

CHAPTER 1 – CHALLENGING EVIDENCE

In the last chapter, I proposed five propositions that form the essential content of this book. They are:

- I. The personality exercises causal agency
- II. The transphysical worlds are part of the actual world
- III. The personality can function independently of its body, even during the life of the body.
- IV. The personality survives the death of its physical body, and has its ongoing existence in transphysical worlds.
- V. Reincarnation is part of the human life-cycle.

In this chapter, I will review the evidence that supports these propositions.

While some of this evidence has been produced in scientific laboratories under strict experimental controls, much of the evidence relevant to personality survival and reincarnation (only summarized here) consists of carefully researched case studies. For example, evidence for near death experiences can be produced in conversation only with those who claim to have had the experience. This forces us to rely on the perspicacity and truthfulness of the participants and the witnesses whose stories constitute the core of anecdotal accounts. Can we take such evidence seriously?

In considering this issue, I want to begin by acknowledging that the experimental method has brought to science a degree of objectivity, accuracy and replicability unmatched by any other means of establishing evidence. And I want to point out that methods of experimental science, while perfectly suited to the investigation of inorganic and, to a lesser extent, to the investigation of biological systems in nature, fails us entirely when we are dealing with the richness, diversity, and complexity of our ongoing personalities. In the study of personality, we cannot achieve anything like scientific objectivity, and we simply do not have the power to replicate any single moment in the life of a personality. My concern in this book is with the “long trajectory” of human life; with the survival, by the personality, of bodily death, and by the destiny of personality in the cycle of

reincarnation. We simply cannot expect to investigate this issue by means of scientific experiments with numerical results.¹

This brings us back to the issue of anecdotal evidence that I will summarize in this chapter. Anecdotal evidence are the only data we can share with each other regarding the nature and prospects of the personality as it is lived.

Scientists often dismiss such evidence with a catchphrase: “The plural of anecdote is not evidence.” This sounds clever but it sweeps under the rug the key function of anecdotes —something found even in the strictest of scientific research. By and large, unless we actually do the experiments, the only way we can know the results of scientific experiments is by anecdotal reports —for instance, in journals or at conferences. These anecdotes, like all reports, are liable to distortion, particularly when the emotional (and funding) stakes are high. In order to minimize the danger, the scientific community insists on independent verification. Once that is achieved, everyone but the original experimenter and the scientists who replicated the events is now left with more anecdotes. It is then assumed that multiple anecdotes about the same experiment are more evidential than just one. The entire edifice of worldwide scientific cooperation is based on simple, (and, usually, well warranted) faith in anecdotes about experiments.

So, rather than taking seriously the dismissive quip, scientists would do well (1) to realize that when it comes down to it most of what they know about science is inevitably anecdotal; and (2) to keep in mind a much more pertinent dictum: “*Absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.*”

In this book, therefore, I do accept as evidential the reports of instances of unusual human capacities when witnessed and investigated by researchers with reputations for high intelligence, high competence, and high integrity. And here, too, the more instances of an anecdote I hear, the more credibility I give it. For example, if I hear about a single case of a near-death experience, I might dismiss it as an aberrant dream-like wish-fulfillment produced by a stressed brain. But when various distinct anecdotes begin to show

¹ I have developed these ideas in more depth in Weiss, Eric, *The Doctrine of the Subtle Worlds*, Proquest, 2003., chapter 1

remarkable similarities, when they begin to appear more and more frequently in my readings and conversations and, finally, when I can, myself, speak to people and hear their own personal anecdotes about a near-death experience, then the anecdotes become evidential.

The various types of evidence presented here have met the tests outlined in the last paragraph. These are reports of instances of unusual human capabilities that are regularly reported in ancient spiritual texts, that are regularly reported by primal peoples, that have been witnessed by multiple reliable witnesses, on many separate occasions, and that (in a number of cases) I have personally verified by speaking with people who have had similar experiences. Some of these capacities I have verified first hand, and all of them are extensions of powers of personality we already exercise in the course of daily life.

One important application of the metaphysical system I develop in this book is to take these disparate data, and organize them into a coherent cosmology that exhibits our actual world as one in which:

- human beings do, in fact, enjoy a life cycle that comprises much more than just bodily life, and
- in which 400 years of scientific work would be expected to produce just the sorts of results that they have.

