

Survival of Bodily Death

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Future Directions for Research

General

1. Work more in the direction of Tart's (1975) state-specific science. Stephen LaBerge's (1985) work with lucid dreaming is a good prototype; he has developed a network of "oneironauts" who undertake experiments while in the lucid state and report back the results. This paradigm of science challenges some of the objectivist assumptions of modern science for it requires a move in the direction of greater participation and personal experience.
2. Develop more targeted hypotheses rather than merely gather more data. Erlendur Haraldsson did this with the hypothesis that children reporting reincarnation memories have a more active and vivid fantasy life or are more suggestible. His tests showed them to be less susceptible to suggestion.
3. Train rather than find subjects. The issue of a paucity of talented subjects is pervasive in almost all the fields discussed. Developing better methods to train cadres of subjects would allow us to do sophisticated, in-depth research. For example, if it were possible to regularly produce OBEs, we could begin to design experiments where the veracity of such experiences could be better studied.
4. Mine cross-cultural studies to generate ideas for further research and to detect areas of lingering bias in our own work.

For the Next Conference

1. Less coverage of current and past research, more planning and brainstorming for future projects.
2. Have each participant take one juicy topic and extend our knowledge of it by the next gathering. For example, Michael Grosso plans to do a study of retrieval of mental functioning on the verge of death. Michael Murphy will investigate fast-track publishing of books out of copyright. Adam Crabtree agreed to spearhead web efforts.
3. Generate a good web site.
4. Circulate more articles and materials in advance.
5. Explore philosophical frameworks (the big picture) more extensively.
6. Targeting the filter versus production hypothesis of consciousness, which is crucial to all the work of the conference.

Near-Death Experiences

1. Investigate extreme surgery. For example, a recently developed procedure to operate on previously inaccessible aneurysms in the brain relies upon an elaborate death-defying procedure. The body is cooled to sixty degrees, the blood is drained from the head, and the patient's eyes and ears are blocked for the duration of the several hour surgery.
2. Cast a wider net for blind people, especially the congenitally blind, who have had near-death experiences in which they report being able to see. Ken Ring (1999) has pioneered research in this area in his most recent book but the work can be taken still further.
3. Emily Kelly and Bruce Greyson are looking into doing a study in a hospice, a systematic survey of death-bed phenomena with the patients, extending the work of Osis and Haraldsson (1977). They would look at basic and pathological visions, mood elevation, and physical phenomena such as clocks stopping. There is evidence that people are able to postpone their own deaths to wait for anniversaries, holidays, or the arrival of relatives. This would be a longitudinal study in a hospice to follow patients until they die. In addition, they would examine what the families experience.
4. Hospice research placing Schmidt random-number generators in the room of a dying person. A good deal of evidence shows that these generators become less random during collectively focused emotional events.

Out-of-Body Experiences

1. Charles Tart's (1968) work with one promising subject who reported regular OBEs indicated that the times when she was "out" corresponded to an unusual EEG pattern dubbed slow alpha. William Dement, the world's foremost authority on sleep, agreed that this pattern was indeed highly unusual. This brought up the idea that subjects might be trained via biofeedback to generate slow alpha, perhaps inducing an OBE.

Reincarnation Research

1. Examine behavioral and personality characteristics of reputed incarnations for parallels in psychological make-up, behavioral traits, emotional disposition, psychopathology, etc. to the deceased individual in matched cases. Follow the kids through their lives and see what turns up. There ought to be a strong statistical correlation.
2. Hypnosis research targeted specifically to past-life material. Though a reasonable amount of data has been collected in the field of past-life regression hypnotherapy, the idea here would be to collect more traceable data, especially with excellent hypnotic subjects. This would introduce a measure of experimental control. Basic hypnotizability and susceptibility scales, which usually are not administered in therapeutic settings, would be incorporated.
3. Develop an experimental protocol using the body-marking traditions of Laos and Thailand as a model. This might mean, for example, encouraging them to make more distinctive markings.
4. Investigate the population of people who have lost children and who believe that a subsequent child is the reincarnation of the dead child. Often, this is problematic for the family. Though it would be difficult to control for confounding variables, this group may well be worth investigating.
5. Study the rates and types of birthmarks following significant wars. Since evidence is accumulating that birthmarks often correspond to death wounds in the reported previous life, it is possible that the percentage of birthmarks of certain types (such as those suggestive of bullet wounds) might increase in the years following a war. Such a study would make the superpsi hypothesis much less plausible.
6. A simple study asking children, "What do you remember about your past life?" Most people assume that children can not remember their birth, but David Chamberlain (1988) makes the case that if you ask them, many actually can. We assume that the average child does not remember past lives, but perhaps many actually do.
7. Charles suggested revisiting The Case for Bridey Murphy (Bernstein, 1965) which caused a sensation in the sixties and which still stands as an excellent case.
8. Xenoglossy: Stevenson has done 90% of the work in this field, showing how people appear to speak languages they have never consciously studied. Ed Kelly suggested studying this phenomenon with functional MRI's. A recent study of bilingualism showed that when people learn languages contemporaneous with the first, the organization in the brain is largely intertwined. If one language is learned later, the organization is separate. This could lead to very interesting studies with the xenoglossy cases.

