

PART II: THE MYTH OF AN AFTERLIFE

THE MYTH OF AN AFTERLIFE: THE CASE AGAINST LIFE AFTER DEATH, edited by Michael Martin and Keith Augustine. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, Pp. xxxi + 675 (hard-back). \$79.31. ISBN 978-0-8108-8677-3.

THE MYTH OF MORTALITY: COMMENTS ON MARTIN AND AUGUSTINE'S *THE MYTH OF AN AFTERLIFE*

By James G. Matlock

Philosopher David Ray Griffin (1997, pp. 26–27) distinguishes three types of thinkers: paradigmatic thinkers, data-led thinkers, and wishful thinkers. Paradigmatic thinkers are those who have adopted a particular worldview and see everything through its prism. The facts they attend to and how they interpret those facts are conditioned by what their worldview tells them is possible or impossible. Data-led thinkers

are empiricists whose worldview is shaped by the facts before them. Their outlook is open and liable to change as new facts come to their attention; the facts determine what seems possible and impossible. The worldview of wishful thinkers is formed by what they would like to be true. Facts matter little to wishful thinkers and neither does logic.

Michael Martin, Keith Augustine, and the contributors to *The Myth of an Afterlife (MoA)* give every indication of being paradigmatic thinkers. They are committed to a materialist worldview and a reductionist account of mind/brain relations that rule out of hand any possibility that consciousness, personality, memory, or anything else about personhood might survive bodily death. They evidently regard all who disagree with them as wishful thinkers. Indeed there may be wishful thinkers among “survivalists,” in particular New Age partisans and those who on religious grounds believe in survival in a resurrection body. However, it seems to me that the majority of survivalists whose work is dismissed in this book are data-led thinkers. They have come to doubt materialism and mortality because they have seen evidence that takes them in another direction. The paradigmatic-thinking authors included here are not much interested in this evidence and ignore it, distort it, or dismiss it without what data-led thinkers would consider a fair hearing.

Griffin (1997) reveals himself to be a data-led thinker. He argues that psi is key to understanding how the brain and mind interact. After close examination of the relevant data, he concludes that the mind survives the body’s demise and that at least some minds reincarnate in new bodies later on. Griffin is not the only contemporary philosopher to reach these conclusions. Almeder (1992), Becker (1993), Braude (2003), Grosso (2004), Lund (2009), and Weiss (2012, 2015) also are persuaded by the evidence for postmortem survival and reincarnation. Psychologists Baruš and Mossbridge (2017), too, recognize the evidence for the survival and reincarnation of consciousness. Neuroscientists who have been led by the data to believe that the mind can exist independently of the body include Schwartz (J. M. Schwartz & Begley, 2002; J. M. Schwartz, Gulliford, Stier, & Thienemann, 2005), Beauregard (2012a, 2012b), and Woollacott (2015). Other scientists and theorists who have rejected materialism include Kastrup (2014) and Stapp (2009, 2015; Schwartz, Stapp, & Beauregard, 2005).

Academics from a variety of disciplines contributed chapters to two hefty books produced by Edward Kelly and his colleagues, *Irreducible Mind* (E. F. Kelly et al., 2007) and *Beyond Physicalism (BP)*. The former brings together an immense array of data relating to the mind’s independence of the body, while the latter explores the implications of these findings and seeks rapprochement between science and religion (or spirituality). Moreira-Almeida and Santos (2012) address similar issues in another edited volume, *Exploring Frontiers of the Mind-Brain Relationship*. The materialist position is questioned in three other recent collections, *The Waning of Materialism* (Koons & Bealer, 2010), *After Physicalism* (Göcke, 2012), and *The Soul Hypothesis* (Baker & Goetz, 2011). These works and others like them individually and collectively present a challenge to *MoA* and raise the question of whether it constitutes a rearguard action by the defenders of a paradigm under assault, a last-ditch attempt to rescue its worldview from an oblivion threatening to overrun it.

MoA contains 30 chapters and a Foreword. In this essay I take up the main arguments of the book, then outline a theory of survival and reincarnation consistent with proposals made by Griffin (1997), E. F. Kelly (2007), and *BP*. This theory depends on what might be called an evolutionary idealist panpsychism (Matlock, 2016a) and builds on the process metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead (1929/1978). Martin, Augustine, and their contributing authors are preoccupied with attacking substance dualism and Christian conceptions of life after death. Nowhere do they address the idealist and process approaches to the survival problem currently in vogue among survival theorists. Several of the book’s chapters are reprints or light revisions of previously published material, adding to its dated feel from the research point of view.

Foreword, Preface, and Introduction

MoA opens with a 12-page Foreword by Steve Stewart-Williams, a psychologist. Stewart-Williams considers beliefs about the afterlife to be memes or cultural traits susceptible to a sort of natural selection that privileges elements with the greatest cultural resonance. Afterlife beliefs persist because (among other

things) they bring pleasure and because giving them up produces acute cognitive discomfort, much as going off an addictive drug produces withdrawal pains. Stewart-Williams observes that survival-related experiences are interpreted in a belief context. Certainly experiences occur against the background of established beliefs, but I think he overstates his case. Experiences and observations may engender changes in beliefs as well as reinforce them. Children's past-life memory claims not infrequently precipitate re-evaluations of views on the part of Western parents who encounter them, for instance.

Stewart-Williams concludes with a section on why it is important to accept that bodily death is the end of existence: "*because it's true*" (p. xxiii, his emphasis). His Foreword states the theme and sets the tone of *MoA*: Afterlife beliefs are religious beliefs, which science has debunked. Next comes a Preface in which the editors say that the book's purpose is to ask questions and explore reasons for thinking that death is the end. This pretense does not last long, however. It soon becomes apparent that this is an unabashedly polemical text, with the answers decided at the outset.