Before we begin to address that larger concern, and before we consider the evidence for each of the five propositions, let us pause to consider the historical evidence for survival and reincarnation in general.

Historical Evidence for Survival and Reincarnation

First, every civilization in history, and in prehistory, of which we have knowledge, believed in some form of afterlife and reincarnation. Of course, many civilizations, particularly those of primal peoples, held an understanding of individual identity very

different from that which we hold today.² Nonetheless, they all experienced the boundary between life and death as fluid, believed in some kind of contact with deceased persons, and most assumed a kind of recycling of personalities through family and tribe.

Many cultures recognized that honoring and dealing with their ancestors was a priority. They built special shrines and rewarded members of their communities who could communicate with the dead. It would be arrogant for us today to assume that these people were unenlightened or primitive. They were genetically identical to us and were at least as smart as we are. Throughout history, they experienced communication with ancestors as not only possible, but also as effective and valuable.

Furthermore, no pre-modern society made the strict distinction between “inner” and “outer” in quite the same way we do. The idea that reality might somehow exist “out there,” beyond experience, never occurred to them. Earlier civilizations assumed, rather reasonably, that they experienced reality as it actually is. The contents of dreams and apparitions were just as real for them as the contents of sensory perception—just in a different way. All pre-modern historical civilizations also understood the physical world to be accompanied by worlds of divine and demonic beings of various sorts, and understood human beings as possessing bodies that could function in those worlds. These beliefs have been exhaustively documented in J. J. Poortman’s *Vehicles of Consciousness*.³ These transphysical worlds appear in my fundamental propositions (Proposition II) and are necessary for the existence of personality survival as defined in this book. I will offer arguments for the existence of these worlds independent of the historical evidence, but it is nice to have the support of my ancestors.

Only modern industrial civilization—rooted in a metaphysics of reductionist materialism and, therefore, imagines that personality is a product of dead matter or brute energy—has

² For a fuller development of this point see, for example: Jean Gebser *The Ever-Present Origin*, trans. Noel Barstad with Algis Mickunas. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1985, and Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Volume 2: Mythical Thought*. Yale University Press, 1972.

³ J.J. Poortman, *Vehicles of Consciousness, Volumes 1-4*. The Theosophical Society of the Netherlands, 1954.

conceived the idea that the physical world is the whole of reality, and has held the idea that personality terminates with the death of its body.

Modern materialistic reductionism not only makes survival and reincarnation seem impossible, it also makes consciousness *per se* seem impossible. As an idea, materialistic reductionism has outlived its utility. The theoretical framework that I will be introducing here not only allows us to preserve all of the findings of modern science but also makes room for the wisdom of our magical, mythical, and classical ancestors.

Because the new metaphysical framework I am about to outline is so counterintuitive—*from the perspective of the old, but still dominant, paradigm of materialism*—I will now prepare the ground for what is to come by reviewing and expanding on the five fundamental propositions that form the core of my thesis.

Evidence that Personality Has Causal Agency (Proposition I)

Common Sense

Before we move on to more exotic forms of evidence, let's look at the evidence for this proposition that surrounds us daily. While scientific reductionism tries to tell us that our personalities are merely epiphenomenal and have no actual effects in the causally closed domain of the physical world, our entire lives are based on quite a contrary belief. While we are willing to accept reflexes, instincts, habits and various sorts of unconscious motives as determinants of our actions, nonetheless, in general, we know that it is we ourselves, as personalities, that make all of the major and many of the minor decisions of our lives. I decide how I will dress, where I will go, what I will say and so forth.

It is impossible to read a news story, a history or a biography that does not make innumerable references to choices made by personalities. It is also impossible to imagine any of the everyday feats of engineering we witness— construction of buildings and ships, for example—without recognizing the conscious purposes and decisions that lie behind their realization. Indeed, our entire legal system, which assigns responsibility to people for the decisions that they make, would be unintelligible if we did not credit personalities with causal effects in the actual world.

