

Survival of Bodily Death
An Esalen Invitational Conference
May 2 to 7, 2004

Discussion of the book "**Irreducible Mind**"
Ed and Emily Kelly

Ed Kelly opened the conference on Monday morning with an update on the book that is an outgrowth of this conference series, which will be titled **Irreducible Mind: Toward a Psychology of the Twenty-first Century**. The target audience for the book is undergraduate and graduate students in psychology and neuroscience. The hope is that the book can influence the outlook and choices of the up-and-coming generation of scholars.

Ed Kelly pointed out that others have written books similar to **Irreducible Mind**, most notably, the Nobel prize winning neuroscientist John Eccles and Roger Sperry. But in retrospect their attempts to argue for the independence of mind failed. Kelly thinks this failure resulted from not taking into account the entire range of data on the nature of the human mind (parapsychology, psi, telepathy, meditation research, NDEs, etc.). One reason they did not include this data is that prominent names in cognitive science and philosophy of mind, such as Nicholas Humphrey, still outrightly dismiss psi-phenomena. Having looked at Humphrey's arguments, Kelly thinks they amount to nothing more than opinion statements that comfort (rather than jostle) the mainstream consensus view.

Irreducible Mind will begin by deconstructing the currently inadequate views in cognitive science. On this note, Kelly thinks that John Searle's critique of computationalism is thorough and devastating. Thus, Kelly will build on that in the book. Searle's own position, "biological naturalism," is better than computationalism but still not adequate to the full scope of the data about the human mind. Kelly thinks there is plenty of solid evidence to show that biological naturalism is not only incomplete but false.

Emily Kelly spoke next and introduced the participants to one of her chapters in the book, which will cover two major types of psychophysiological phenomena: 1) those in which our mind seems to have affected our own body; and 2) those in which the mind seems to have affected the bodies of other persons or other physical objects. Kelly noted that, although the placebo effect is well known and commonly accepted in the medical community, no one really understands how it works. In this chapter Kelly will cover a spectrum of mind-body phenomena stretching from commonly accepted ones, like the placebo effect, to less well-known and accepted ones, like hypnotic suggestion, stigmata, maternal impressions, and unusually pronounced birth marks. Kelly's main point will be that these phenomena fall on a continuum with no sharp dividing line between those that are accepted by the scientific and medical community and those that are not, and that the evidence for much of the latter is as strong as the evidence for the former.

Alan Gauld has contributed to the chapter on memory in the book, updating many of the ideas he has presented in his own books. In particular, Gauld has looked at problems with the "trace theory" of memory, in which memory is thought to be "traces" (whatever those are?) that are recorded in the brain. In our everyday lives we somehow reactivate and recall these traces. But Gauld's chapter scuttles this widely held theory and exposes its fundamental weakness. Despite the millions of dollars pouring into research, the study of human long-term memory is still a wide-open field. Ed Kelly concluded by briefly discussing some of the finer details of contemporary neuroscience and the state of the field of cognitive science in general. He mentioned the work of some prominent names, such as Gerald Edelman, Francis Crick, and Stanislas Dehaene. Current theorizing emphasizes brain "modularity", the idea that the brain is made up of a large number of relatively independent "modules" that perform highly specific mental tasks. The activity of these modules is thought to be coordinated over long distances – a "global workspace" - by coherent EEG oscillations in the gamma range (roughly 30 to 70 Hz), and such large-scale coherent oscillations are widely thought to be necessary in order for the brain to solve the "binding" problem, and thus to synthesize coherent mental experience. This view seems to many scientists to be supported by the fact that when these electrical rhythms are deliberately disrupted, as in general anesthesia, the usual and desired result is that we become unconscious. However, a large and growing number of case reports shows that full or even enhanced consciousness can sometimes be present under conditions of adequate general anesthesia, even when it is accompanied by cardiac arrest. In a few such cases, moreover, the patients have correctly reported verifiable external events that occurred during their procedures. These results flatly conflict with the current mainstream consensus.

Overall, Ed and Emily are pleased with the progress on the book and are looking forward to someone else taking charge of the next book, which will focus less on deconstructing the inadequacies of contemporary cognitive science and instead attempt to build a viable theory of consciousness, in particular some form of interactive dualism, meaning the interaction of a semi-independent "mind" with the body and brain. Such a theory will be touched upon only briefly in the conclusion chapter to **Irreducible Mind**. Right now, a number of members in the group think that a transmissive theory of the mind (from William James and F.C.S. Schiller) is the most plausible hypothesis.

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