In Chapter 1, entitled "Introduction," Augustine (p. 1) contrasts the "extinction hypothesis" with the "survival hypothesis," or, as he quickly reframes the problem, the "dependence thesis" with the "independence thesis." The dependence thesis holds that the mind derives from neural activity and is fully dependent on the brain; the independence thesis maintains that the mind has a separate existence but interacts with the brain while embodied. Augustine asserts that various lines of evidence from neuroscience "have one thing in common: they demonstrate that profound changes in the brain radically alter the mind itself," which is "extraordinarily difficult to reconcile with the simple notion that the mind is mostly independent of the brain, requiring the brain only as a means to control the body" (p. 4). This naïve version of the independence thesis, repeated over and over in *MoA*, is a caricature of the filter or transmission model employed today. "The basic picture here is of a conscious mind which normally operates in close conjunction with its associated brain in a manner strongly dependent on that brain's functional state," according to Edward Kelly and David Presti (*BP*, p. 117). By not engaging with the independence thesis as it is advanced by its proponents, Augustine and his fellow authors set up a straw argument, the easier to defeat it.

Moreover, do the findings of neuroscience really indicate that "profound changes in the brain radically alter the mind itself" (p. 4)? That depends on how one defines "mind." If mind is truly and exclusively a product of neural activity, one would have to say yes, but if mind is construed in the way the independence thesis imagines it, the conclusion is far from obvious. E. F. Kelly and Presti (*BP*, Chapter 4) are careful to specify that it is the "conscious mind" which engages the brain. There is no doubt that alcoholic drinks, psychoactive drugs, head traumas, and so forth, alter one's conscious awareness, but is that the same as altering "the mind itself," much less altering it radically? Is conscious awareness all there is to the mind? Not if one follows F. W. H. Myers (1903) in distinguishing the "supraliminal" from the "subliminal." Myers' supraliminal mind is the seat of conscious awareness, whereas the subliminal is the home of unconscious or subconscious processes.¹ The subconscious plays a key role in modern transmission models but is rarely mentioned in *MoA*, whose contributors conceive of the "soul" in terms of substance dualism. Many philosophers (e.g., Baker & Goetz, 2011; Göcke, 2012) continue to champion substance dualism, but since it is not the basis of the transmission model represented by Edward Kelly and colleagues (*BP*, E. F. Kelly et al. 2007) the unrelenting attacks on the "independence thesis" mostly fall flat from the research perspective.

Augustine has no need for psi, which he considers to be an "unknown and purely hypothetical" ability (p. 33). He argues that psi and superpsi (which he understands to be an "unlimited" psi) are functionally indistinguishable and since superpsi tends to be invoked in an ad hoc way to explain the survival evidence, and is unfalsifiable, that that is true of psi in general. However, superpsi is best understood not as unusually extensive psi but as an unusually complex psi. We may say that psi involves the transfer of information between two minds, the acquisition of information by one mind, or the direct action on the physical world or a biological entity by one mind, in a single step. Almost all if not all instances of telepathy, clairvoyance,

¹ Myers' idea of the subliminal or subconscious stratum of mind was very different from the concept of the unconscious developed around the same time by Freud and later adopted by Jung as the personal unconscious (Cook, 1994). Myers (1903) also wrote about the greater mind as being the subliminal Self (E. F. Kelly & Presti, *BP*, Chapter 4; E. W. Kelly, 2007a), which takes in mystical states of consciousness, but I am more interested in his subliminal/supraliminal contrast.

and psychokinesis reported from both the lab and the field qualify as psi on this definition. Superpsi on the other hand involves the acquisition of information from more than one source or a combination of information transfer, information acquisition, and direct action, in a single step or sequence of steps. Accounting for birthmarks along with episodic memories, emotional memories, and behaviors linked to the previous person in a reincarnation case in terms of psi requires superpsi, because it is impossible to explain all these effects as the products of a single event. One might perhaps evoke a “magic wand” (Braude, 2003) but even magic wands attested to in other contexts (e.g., Eisenbud, 1970, 1983) do not produce such complex effects.

I would like to make one other preliminary point regarding psi and survival. It is clear that psi processing occurs in the subliminal stratum of the mind. Psi impressions are sent and received through the subconscious before being presented to conscious awareness. There is no reason to think that a discarnate mind would lack subliminal and supraliminal strata and no reason to think that psi operates differently when a mind is disembodied than when it is embodied. Disembodied minds would be able to communicate with each other and with embodied minds through psi, with no need for superpsi. Braude (2009) seems to think that disembodied perception and communication would require superpsi, but I am unaware of any situation in which one must posit deceased-agent superpsi. Superpsi is a supposed ability of living agents only. It is an attempt to explain phenomena suggestive of survival without evoking deceased agents. Psi, but not superpsi, has a significant place in the survival theory I outline in this essay.

Correlation and Causation

MoA is arranged in four parts, each introduced by a few pages from the editors. Part I, entitled “Empirical Arguments for Annihilation,” includes nine chapters by philosophers, psychologists, and neuroscientists dedicated to showing that various kinds of mental states are related to brain function. From this we are to infer that the brain produces the mind and that when the brain fails, so does the mind. However, all that this work demonstrates is that there is a correlation between mental and neural activity; it suggests that they are interrelated, but it does not prove that the neural activity gave rise to the mental activity.

That “correlation is not causation” is a widely-recognized counter to the dependence thesis. Several contributors acknowledge the issue. Some, like Terence Hines (Chapter 8, p. 193), admit that it is impossible from correlations alone to say which way the causal arrow runs. David Weisman (Chapter 4, p. 102) insists that the correlations are so tight that they should be regarded as causal. Augustine and Yonatan Fishman (Chapter 10, pp. 208–209) agree. Augustine (p. 31) argues that one must take into account the degree of evidential support and that since the preponderance of the “best evidence” favors the dependence thesis, it should be preferred.

Early on, Jean Mercer (Chapter 3) departs from the neurological emphasis to examine the genetic roots of temperament, tendency toward psychopathology, and intelligence. Although she confesses that this work has led to “confused and partial conclusions” she feels that it is more parsimonious to assume that personality is “entirely determined by biological factors” than that it is “determined by biological and spiritual factors” in tandem (pp. 79–80). She says nothing about environmental factors, which many psychologists have long believed to make a major contribution to personality development.