Only when our attention is directed by the very abstract ideas of modern science can we imagine personality to be void of causal efficacy. Indeed, the very real and significant act of judgment that condemns the personality to a non-causal status is itself a causal act performed by a personality. To put it simply, any personality that judges the personality to be epiphenomenal, and that strives to convince other personalities of this point of view, is engaged in a blatant performative contradiction.

We all live and act on the assumption that our personalities are causal agencies in the actual world.

Beyond the essential evidence from our own everyday experiences, however, other evidence suggests that the causal power of the personality is much greater than it appears in the normal course of our lives.

Unusual Causal Impacts of Personality on its own Body

A great deal of evidence suggesting that the mind has unusual causal influence on the body is presented in chapter three of *Irreducible Mind*.⁴ Emily Kelly, the author of that chapter, drawing from published research as well as from her own investigations, documents the following:

- Cases in which purely psychological factors trigger symptoms of full-blown diseases (such as mass hysteria in closely associated groups).⁵
- Studies correlating chronic negative emotions (such as depression or helplessness) and physiological illness.⁶
- Cases where people died suddenly, usually from cardiac arrest, after receiving a sudden emotional shock or (more rarely) sudden unusual joy.⁷
- Cases of “voodoo” death in which a person who has been cursed or otherwise led to believe “by another, usually authoritarian, person . . . that he or she is going to

⁴ Edward F. Kelly, Emily Williams Kelly, Adam Crabtree, Alan Gauld, Michael Grosso, Bruce Greyson. *Irreducible Mind: Toward a Psychology for the 21st Century*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2006.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 124-125.

die at a particular time does in fact die [at that time].”⁸ Some of these occur entirely outside religious or “magical” contexts, as in the case of a man who had a bad asthma attack “after his mother had cursed him for going against her wishes, saying ‘something dire will happen to you’ as a result.”⁹ He had several more attacks over the next several months, always after encounters with his mother. Finally he was found semi-comatose an hour after a conversation with his mother in which she repeated her warning, and he died twenty minutes later.¹⁰

- Many cases in which people “postpone their death until after some meaningful occasion, such as the arrival of a loved one or a significant day.”¹¹
- Cases documenting the power of placebo effects—even a case in which patients given a placebo surgery did better than those who received the real thing.¹²
- Cases of sudden whitening of the hair or skin.¹³
- Cases of false pregnancy, in which the signs are so convincing that even doctors are often fooled.¹⁴
- Stigmata, and related phenomena in which people see another person get injured, and develop corresponding wounds on their own bodies; or in which people reliving traumatic experiences reproduce the wounds from the original incident ; and cases in which people can make geometrical blisters, or even writing, appear on their skin merely by willing or imagining it.¹⁵
- Cases in which different personalities all belonging to one person with Dissociative Identity Disorder require different prescriptions for their eyeglasses, and have different allergies.¹⁶

⁸ Ibid., p. 125

⁹ Ibid., p. 126

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 126.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 129.

¹² Ibid, p. 143.

¹³ Ibid., p. 148.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 149-152.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 156-159.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 167-174.

In all of these cases, the personality seems quite clearly to be exercising unusual influence on the body with its own, independent, causal power. But we can go one step further, and also document cases in which the personality has a *direct* causal effect *on the bodies of other individuals*.

Causal Impact of Personality on Other Bodies

Here is a sampling of the evidence that suggests causal impact of personalities on other bodies without the mediation of its own body.

- First, in daily life, considerable evidence exists for “empathy,” or direct communication of feeling states between personalities, unmediated by physical causes. Many of us have the experience of “feeling vibes,” which happens, for example, if we walk in on a room where people are fighting, and feel the anger thickening the air. While these experiences can, usually, be “explained away” by references to elaborate processing of subtle sensory cues, in fact many of us take this sort of empathy as a regular phenomenon, and make extensive use of it in daily life. In the metaphysical system I will present and explore here, it is very natural to think of this sort of empathy as a direct causal connection among personalities. Daily life and parapsychological research also provide evidence for various forms of “telepathy,” or direct sharing of thoughts among individuals.¹⁷ Sigmund Freud, though generally a materialist, was nonetheless convinced of the reality of telepathy by his exploration of dreams.¹⁸
- Numerous cases have also been documented in which one person takes on the symptoms of another—for example, “couvade,” in which a man takes on many of the symptoms of his pregnant wife.¹⁹
- More striking are cases of “maternal impression” in which a fetus manifests characteristics that can be attributed only to the experiences of the mother while the fetus is developing. One case documents a woman who was, during her pregnancy, shocked and impressed by seeing someone on the street with a

¹⁷ Rene Warcollier, *Mind to Mind*, Hampton Roads Publishing Company, 2001.

