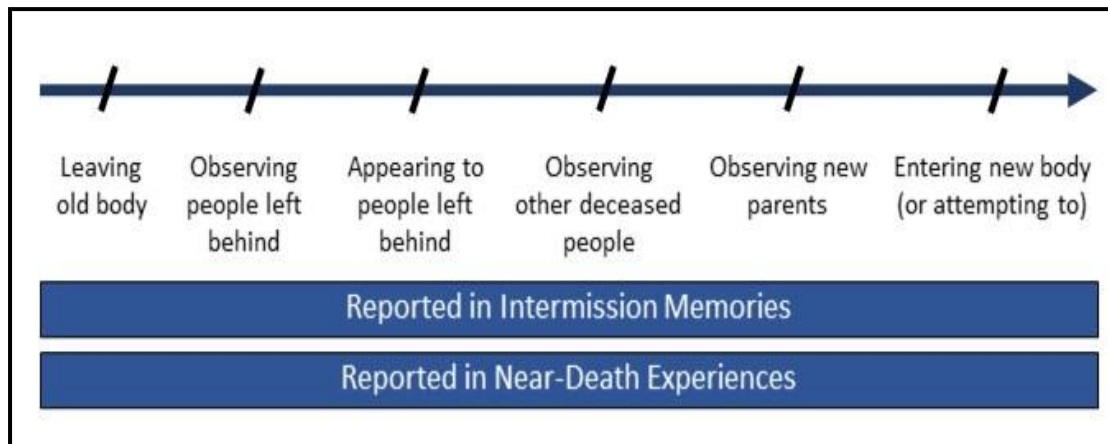
Elizabeth's mother confirmed these details. When she was 12 weeks along with her previous pregnancy, she felt something fall out of her in the shower: a white glob two or three inches long. Interestingly, Elizabeth actually remembered *initiating* the miscarriage. When she was seven, she was riding in the car with her mom in a neighborhood she'd never been to before when she pointed at a non-descript building and said she'd been in that building before. Her mom confirmed that this was the building where she'd gone to the doctor during the pregnancy she'd lost. "That was me," said Elizabeth. "I was a boy, and you and dad had a fight. I chose to leave and come back as a girl." It was true that her mother had sensed her baby was going to be a boy, and she'd fought with her husband about whether to circumcise him. Neither of them was willing to budge on the issue. Once she was an adult, Elizabeth was able to explain that she'd

²²⁰ Generally, these memories don't seem traumatic for those who have them, although frustration that things didn't go according to "plan" is sometimes evident. For some examples of cases involving memories of miscarriage or abortion, see Bowman, *Return from Heaven*, 161-75, 181-2; Gladys T. McGarey, *Born to Live* (Scottsdale, AZ: Inkwell Productions, 2008), 53-65; Hinze with Lofgreen, *The Memory Catcher*, 146-9; Ohkado Masayuki, "Same-Family Cases of the Reincarnation Type in Japan," *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 31, no. 4 (Winter 2017): 551-71; and "Dina's Story," *PreBirthExperience.com*, <http://www.prebirthmemories.com/Dina's%20Story.htm> (accessed January 28, 2018).

known her parents were in danger of divorcing over the circumcision question. “I needed them to stay together to fulfill what I came here to do,” she says. “So I chose to leave.” Though her mother had never previously connected the two events, she did confirm that the miscarriage had happened the morning after the circumcision argument.²²¹

Summary of Evidence Provided by Intermission Memories

Figure 2. Experiences Between Death and Birth Reported in Both Intermission Memories and NDEs



Intermission memories clearly provide an essential piece of first-person evidence for consciousness apart from the body, expanding on the experiences of provisional death provided by NDEs and the evidence provided by the memories and personalities of deceased persons that recur in new bodies. Intermission memories provide crucial evidence that memories of previous lives are not caused by mere psychic access to the past but are due to an actual continuity of consciousness stretching from death in a previous life through birth into a new one. The diagram below depicts this continuity of consciousness and illustrates six types of events between death and rebirth that are reported both by NDErs and those with intermission memories.

I want to emphasize that intermission memories of using apparitions, dreams, and poltergeist effects to contact people left behind complement NDErs’ memories of contacting people through apparitions. Together, they provide crucial evidence that, when these phenomena occur after death, they are at least sometimes not mere super-psi simulations but actual reflections of the ongoing, first-person consciousness of the deceased.

²²¹ Carman and Carman, 39-50.