In Chapter 2, Matt McCormick tries to show that personality traits, cognitive abilities, emotions, conscious awareness, and self-awareness—“in short, the features that we attribute to the personal soul” (p. 64)—are brain-dependent. Carlos Álvarez (Chapter 7) supplies a more detailed look at the neural substrates of emotions and emotional processing. Terence Hines (Chapter 8) describes the specialization of language function within the brain. There is no doubt about the brain’s involvement in all these things, but it has become increasingly clear that the mind also has a role in their expression. Beauregard (2007, 2012b; Beauregard & O’Leary, 2008) has written about fMRI studies of emotional self-regulation. J. M. Schwartz (J. M. Schwartz & Begley, 2002; J. M. Schwartz, Gulliford, Stier, & Thienemann, 2005) has documented changes in the brain when adults with obsessive-compulsive disorder deliberately alter their behaviors. Baker (2013) discusses the limitations of neurobiology in explaining what Noam Chomsky (1966) called the “creative aspect of language use.” Noë (2009) makes a strong case that conscious awareness emerges

outside the brain, in response to environmental stimuli. His theory explains language, perception, thought, and cognitive skills generally as the result of engagement with the world around us.

Several contributors claim that the decline of psychological function in a compromised brain demonstrates that the mind cannot exist apart from the brain. Rocco Gennaro and Yonatan Fishman (Chapter 5) note that brain damage can affect a great range of mental processes, including perception; awareness, comprehension, and recognition; memory; personality; language; emotion; decision making; and moral judgment and empathy. David Weisman (Chapter 4) focuses on the dying brain, using case studies to show how progressive degeneration is related to lessening of awareness and conscious control. Gualtiero Piccini and Sonya Bahar (Chapter 6) describe the neural localization of mental function in the brain and conclude that there can be no mental life after brain death. In their treatment of neuroplasticity (pp. 159–160) they miss the important point that behavioral changes guided by will can sometimes bring about the neural reorganization (J. M. Schwartz & Begley, 2002; J. M. Schwarz, Gulliford, Stier, & Thienemann, 2005).

Given the tight association between neural and mental functioning, a correlation between brain degeneration and loss of awareness is to be expected. There is no reason to suppose that the impact on conscious awareness affects the subliminal stratum of the mind, however. Subconscious processing might continue despite the mind's ability to interact with the brain and, indeed, could help to account for responsiveness in locked-in and persistent vegetative states (e.g., see Owen et al., 2006). The persistence of subconscious activity could also explain cases of what Nahm and his colleagues (Nahm & Greyson, 2009; Nahm, Greyson, E. W. Kelly, & Haraldsson, 2012) call "terminal lucidity," even if conceived of as "lucid intervals" (Weisman, pp. 100–102) or "transient lucidity" (Augustine & Fishman, pp. 248–250). In these cases, although the brain may have been severely impaired by advanced dementia, tumors, strokes, abscesses, meningitis, and other disorders, often involving tissue destruction and lasting for years, patients suddenly become responsive, recognize and even converse with loved ones, usually shortly before dying.

Gennaro and Fishman (p. 122) ask, "if the soul can influence the brain, then why can't the soul 'will' away drug addiction or depression" or help to resolve other problems? Well, sometimes it can. In *Anatomy of an Illness*, Cousins (1981) described how he used laughter to cure himself of ankylosing spondylitis (an inflammatory disease that can cause spinal vertebrae to fuse). The well-known placebo effect furnishes other examples (E. W. Kelly, 2007b, pp. 139–148). One man's cancer went into remission when he was given an experimental drug but returned when he learned that the study was inconclusive. He recovered again after his doctor injected him with water, telling him that it was an improved version of the drug, but relapsed once more and died when he heard another report about its worthlessness (E. W. Kelly, 2007b, p. 145). Emotional states alone may have physical effects; the bereaved may die within days of a spouse's passing (E. W. Kelly, 2007b, p. 124). The mind may also affect the body in an injurious way. In stigmata, marks (accompanied sometimes by bleeding) appear on the hands and feet of devout Christians, corresponding to wounds Jesus is presumed to have suffered on the cross (E. W. Kelly, 2007b, pp. 152–156). See E. W. Kelly (2007b) for many other instances of psychophysiological influence.

Jamie Horder (Chapter 9) assumes that under dualistic interactionism the mind should be consciously aware and in control of everything that befalls the body. Since this is manifestly not the case in situations that include hallucinatory states, dreaming, and hemineglect (where one side of the body is not aware of what the other is doing or going through), there can be no mind apart from the brain, he contends. Horder does not acknowledge that the subconscious might have a role in dreaming and that our subconscious could preserve our identities when our conscious awareness is offline or confused for whatever reason. Absence of conscious awareness or control need not mean that there is no mind present at all.

Correlations between neural and mental events are as compatible with the independence thesis as with the dependence thesis. Is there any way of deciding between the rival interpretations? Augustine and Fishman (pp. 208–211) say yes, we should prefer the dependence thesis because the temporal precedence of the neural events is clear: the brain acts first, and the mind responds. However, as I have shown, that is not always true. There are many reports, some quite well documented, of mental events coming first. The only recourse materialists have is to dismiss these cases and studies on the grounds that they are old, anecdotal,

poorly described, do not meet the standards of our “best available data” (p. 204), “best findings” (p. 254), and “most reliable evidence” (p. 269), and so forth. This they must do and do do, otherwise they would have to admit that the dependence thesis is falsified and the independence thesis supported. The causal arrow between the mental and the physical may run in different directions at different times, but if any part of the large and diverse data set suggesting the mind’s temporal precedence is valid, at the least we know that the arrow does not always run from brain to mind.

Causal Openness

Part II is devoted to “Conceptual and Empirical Difficulties for Survival.” There are nine chapters, seven by philosophers, one by a psychologist (Susan Blackmore), and one by a biologist. We get a rehearsal of familiar arguments against substance dualism, with no attention to other forms of dualism or to nondual and idealist possibilities. A central theme is causal closure, a necessary starting point for any materialist position. To say that the physical world is causally closed is to say that for every physical effect there is a physical cause. There is no room and no need for mental causation. The physical is the only reality; the mind must in some fashion emerge from or supervene on the brain. The trouble for materialism is that it is not clear that the physical domain is causally closed at a fundamental level. Causal closure is a feature of classical or Newtonian mechanics, but quantum mechanics is probabilistic rather than deterministic. The standard model of quantum mechanics places consciousness outside physical systems and many physicists believe there is evidence that the mind can bias outcomes in certain directions (Stapp, 2011).