¹⁸ Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy, 1870-1901*, Oxford University Press, 2002

¹⁹ Kelly et. Al., *Op., Cit.*, p. 219-221.

birthmark covering half of her face. Her child was born with a similar birthmark.²⁰

- Other cases include a woman who could “reproduce on her skin [by entirely subjective means] target pictures or writing. Not only could she “somehow translate an image presented to her normally into corresponding marks on her skin” (but in some instances “the target information often had not been conveyed to her in any normal sensory way” (p. 225)—in other words, it was communicated via some kind of extra-sensory modality, such as telepathy.²¹
- Many cases have been documented in which a hypnotist could put a subject into a trance *without being in any way physically present to the subject*.²²
- Finally, evidence from a number of cases attest to the healing power of distant prayer.²³

These cases show not only that the personality of one person can exercise causal influence on his or her own body, but also that a personality can exercise, without physical mediation, causal influence *on the bodies of others*. In addition, as we will see when discussing the Ian Stevenson evidence below, cases exist in which it appears that a recently deceased personality produced marks on the body of a subsequent incarnation.

Influence of Personality on Inorganic Systems

In considering the causal power of the personality, we must also look at the considerable evidence demonstrating that personalities can influence the behaviors of inorganic systems. These studies usually involve the ability of individuals to influence the outcome of random events through the simple act of intending to do so.

Robust results, obtained in rigorous experiments, have been documented in Robert Jahn and Brenda Dunne’s *Margins of Reality*²⁴ and Dean Radin’s *The Conscious Universe*.²⁵

²⁰ Ibid., p. 221-224.

²¹ Ibid., p. 225.

²² Ibid., p. 226-227.

²³ Ibid., p. 227-230.

For years, scientists have experimented with digital random number generators (RNGs) where people will, wish, or intend for more ones or zeros to show up with a frequency greater than chance. Because these machines operate via quantum effects, and are shielded from any physical influence by humans, the results should turn out to be statistically random. Nevertheless, when human subjects are tested to see if they can influence the behavior of the RNGs using only their minds, the results reveal patterns significantly greater than chance. The experimental system is electronic, operating close to the speed of light, and so scientists have been able to perform millions of trials. Meta-analysis reveals statistically significant results demonstrating some kind of psychokinetic (PK) effect.

Besides these cases in which personalities influenced the results of random number generators, cases of so-called “macro PK” have been documented—in which skilled subjects, ostensibly using only the power of their minds, have levitated tables, bent spoons, and made clocks run backwards.²⁶

These are just a small selection of the kinds of data documented in *Irreducible Mind* and other sources. When we review this body of evidence as a whole—including the accumulated weight of scientific data, historical and cross-cultural persistence, contemporary personal reports, and other anecdotal sources—it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that some aspect of who we are can both function independently of the body and survive bodily death.

Summary

Considering (1) the fact that we all live with the assumption that our personalities exercise causal power over our own bodies; (2) that the entire moral and legal foundation of our civilization rests on the assumption that the personality generally controls and is, therefore, responsible for, the behaviors of its body; (3) that we have strong evidence for

²⁴ Jahn, Robert and Brenda Dunne. *Margins of Reality: The Role of Consciousness in the Physical World*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Janovich, 1987.

²⁵ Radin, Dean. *The Conscious Universe: The Scientific Truth of Psychic Phenomena*. San Francisco: HarperEdge, 1997.

²⁶ see Kelly and Kelly, *Irreducible Mind*, Op. Cit., pp. 199-218.

the power of the personality to create sickness and health, to postpone death, and even to produce voluntary stigmata; (4) the evidence for direct causal influence by one personality on another; and (5) the extensive evidence for the direct, unmediated influence by the personality on inorganic systems (such as random number generators)—we have more than ample reason to believe my second proposition: that the personality has the power within itself to create effects in the actual world.