Channeling and Mediumship

1. Examine cross-correspondence data at greater depth. This material, which is derived from multiple "transmissions" to unrelated mediums and is reputed to make sense only when pieced back together, appears very promising but is underanalyzed. One of the reasons this data is so promising is that it makes fraud and the "super-psi" hypothesis far less plausible.
2. A psychomanteum is a cloth-enshrouded "room" with a mirror at one end. It is currently being used for research and as a therapeutic tool to create an environment conducive to contacting departed loved ones, thereby bringing emotional resolution. The question of whether it is actually effective in contacting "real" spirits has not been adequately addressed but the therapeutic benefits are commonplace. A more extensive study might prove valuable.
3. Examine more carefully some of the literary works that have been produced as a result of channeling. For example, a fairly high quality channeled version of the second half of Edwin Drood is available. Initial commentators have said it resembles an "early Dickens." Ed Kelly tracked it down and was amazed by it. It could be subjected to some of the more recent authorship-analysis tests which compile profiles of function words (like prepositions) to determine probable authorship. This would bring in a quantitative angle.
4. Elaborate upon all the possible explanations for channeled material. Most research dwells only on its validity as evidence for discarnate existence. However, it is equally, if not more interesting to see what sort of picture of the psyche emerges when we assume only unconscious processes are at work. The conclusion is that human consciousness is capable of exhibiting remarkable skills without a development process, can perform psychic feats, can create elaborate personalities and histories at will, and is capable of enormous self-deception.
5. Conduct a survey of the training of channelers to begin a systematic program of training subjects. The College of Psychic Sciences in London has the best reputation for such work. Again this is part of the general trend away from finding subjects to training and developing them.
6. Examine the psychology of mediumship: do certain personality scales or traits predict this ability? Is there perhaps a developmental process involved

Multiple Personality Research

1. Charles Tart hypothesized that there must be many high-functioning multiples in society who never enter therapy. A carefully organized search for such high-functioning multiples might turn up more.
2. Bruce Greyson reported that one person with multiple personality disorder had a near death experience and reported that she experienced her Inner Self Helper (ISH) as the being of light at the end of the tunnel. Since the ISH often plays a dispassionate organizing role in the course of treatment and often disappears at the end, there is a plausible link to suggest that ISHs might be discarnate spirit helpers, or, conversely, that the part of the deeper psyche that creates an externalized helper being constructs such an entity when approaching death. In either case, the ISH may provide us with a bridge between the two areas of research.
3. Charles Tart wondered if multiple personality clients experience a near-death experience from one or all of their separate identities. Small populations involved here, but the results could be important.

Other

1. Several reports have surfaced (Sylvia, 1997;Pearsall, 1998) of organ recipients with memories, feelings, and cravings which appear to be associated with the deceased donor. A recent murder was actually solved after an organ recipient correctly identified an accused murderer from a line-up based upon memories he seemed to inherit with his transplanted heart. This line of evidence raises particularly interesting questions about the nature of memory and bears upon the issue of survival, though the situation may be confounded by psychic influences parallel to those in psychometry, in which a person provides information about a remote person based upon an associated object or picture. To the knowledge of the participants, no systematic study has been undertaken, though John Mack reportedly has been collecting some cases.

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