The argument from causal closure is meant to bolster the dependence thesis. None of the *MoA* authors give any indication of realizing that the physical domain may not be closed after all and consequently do not consider what this lack of closure might mean for mental causation and the independence thesis. They do not seem to appreciate that we have evidence of mental causation in the mind’s ability to impact its body for healing and harm, much less in psi effects generally. The role of psi in the making of reality may nevertheless be quite significant and psi may provide the answer to the biggest philosophical objection to dualism, the question of how a nonmaterial substance (the mind) might influence a physical one (the body). Gennaro and Fishman maintain that “no such explanation is forthcoming or is perhaps even possible” (p. 108). Several other authors in Parts I and II say similar things.

We are told again and again that it is impossible to imagine how a disembodied mind could perceive or act upon the physical world, unless with divine assistance. Theodore Drange (Chapter 12, p. 331), the only contributor to discuss psi in this context, contends that clairvoyance, telepathy, and psychokinesis require a body (not just a mind), although he does not explain why this should be. Drange cannot understand how a disembodied mind would be able to establish its own identity, let alone the identity of others. Perhaps identity could be based on memory, but the apparent memories of a disembodied mind would give no assurance of identity because they could have been “deliberately implanted by someone else” (p. 332). Since there is no way to ensure identity in the afterlife, it makes no sense to speak of personal survival, Drange claims.

Raymond Bradley (Chapter 11, pp. 301–302) asks how, given the “manifest dependency” of mental states on changes in physical states while embodied, there could be changes in mental states while disembodied. One answer is that changes in mental states are not necessarily dependent on changes in physical states. Rather, changes in mental states may arise directly from prior mental states or in response to external cues (Noë, 2009), and so they might occur while disembodied as easily as while embodied (given psi information transfer and acquisition). Bradley (pp. 304–306) challenges substance dualists to explain the soul in relation to evolutionary change. When in evolutionary history did souls first appear? Do nonhuman animals have souls? How exactly does the soul relate to the mind? These I think are problems for substance dualism (particularly the Cartesian variety targeted in *MoA*) that do not necessarily apply to other conceptions of postmortem survival. The theory I outline later embraces evolutionary change.

Another contributor concerned specifically with Cartesian ideas is Jaegwon Kim, whose Chapter 13 is reprinted from Corcoran (2001). I have already answered Kim’s titular question, “What Could Pair a

Nonphysical Soul to a Physical Body?” (it is psi) and will concentrate my remarks on an issue that I have not yet addressed, causation and space. Physical causation requires contact, hence spatiotemporal proximity. Psychokinesis does not require spatial proximity and perhaps not even temporal proximity. Would it be available to a disembodied Cartesian thinking substance and could it get around Kim’s objections that such a substance, lacking a spatial dimension, would be unable to interact with the physical world in the same spatiotemporal coordinate system? I am not sure and will leave that question to the philosophers. I think we can say, at least, that there would be fewer logical difficulties for a surviving mind that is localized in space (and time) and this is an additional feature of my survival theory.

In a paper reprinted from the *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, David Wilson (Chapter 14) complains that (in the words of his title) “Nonphysical Souls Would Violate Physical Laws.” This is followed by a chapter from David Papineau, excerpted from his chapter in Stone and Wolff (2000), in which he declares that “There Is No Trace of Any Soul Linked to the Body.” Leonard Angel (Chapter 16) appears next with a chapter entitled, “Since Physical Formulas Are Not Violated, No Soul Controls the Body.” The starting point for these three chapters is the alleged closure of the physical domain. Angel advises us that in order to come to the correct view of the matter, “learning intellectual history is required. It might take a bit of time to do that” (p. 378). He then helpfully supplies a condensed reading of the intellectual history to which he refers:

Pythagoras and Plato lived almost a century and a half apart, but Pythagoras recorded almost nothing that survives, whereas Plato wrote many surviving dialogues. Yet both Pythagoras and Plato seem to have been rationalists who believed in the importance of mathematics. Plato’s student, Aristotle, subtly developed an early synthesis of rationalism and observational empiricism. After Newton’s work, which occurred almost two thousand years later, modern syntheses of rationalism and observational empiricism developed. The developing processes came to fruition in the twentieth century (p. 381).

“Rationalists” seems to be used here as a synonym for “materialists.” It is a highly inapt appellation for Pythagoras, whom R. Martin and Barresi (2006, p. 10) liken to a shaman, and Plato. Pythagoras believed he could remember having lived before and taught metempsychosis and the direct apprehension of reality. His mathematics was a way into that reality. Plato did not claim past-life memories, but he had Socrates and others expound on reincarnation in several of his dialogues (R. Martin & Barresi, 2006; Obeyesekere, 2002).² Concluding the modern synthesis with Newton is just as misguided, and telling, ignoring as it does the revolution in physics that came with quantum mechanics (Stapp, 2011). Angel’s attitude perfectly captures the spirit of *MoA*. “The crucial thesis that nothing violates mathematical physics is not only *really hard* to deny, but evidentially *undeniable*; that some intransigent deniers refuse to accept it may simply be a reflection on their unmindfulness of the enormity of human history” (p. 388, his emphasis). The irony of the final clause requires no further comment.

Blackmore’s Chapter 17, “The Implausibility of Astral Bodies and Astral Worlds,” is excerpted from *Beyond the Body* (Blackmore, 1982), where it stands as the penultimate chapter and is entitled “Re-assessing the Theories.” *Beyond the Body* is about out-of-body experiences (OBEs) and this chapter is concerned with critiquing exteriorization theories of the OBE. Blackmore first considers physical theories (a physical double travels in the physical world), then “astral world theory” (a nonphysical double travels in the physical world), and finally “mental astral world theory” (a nonphysical double travels in an astral world). These theories introduce new concepts into *MoA*, especially the idea that the mind might survive death in a quasi-physical subtle (astral) body. Following Blackmore there are two chapters critiquing the notion of postmortem survival in a resurrection body.