Furthermore, the data of parapsychology—such as PK, clairvoyance and remote viewing—demonstrate that the human mind is capable of interacting with the physical world *directly*, without the medium of the body. Whatever we are, we not only have the capacity to operate a body but also have the capacity to have causal effects in the world around us not mediated through our bodies.

Bottom line: Whatever a human personality is, it appears to have the ability to affect the waking world in meaningful and significant ways directly, without working through the body. We do not know yet where the outer limits of this ability lie.

Given the impressive weight of all the parapsychological data, plus our own commonplace direct experiences of influencing our bodies through choices generated in our minds, the worldview of modern science is seriously called into question. I present this work with a clear understanding that the standard metaphysics of materialism—the view that nothing ultimately exists but physical matter or energy—is not only incomplete but also inadequate. We need a much more comprehensive set of metaphysical assumptions if we are to account for indisputable realities such as consciousness itself, our thinking, feeling personalities, as well as explain “anomalous” data that indicate the human personality has the capacity to survive physical death, and even to reincarnate through multiple lives.

Evidence for Existence of Transphysical Worlds (Proposition II)

In the chapters that follow, I aim to establish the plausibility of the existence of the transphysical worlds. Such worlds are alien to the sensibilities of modern, scientifically informed common sense. Consequently, it is difficult to find works that discuss the existence of these worlds. Nevertheless, I take it that the evidence in support of

propositions III and IV below also counts as evidence for the existence of the transphysical worlds. Furthermore, much that is difficult to understand about our waking lives can also be illuminated by the doctrine of the transphysical worlds.

Evidence for Independent Functioning of Personality (Proposition III)

The idea that the personality can survive the death of its body will be much more plausible if it can be shown that the personality can function independently from its body while the body is alive. Evidence for this idea falls under several different headings.

Dreams

In modern times, we have come to think of dreams as entirely private shows put on for us by our brains when they are unoccupied with the processing of external sensory data. This idea, however, is not without its difficulties.

If it is, indeed, possible for our brains to generate what appear to be entire worlds for us to explore, and to populate those worlds with various objects and the expressions of other seemingly human and non-human personalities, then how can we know whether or not our waking worlds are merely unusually coherent dreams? And if we can't tell the difference between waking and dreaming, then how can we know whether or not other people are merely figments of our brains? In other words, the idea that dreams are entirely private productions raises a serious problem of solipsism—it makes it plausible to imagine that we are the only actual personalities in existence, and that everyone else is merely a projection of our own brains.

Other difficulties exist with the idea that dreams are entirely private (I have explored this elsewhere).²⁷ For now, I simply invite you to consider not the differences, but the *similarities* between waking life and dreaming life. In both, we are dealing with process and the flow of time (of course, time may behave very differently in dreams than it does in waking life; nevertheless, events in dreams can be sorted, more or less, into before and after). In both cases, we are dealing with some form of space in which various objects are

²⁷ Weiss, *Ibid.*

arrayed. In both, we are a subject at the center of a situation involving multiple objects, and with various sorts of causal relations among ourselves and those objects.

Even though dreams are often confused and confusing, and difficult to remember, I would like you to at least consider that dreams are glimpses into transphysical worlds. To the extent that we are willing to accept this, we can interpret our ordinary dreams as evidence for the independent functioning of the personality in transphysical worlds.

Near-Death Experiences

Near-death experiences (NDEs) are “generally understood to be the unusual, often vivid and realistic, and sometimes profoundly life-changing experiences occurring to people who have been either physiologically close to death, as in cardiac arrest or other life-threatening conditions, or psychologically close to death, as in accidents or illnesses in which they feared they would die.”²⁸ These experiences often include the sense of floating outside the body and of seeing events transpiring around the body while it is unconscious (sometimes in ways that can be clearly verified afterwards). They also frequently include the feeling of moving through a tunnel with a bright light at the end. People experiencing NDEs regularly report clarity of perception and thought greater than that enjoyed during normal waking life, and even though “according to conventional psycho-physiological theory, such activity should be diminishing or even not possible.”²⁹ Many people who have experienced NDEs come away from the experience with the conviction that they have functioned independent of their physical bodies, and that they will do so after they die. These experiences are relatively common, being experienced by 10-20 *per cent* of patients who are close to death.³⁰