Conclusion

We've now looked at a wide variety of evidence for survival of death, both from third-person and first-person perspectives. Each phenomenon we've examined—apparitions, dreams, mental mediumship, poltergeist phenomena, phantom phone calls, synchronicity, near-death experiences, memories of previous lives, and intermission memories—provides some evidence for survival when taken alone. But the real strength of the evidence lies in the fact that not only are experiences of postmortem consciousness exceedingly common but, across their many forms, they display consistent evidential qualities and a cohesiveness that's hard to explain except by appealing to the actual survival of consciousness beyond the death of the body.

Some people are likely to still reject the idea of survival because it doesn't fit today's mainstream scientific views about the physical world and the connection between consciousness and the brain, but it would be a serious mistake to ignore the well-substantiated evidence described in this essay just because it doesn't match currently popular theory. This evidence has a lot to teach us, and its clearest lesson seems to be that we are still in our infancy when it comes to understanding consciousness and its relationship to the physical world.

Fortunately, there's an increasing number of researchers and theorists who take the evidence for survival seriously and who are formulating theories about the mind-brain relationship that account for this evidence as well as making new, testable predictions.²²² The most promising kind of theory, in my opinion, regards consciousness as the primary reality and understands physical reality as just one type of experience that consciousness can have. Consciousness is the hardware, if you like, and physical reality is one kind of software it can run. Another analogy I find useful is to think of physical reality as a dream consciousness can experience. This fits well with the observations of NDErs who say dying is like waking up from a dream. It also explains why there seem to be other ways, besides dying, of taking a momentary break from the experience of the physical world: for instance, through the altered states of consciousness facilitated by meditation or psychedelic substances.²²³

Maybe the most important advantage of a consciousness-based theory of reality is that it dissolves many of the puzzles that arise when one studies the evidence for survival

²²² See examples in Edward F. Kelly, Adam Crabtree, and Paul Marshall, ed., *Beyond Physicalism: Toward Reconciliation of Science and Spirituality* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015); and Edward F. Kelly and Paul Marshall, ed., *Consciousness Unbound: Liberating Mind from the Tyranny of Materialism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021).

²²³ Edward F. Kelly and Michael Grosso, "Mystical Experience," in *Irreducible Mind: Toward a Psychology for the 21st Century*, ed. Edward F. Kelly, Emily Williams Kelly, Adam Crabtree, Alan Gauld, Michael Grosso, and Bruce Greyson (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 495-575.

of death. For example, investigators have long been stymied by the fact that apparitions sometimes and in some respects seem like physical objects (for example, by having solidity and opaqueness, appearing appropriately from multiple angles, causing physical effects) while at other times and in other respects seem like projections of the mind (the fact that they wear clothing, often appear younger than the deceased's age at death, sometimes appear transparent, dissolve, or walk through walls). If all physical objects are fundamentally patterns of conscious experience, then there's no need to choose between apparitions' being physical and their being mental. Apparitions are in consciousness just like everything else, and while they sometimes play by the same rules as the phenomena we call "physical," they can also deviate from them and be more fluid and responsive to intention, more like the experiences we have while, well, dreaming.

Theories in which consciousness grounds the physical world are not new. In fact, they've been around for millennia, even in the Western world. In philosophy, they go by the name "idealism," to reflect the primacy of *ideas* over matter. Idealism has had staunch defenders even during the scientific era, in philosophers such as George Berkeley,²²⁴ Brand Blanshard,²²⁵ and most recently Bernardo Kastrup.²²⁶ Consciousness is also understood as playing a central role in the determination of physical properties under some interpretations of quantum mechanics.²²⁷

But whether or not idealism proves to be the most productive path to understanding the physical world and the not-so-physical phenomena we've seen in this essay, taking seriously the evidence for survival of consciousness will be of vital importance in the development of future theory. And that's not just because of what it tells us about what awaits us beyond death, but also because of what it reveals about the world we live in right now.

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²²⁴ George Berkeley, *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710).

²²⁵ Brand Blanshard, *The Nature of Thought*, 2 vols. (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1939).

²²⁶ Bernardo Kastrup, *The Idea of the World: A Multi-Disciplinary Argument for the Mental Nature of Reality* (Winchester, UK: iff Books, 2019).

²²⁷ See, for instance, John von Neumann, *Mathematical Foundations of Quantum Mechanics*, trans. R. T. Beyer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955). An accessible summary of von Neumann's view is given by Henry P. Stapp, "A Quantum-Mechanical Theory of the Mind/Brain Connection," in *Beyond Physicalism*, ed. Kelly, Crabtree, and Marshall, 157-93, pp. 163-7.

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