² I am letting pass the relatively minor points that Pythagoras believed in oral teaching and left no writings whatsoever (R. Martin & Barresi, p. 10) and that Plato is not noted for his mathematical commentary. Perhaps Angel has in mind the passage in the *Meno* (84c–86a) where Socrates uses the mathematical prowess of his untutored slave boy to make a point about knowledge deriving from pre-existence and ultimately past lives.

Theological Conceptions Versus Theological Principles

A relatively short Part III, “Problematic Models of the Afterlife,” contains three chapters that point out “inconsistencies between theological conceptions and theological principles” (p. xxx). Michael Martin (Chapter 20) discusses “Problems with Heaven.” Bradley (Chapter 21) returns with the question, “Can God Condemn One to an Afterlife in Hell?” Ingrid Hansen Smythe (Chapter 22) supplies the only chapter that deals with a religious concept not derived from Christianity. Her “Objections to Karma and Rebirth: An Introduction” deals with a generalized concept of karma unrelated to any specific tradition, despite the sometimes considerable variations among the conceptions of different traditions (Krishan, 1997). Undoubtedly part of Smythe’s purpose is to undermine the idea of reincarnation by linking it to karma, but reincarnation does not entail karma. Karma has no place in reincarnation belief systems outside the Indic sphere (Obeyesekere, 2002), and, in fact, past-life memory case studies have found no sign of karma in the retributive (or juridical) sense that Smythe analyses (Stevenson, 2001, pp. 251–253). Her chapter has no bearing on the empirical question of whether reincarnation occurs.

Evidence for Survival

Part IV, “Dubious Evidence for Survival,” is the part of *MoA* most directly concerned with psychological research and cases suggestive of survival after death. Most of the eight chapters are reprints or revisions of previously published material.

Rense Lange and James Houran’s Chapter 23, “Giving up the Ghost to Psychology,” is a reprint of a 1988 article in *Skeptical Intelligencer*. It lumps together poltergeist disturbances and haunting experiences, interpreting them as “mistaken perceptions arising from an interaction of paranormal beliefs, paranormal experiences, and fear of the paranormal” (p. 508). This conclusion is based partly on the authors’ research, but they have the annoying habit of misrepresenting the findings of others. In their second sentence (p. 503), they cite Gauld and Cornell (1979) and Roll (1977) in saying that a poltergeist outbreak of any duration is called a haunting. In fact, Gauld and Cornell confirmed the standard distinction between a person-centered poltergeist and a place-centered haunting through a cluster analysis of 500 cases. Roll (1977) made the same distinction and introduced his theory of recurrent spontaneous psychokinesis (RSPK), which has become accepted as the explanation for the majority of poltergeist episodes. This, however, brings psi into the picture, and that is something Lange and Houran cannot countenance (pp. 505–506).

Chapter 24 brings back Blackmore on OBEs. Her “Out of Body Experiences are not Evidence of Survival” is reprinted from a 1998 issue of *Anabiosis*, now the *Journal of Near-Death Studies*. She says, “The main problem to face [in interpreting OBEs as literal out-of-body experiences] is conceiving of anything that” might be able to leave the body. “The ‘whatever it is’ . . . must be able to move, perceive at a distance, and to transfer the results back to the body. That is a very tall order” (p. 519). It seems to me, though, that describing the “whatever it is” is not so hard. It is not difficult to imagine a mind that separates from the body, views things via clairvoyance, records them in its subconscious memory bank, then uploads them into conscious awareness when it is associated with its body again. The harder question is, do we have evidence that this happens? On the latter point, I agree with Blackmore: apparently not very much. OBE sensations are very similar to autoscapy, the visual hallucination of one’s body, viewed as if from the outside. Most OBEs are likely no more than special altered states of consciousness. OBE perceptions become parapsychologically interesting only when they are veridical and even then it is often possible to interpret them as psi-based without having to assume the mind has left the body (E. W. Kelly, Greyson, & E. F. Kelly, 2007, pp. 394–405).

In Chapter 25, “Near-Death Experiences are Hallucinations,” Augustine (2007b, 2007c) presents a condensed and revised version of two of papers that appeared in the *Journal of Near-Death Studies* in 2007. Augustine has scoured the NDE literature for instances of inaccurate or confused perception and presents these as problematic for an exteriorization interpretation of the experience. Apparently he expects disincarnate perception to resemble embodied visual perception, but we are dealing with clairvoyance here. The

psi inputs are processed by the subliminal mind, whence the distortions. We see this with dream telepathy and remote viewing to an even greater extent than with OBE perception during NDEs. A recent book by Rivas, Dirven, and Smit (2016) brings out the psi angle very well, citing cases of veridical telepathy as well as clairvoyance. Rivas et al. (2016, Chapter 7) also discovered seven cases of NDEs related to reciprocal apparitions, in which experiencers were seen as apparitions at the sites to which they felt they were traveling out-of-body. These last cases more than the psi-related ones suggest a mind detached from the body, but we should remember that NDEs at their best tell us no more than that separation is possible. NDEs do not provide direct evidence of survival. Of greater relevance to the survival question are memories of the intermission in reincarnation cases (Matlock & Giesler-Petersen, in press; Sharma & Tucker, 2004). Interestingly, veridical perceptions of the terrestrial world have been reported in all stages of the intermission experience and are more accurate (have less distortion) than the NDE perceptions Augustine highlights (Matlock & Giesler-Petersen, in press).

Chapter 26, by Champe Ransom, a lawyer and research assistant to Ian Stevenson in the early 1970s, is based on a critique of Stevenson's research that Ransom prepared for Stevenson in 1972. This critique has a history. Writer D. Scott Rogo learned about it from an unnamed colleague and described it in *The Search for Yesterday* (Rogo, 1985, p. 79). Rogo's account brought it to the attention of Paul Edwards, who persuaded Ransom to write a summary of it for his *Reincarnation: A Critical Examination* (Edwards, 1996, pp. 276–277). The "Ransom Report" has since become a staple of the skeptical commentary on Stevenson, although it has never been seen in full. The *MoA* editors say that they were unable to get permission to reproduce it along with the response Stevenson had requested accompany it, so they asked Ransom to write the abbreviated version that they published.