After a thorough analysis of the data, and of the various explanations that have been proposed, the authors of *Irreducible Mind* conclude: “We should not rule out categorically that NDEs are essentially what many of those who experience them think

²⁸ Kelly et. al, Op. cit., p. 369.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 386.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 371

they are—namely, evidence that they have temporarily separated from their body and, moreover, may survive the permanent separation that occurs at death.”³¹

Out of Body Experiences

NDEs are closely associated with out-of-body experiences (OBEs). In fact, many NDEs are reported to begin with OBEs, and then move into more elaborate scenarios. “In an OBE, a person experiences his or her consciousness as having separated from the body, but also as continuing to function normally.”³² It is estimated that as many as 10 *per cent* of the general population has had these experiences.³³

A large literature exists on the subject of OBEs, most prominent are the extensive personal records of OBEs compiled by Monroe, Bruce and Vijera.³⁴ Reports include veridical perceptions of events that could not have been sensed by the body, communication with other individuals who are, at the time of the contact, asleep and in a dream-like condition, and communication with deceased individuals.

Some OBEs include “reciprocal apparitions” in which one person deliberately tries to “project” his or her personality or is having a spontaneous OBE, or is having a dream in which he or she seems to go to a distant location, while a person at that location, unaware of the first person’s experience, sees an apparition of that person. One famous case from 1863 involves a Mrs. Wilmot, whose husband was onboard a ship on a storm-tossed Atlantic crossing. She “had an experience, while she was awake during the middle of the night, in which she seemed to go to her husband’s stateroom on the ship, where she saw him asleep in the lower berth and another man in the upper berth looking at her. She hesitated, kissed her husband, and left. The next morning Mr. Wilmot’s roommate asked him, apparently somewhat indignantly, about the woman who had come into their room

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 391.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 394.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 396

³⁴ Robert Monroe. *Far Journeys*, New York: Doubleday, 1985; Robert Bruce, *Astral Dynamics*. Charlottesville, Va.: Hampton Roads, 1999; Waldo Viera, *Projections of the Consciousness*. Rio de Janero: International Institute of Projectiology, 1995.

during the night.”³⁵ A number of more recent cases of the same type have been reported.³⁶

Lucid Dreams

Lucid dreams are closely related to OBEs and NDEs.. I have had lucid dreams several times, and thinking about this experience brought my attention to the fact that there is a kind of taking-for-granted that pervades my dream experiences. I may have a very strange dream in which I am doing strange things in strange places, but while I am dreaming, it always seems perfectly normal. It’s as if I’ve always been there, in that dream space, and the dream experience is entirely undisturbed by memories of waking life. In lucid dreams, that taking-for-granted is interrupted. Suddenly, it is “I,”—my waking self, the person that I am in my everyday, waking life—who is there in the dream. I remember having been awake, I appreciate the uncanny strangeness of the dream space, and anticipate waking up. The waking “I” brings with it to dream space whatever lucidity and clarity of purpose it can muster in waking life. Lucid dreams can merge into OBEs, and vice versa. An extensive literature on lucid dreams also exists.³⁷

Summary

Out-of-body experiences and lucid dreams are felt, by those who have them, to be clear instances of the functioning of the personality independent of the body. People who have these experiences are often convinced they will survive bodily death. Near-death experiences are related to lucid dreams and out-of-body experiences in that lucid dreams and near-death experiences not infrequently lead to out of body experiences. Near-death experiences are particularly evidential in that they happen under conditions of intense medical monitoring, and it can be shown that while they are happening, the electrical activity of the brain is entirely flat-lined. Thus they seem to be clear instances of personality functioning in the absence of the normal bodily support. Given that dreams can turn into lucid dreams, which are essentially identical to out of body experiences, we may also choose to take our ordinary dreams as further evidence of our ability to function