The original report included 18 points, 13 of which Ransom chose to repeat here. Most do not concern Stevenson's research methods (Ransom never accompanied him into the field) but rather the way the write-up was handled in *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* (Stevenson, 1966), Stevenson's first volume of case studies. For instance, ". . .often the case reports are lacking in the details of when the statements (of a subject or witness) were made and in what context and to whom" (p. 640). Other points turn on hypotheticals, e.g., "Leading questions may have been used" (p. 641). Ransom raises some serious concerns, including subtle distortions of memory over time, the need to work through interpreters, and problems attendant with spending only brief periods with witnesses. However, these and many other potential pitfalls were acknowledged and addressed by Stevenson in the first chapter of *Twenty Cases* (Stevenson, 1966), so it cannot be said that he was unaware of them before they were brought to his attention.

Angel continues the criticism of Stevenson's work in Chapter 27. He declares that "Stevenson thought that anecdotal research was required for his project because it was practically impossible, he assumed, to do controlled experimental research on the subject" (p. 655). Angel believes that the correspondences between the present and previous persons, including the birthmark evidence that Stevenson adduces in *Reincarnation and Biology* (Stevenson, 1997), are all due to chance. What he means by "controlled experimental research" is demonstrating the statistical probability that a child's statements fit one person and no other. This has been done rarely, because the matches typically are so striking as to make quantification seem unnecessary, but he is wrong in his repeated assertions that no efforts of this kind have been made. Pasricha (1983) reports a statistical assessment in relation to the Rakesh Gaur case, and Mills (2004) attempted to quantify likelihoods in the case of Ajendra Singh Chauhan.

Angel reprises his assessment of Stevenson's case of Imad Elawar (Stevenson, 1966), originally presented in 1994 (Angel, 1994). The Imad Elawar case was not solved when Stevenson reached it and Imad's parents, in an effort to make sense of what he was saying, had strung his statements together in a way that turned out to be mistaken. What should be a strength of the case—the written record made before verifications were attempted—becomes problematic for Angel, who charges that Stevenson selected which information to credit and which not. In a careful re-analysis of Imad's statements before Stevenson arrived on the scene, Barros (2004) shows that they alone are sufficient to identify the previous person and supports Stevenson's interpretation over Angel's. Angel cites Barros's paper under the name "Siquiera" (his maternal surname) but does not take the opportunity to reply to his remarks on the case.

Chapter 28, by Claus Flodin Larsen, and Chapter 29, by Christian Battista, Nicolas Gauvrit, and Etienne LeBel, are devoted to research on mediumship by Gary Schwartz and Julie Beischel. Larsen opens with a history of mediumship, focusing on Spiritualism, drawn from skeptical and online sources. He explains the principles of cold reading and shows how the overinterpretation of reported statements by sitters could have influenced the results reported in *The Afterlife Experiments* (G. E. Schwartz with Simon, 2002). There is value in what Larsen says, but as so often in the skeptical treatment of parapsychology, he may be too quick to assume that there is nothing paranormal going on at all. Daryl Bem (2005), whose critical review of *The Afterlife Experiments* Larsen does not cite, identified a variety of statistical errors in Schwartz's work but believed that there was reason nonetheless to think that there was some psi involved, albeit psi on the part of the test mediums alone.

Battista, Gauvrit, and LeBel find methodological and statistical flaws in a triple-blind study by Beischel and G. E. Schwartz (2007). The statistical flaws appear to be corrected in a follow-up quintuple-blind study (Beischel, Boccuzzi, Biuso, & Rock, 2015), but one of the methodological issues remains. This is the practice of supplying mediums with the first name of the discarnate to be contacted, which Battista, Gauvrit and LeBel point out could provide information for the start of a cold reading. Beischel et al. (2015, p. 138) defend the use of this practice, and they are probably right that its impact would have been negligible; nevertheless, it would seem wise, as they acknowledge in their conclusion (Beischel et al., 2015, p. 141), to find a different way of ensuring the medium's "mental focus."

The final chapter, David Lester's "Is There Life After Death? A Review of the Supporting Evidence" is excerpted with minor changes from his *Is there Life after Death? An Examination of the Empirical Evidence* (Lester, 2005). Lester asserts that "the two major sources of evidence for contemporary research on life after death are reports of near-death experiences and ostensible reincarnation" (p. 636). He cannot understand why there should be cultural variation in either NDEs or reincarnation experiences. Cultural variation in NDEs also troubles Augustine (pp. 542–550). Both authors seem to think that if these phenomena are what they appear to be, they should be the same for all experiencers, everywhere. They give no reason for expecting such uniformity and it would be odd if it were found. Is there anything about human experience that is the same for everyone, everywhere? I do not have room here to treat Lester's other concerns about reincarnation in the depth required. I deal with Lester's concerns more thoroughly in a work in preparation (Matlock, 2016b).³

The chapters of Part IV do little to counter the evidence for survival. They do not even confront it properly. Most poltergeists have nothing to do with survival but rather concern the psychokinesis of living persons. OBEs and NDEs have no direct bearing on the survival question; at most they show that the mind can exist apart from the body and an incapacitated brain. There are features of NDEs, such as encounters with the apparitions of deceased persons, that are more directly suggestive of survival (Rivas, et al., 2016, pp. 221–237), but these are not discussed anywhere in *MoA*. In fact, apart from a few pages by Augustine (pp. 20–22), apparitions of any sort receive only passing mention. The treatment of mediumship is confined to studies by Schwartz and Beischel with mental mediums. There are no references to the decades of work with trance mediums by members of the Society for Psychical Research and the American Society for Psychical Research (see, e.g., Gauld, 1982). The reincarnation data also are much more complex and varied than this book suggests (Haraldsson & Matlock, in press). The failure to grapple with, much less to come to grips with, the breadth and depth of the evidence for postmortem survival is the greatest weakness of *MoA*.

A Process Theory of Personal Survival

In addition to insisting that correlation is tantamount to causation in mind/brain relations, that the physical realm is causally closed, and that all empirical evidence of personal survival is bunk, Augustine and Fishman (Chapter 10) discuss the requisite features of scientific theory and explain why they think the dependence thesis is more satisfactory than the independence thesis. A good theory should be testable and have predictive success; it should have wide scope (unifying power) and fertility (be productive of

³ This work is built around lectures for a course I teach online through the Alvarado Zingrone Institute for Research and Education (theazire.org/moodle).

research). According to Bayesian confirmation theory the strongest hypothesis (or theory) is the one with the best fit to existing data and background knowledge and the highest prior probability of being right. The more ad hoc auxiliary assumptions are brought in to shore up a theory, the more problematical it becomes. Simplicity counts.

Augustine and Fishman naturally believe that the dependence thesis is the winner of the contest with the independence thesis, because they assume that the mind cannot affect the brain and body and that the physical realm is causally closed. These starting assumptions constrain the estimation of prior probabilities and guarantee that the dependence thesis comes out ahead. If we reject the notions that the brain always acts antecedent to mental events and that the physical realm is causally closed, the calculus changes so that the dependence and independence theses are more equal in their prior probabilities; and when we take into account all of the data relating to mind/body relations, not just those which conform to the expectations of the dependence thesis, our background knowledge changes enough to tilt the balance in favor of the independence thesis.

Substance dualism is not the only alternative to materialism and mind/body identity in philosophy and it is not the alternative most favored by scientists who turn away from reductionism. As Barušs and Mossbridge (2017) note, “at the time that materialism is on its way out, it appears that panpsychism is on its way in” (p. 20). The core conception of panpsychism is that entities of all kinds at all levels have experiences associated with a mind or mind-like quality (Skrbina, 2005). Panpsychism does not necessarily require a rejection of materialism. Chalmers (1996), Strawson (2006), and Koch (2012) adopt panpsychist positions that recognize that awareness is not grounded in cerebral activity, yet do not forsake a materialist account of how the rest of the world works. Noë’s (2009) idea that awareness emerges in interaction with the environment is applicable all the way down the phylogenetic tree but does not entail wholesale rejection of the materialist world view either. Barušs and Mossbridge (2017), Woollacott (2015), E. F. Kelly (2007, 2015), and Griffin (1997), on the other hand, link panpsychism to idealism, the idea that consciousness is the primary force in the universe, and allow for postmortem survival and reincarnation (Matlock, 2016b).

Idealism is a form of monism diametrically opposed to materialism. From the idealist perspective, the universe consists of a “deep consciousness” from which “both physical and mental events arise” (Barušs & Mossbridge, 2017, pp. 181–182). Bringing idealism and panpsychism together we arrive at the proposition that all things are derived from the same deep background consciousness and so consciousness is a part of all things. One reason this idea has become popular is that it is consistent with quantum theory (E. F. Kelly, 2007; Stapp, 2011, 2015). All things are not alleged to have the same type of consciousness, of course. The idea is that material objects, including bodies, and minds are imbued with different grades of consciousness. There is a dualism of mind and body here, but it is an idealist property dualism. The difference between an idealist property dualism and substance dualism is important. If mind and body are not so different in their composition it is easier to understand how they interact (Griffin, 1997).

We may characterize the soul or mind as a stream of consciousness. A consciousness stream differs from body consciousness in various ways, chief among them that the former survives the annihilation of the latter. Also, a consciousness stream has supraliminal as well as subliminal strata, whereas other forms of consciousness enjoy gradations of the subliminal only; they are sensual but not fully sentient. I suspect that the reincarnation of the consciousness stream began with the inception of biological life and death and that the minds of all living creatures return in new bodies again and again. I think they do this more by habit than by requirement and that it is possible for there to be transmigration between different animal species, although as yet we have no good evidence that this occurs. By the same token, it should be possible for a consciousness stream newly sprung from the background consciousness to incarnate in the body of any species (including ours) without having been incarnated in that species before. Again, we have no good evidence of this, although it may be noted that popular metaphysics claims to be able to distinguish “new souls” from “old souls.” In a complementary way, a consciousness stream should be able to blend back into the background consciousness, much as would presumably occur in nonreincarnating types of consciousness when their hosts cease to exist.

We can assign certain capabilities or attributes to our human streams of consciousness, many if not

all of which may be features of consciousness streams in general. These include the capacity for attention, intention, and will (Stapp, 1999), psi (Stapp, 2015), and memory. Attention, intention, and will imply conscious awareness as well as agency and belong to the supraliminal stratum of the consciousness stream, whereas psi and the ability to form and store memories belong to the subliminal stratum. In memory I include our behavioral dispositions, our body image and body schema, and all the bits from which our personalities are constructed, in addition to the episodic, semantic, emotional, and other residues of our experiences. I call the subject or experiencer of these various attributes the self. I think of the self as contingent on experience and yet the self has a greater permanence than the attributes of the consciousness stream. We change continually as we go through life—and move from one life to another—yet the self remains constant (Matlock, 2016b).

I do not think that a consciousness stream requires the support of an astral body, which some analysts and critics (e.g., Broad, 1962; Flew, 1976) have believed necessary to hold a personality together after death and render postmortem existence intelligible. Broad (1962) and Flew (1976) missed a way in which a consciousness stream might cohere in a completely disembodied state, and that is through the concatenation of discreet experiential events (“actual occasions”) as per Whitehead (1929/1978). Whitehead believed that an individual’s experiential stream outlasted his death, resulting in a sort of “objective immortality” (Whitehead, 1929/1978, p. 351), but he seems to have thought of mental activity as having ceased then. I see no reason that the concrescence of actual occasions must end at death, though, and with this amendment Whitehead’s process metaphysics allows for the survival of dispositional traits and memory into the afterlife. This is especially true when we consider that the consciousness stream might continue at a subliminal level even in the absence of supraliminal activity. Weiss (2012, 2015) extends Whitehead’s proposal in similar fashion.

The persistence into death of a stream of consciousness means that the afterlife is better thought of as an altered state of mind than as a place. Our afterlife experience is a consequence of our consciousness no longer being constrained and mediated by our brain. Our personal histories and entrenched beliefs go with us when we die and help to shape how we perceive what we find in death, thus the individual and cultural variations in NDEs, intermission memories, and mediumistic portrayals of afterlife conditions. The afterlife experience has sometimes been likened to a dream, for example, by Price (1953), and Tucker (2013, Chapter 9), but this implies that the subconscious is more in control than appears to be the case from reported memories and mediumistic accounts. The fanciful elements and distortions in some of these narratives are better understood in terms of an increased permeability between the supraliminal and the subliminal strata of the mind, I think. On this issue, see E. F. Kelly and Presti (*BP*, Chapter 4, p. 121).

What would constitute the actual occasions, the experiential events, of the supraliminal postmortem state? Broad (1962, 1976) suggested that the dispositional aspects of personality are brought out through contact with other entities, an idea similar to Noë’s (2009) notion of conscious awareness arising in response to external stimuli. The stimuli could come from incarnate minds as well as other discarnate ones, via psi. Barušs and Mossbridge (2017) remark, “interactions with discarnate beings could become possible when we stop filtering them out of our experience” (p. 178). This seems to me exactly right. It may well be that the dead are all around us and we have only to open our minds to them. Mediums are practiced at doing this and it happens to the rest of us when we see apparitions or experience other afterdeath contacts (Arcangel, 2005; Haraldsson, 2012). NDErs participate in this discarnate reality, and for the same reason: Their brains are out of commission and material from the subliminal is more easily passed up to the supraliminal.

Other stimuli for a discarnate mind might come from clairvoyant perception of the terrestrial world. Earlier I mentioned reports of veridical perception not only during the OBE stage of NDEs, but from pre-birth or “pre-existence” memories and intermission memories (Matlock & Giesler-Petersen, in press; Rivas, Carman, Carman, & Dirven, 2015). An intriguing aspect of these perceptions is the impression they give of being from a situated vantage point, typically above the scene in question. It is as if the discarnate mind were present at the same time and place as the embodied persons. Sometimes its presence is seen, heard, or felt by the embodied persons (Arcangel, 2005; Haraldsson, 2012), perhaps because of a momentary letting down of the guard that normally prevents psi inputs from reaching conscious awareness. If disembodied streams of

consciousness are localized in this way we may want to conceive of them as extended in space, although this extension would be very different from the physical extension we are accustomed to considering.

From prebirth and intermission memories, as well as from mediumistic accounts, it appears that discarnate minds are capable of thinking and acting on their own volition. One way this shows up is in the selection of new parents in reincarnation cases. We see this in solved international cases, those involving reincarnation in a foreign country. A motive for reincarnating abroad is discernable in all 14 such cases known to me (Haraldsson & Matlock, in press, Chapter 27). There are indications also that a discarnate mind's deep-seated beliefs, carried over from its recently concluded embodiment, can influence its choices about where and when to reincarnate (Haraldsson & Matlock, in press; Matlock, 2016b; Stevenson, 2001, p. 180). This provides an explanation for cultural patterns alternative to the view (expressed by Lester in Chapter 30) that all such patterns are products of parents guiding their children in accord with their culturally mandated belief systems.

Reincarnation is the process of joining a previously embodied stream of consciousness with a new body and a new brain. It is perhaps best thought of as the long-term possession of a body. Generally the process begins in utero, but it can take place after birth, with the replacement of one stream of consciousness by another (e.g., Mills & Dhiman, 2011). When the replacement is permanent it may be preferable to term the cases "replacement reincarnation" rather than possession (Matlock, 2016b). Replacement in utero is theoretically possible and appears to have occurred in the case of Titu or Toran Singh (Haraldsson & Matlock, in press, Chapter 23). In any event, a crucial aspect of the reincarnation process is the resetting of the supraliminal stratum of the consciousness stream. This comes about thanks to its connection with the new brain, which has much to say about how conscious awareness is experienced. A person's previous-life experiences are still present in the subliminal stratum of his or her mind, whence they sometimes erupt into conscious awareness, but more often influence his or her behavior in an unconscious way (Haraldsson & Matlock, in press; Matlock, 2016b).

I must comment on one other feature of the reincarnation process—the transmission of physical traits and practiced skills. Imaged, verbal, and emotional memories might be recorded in the subconscious and inherited as part of the mind, but physical traits and learned behaviors are different. Although memories of them might be preserved in the subconscious, they themselves could not be. Physical traits include birthmarks and birth defects commemorating death wounds but also internal diseases and physical likenesses in stature, facial structure, eye form, skin color, and the like (Stevenson, 1997). Skills include speech performance and other "knowledge how," which some subjects have displayed (Haraldsson & Matlock, in press; Stevenson, 2001). Stevenson (1997, 2001) suggested that physical traits are conveyed to a new physical body in a subtle body he called a "psychophore," but could they not be produced more easily by the reincarnating mind acting psychokinetically on its new body? Similarly, neural pathways underlying skillful behavior might be imprinted on the new brain by the reincarnating mind (Matlock, 2016b). I do not imagine these things happening by conscious will; the physical traits and skills replicated tend to be ones to which the previous person was emotionally attached, and that implicates the subconscious. This proposal is novel but not unrealistic. We have a great deal of evidence of the mind's ability to influence its body and I am only pushing that influence back to the earliest stages of life.

I call my theory of survival and reincarnation the "processual soul theory" in acknowledgement of its debt to Whitehead's process metaphysics. It is unlikely to impress those committed to materialism and reductionism but other scientists and scholars may find it useful. It presents an alternative to substance dualism as a conception of mind and body, explains how the mind interacts with the brain, describes the nature of disembodied existence, and indicates how reincarnation works. The theory has a good fit with background knowledge in psychical research and parapsychology. Its scope is broad and unifying, integrating survival research into parapsychology at large by showing the role psi plays in the functioning of disembodied minds and in the interaction between embodied and disembodied minds. It has the potential to suggest new lines of investigation in parapsychology. The inclusion of reincarnation expands its scope and potential fertility well beyond parapsychology, however. Reincarnation has great explanatory power (Stevenson, 1977, 2000) and the reincarnation case data that have been amassed over the last 50 years will

bring about a major revolution in our biological and psychological sciences when they come to be accepted. My ideas are in line with recent proposals from others—from *BP* and Barušs and Mossbridge (2017), in particular—and that time may be nearer than many people think. It is becoming increasingly clear that Martin and Augustine, et al., are fighting a losing battle.

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