³⁵ Kelly and Kelly, Op. cit., p. 396.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ For example, see Stephen LaBerge, *Exploring the World of Lucid Dreaming*. Ballantine Books, 1991.

independently of the physical body. This evidence will, of course, be most convincing to those who have had the relevant experiences, but these experiences are fairly widespread. The evidence so far presented supports the idea that, at a very minimum, ten to twenty percent of the population has experienced these phenomena first hand. Given the suspicion in which these experiences are held, it is probable that these experiences are even more widespread than the currently available evidence suggests. My own informal research in my own classes (which are composed, of course, of people who are open to and curious about these matters and which, therefore, say nothing about the general population) suggests that as many as 60-70 per cent of my students have had or are regularly having these experiences. This summarizes the evidence for Proposition III.

Evidence for Personality Survival After Death in Transphysical Worlds (Proposition IV)

Evidence from Ian Stevenson

Ian Stevenson's evidence, which I will present shortly when I discuss reincarnation (Proposition V), is also relevant to the issue of personality survival. Stevenson's evidence is extensive and careful documentation of "Cases of the Reincarnation Type (CORT)"—cases of young children with vivid and demonstrably accurate recollections of previous lives—usually of lives that were recent in time and close in space to the life they are now living. I introduce this evidence here because twenty percent (20%) of his cases include reports of what the personality was doing during its sojourn out of the body. This evidence includes:

Evidence from mediums

The most glamorous evidence we have for personality survival comes from mediums. Mediumship, also known as "channeling," involves special individuals who claim to be able to communicate directly with various sorts of disembodied entities—spirits, demons, and disincarnate people—and to relay messages from those entities to the living. Awareness of mediumship has grown so broad and mainstream that some more commercially minded mediums now practice their art on television. I will not attempt to review the vast literature on this subject, other than to note that the descriptions of the

afterlife communicated by mediums often seem to be corroborated by the descriptions of afterlife conditions given by individuals who report on these matters in terms of their OBEs.

Reports of Extra-bodily Activities of Personality

Some of the most important evidence for survival has been already outlined when I discussed the evidence for Proposition III—i.e., that the personality can function independently of its body. Some evidence, particularly among reports of out-of-body experiences, supports the idea that personality may travel about in the space of our waking lives.³⁸ The vast majority of these reports, however, attest to the existence of strange and wondrous worlds that transcend the physical world in their variety of form and function, and in the freedom and profound adequacy of self expression that the personality can find in them.³⁹

Once we take our own experiences of these worlds (as, at least, in dreams), and the stories of these worlds that we hear from others, as evidence for the ability of the personality to function independently of its body, then it makes sense for us to take the contents of these stories as evidential as well.

Without going into a detailed analysis of the many stories to be found in the literature, I want to propose that the type of world these stories imply has been extensively explored in popular fiction.

Here are a few examples of this exploration, distinguished from many others only because of their vividness in my own memory:

- The environments explored by Dr. Strange, a long-time character in comics of that name published by Marvel Comics

³⁸ Some authors, however, suggest that even in out-of body-experiences that appear to be in space and time of waking life, there are always details out of place – which suggests that such experiences happen in those portions of the transphysical worlds that most closely approximate that of our daily lives.

³⁹ What is probably the most exquisitely evocative description of these worlds in all of English literature is to be found in Book II of Part I of *Savitri*, (Sri Aurobindo, *Savitri*, 3rd ed., Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1970).

- Movies such as *Roger Rabbit* and *What Dreams May Come* with Robin Williams.⁴⁰
- The environment inhabited by the Worm-Hole-Aliens who serve as religious prophets in the television series *Star Trek Deep Space Nine*.
- *Neuromancer*⁴¹ and the cyberpunk tradition to which it belongs, all imagine cyberspace very much as the astral world is depicted in the Theosophical literature⁴²

These are all descriptions, under the safety of science fiction, of the types of transphysical worlds that people enter when they are functioning in a mentally conscious way, and with some continuity of memory, outside their physical bodies. These fictional explorations are far from the sort of aesthetically, ethically and intellectually coherent cosmology that we need for deeper investigation of these issues, but it is evidence that awareness of these experiences and a willingness to entertain them—even if only “in fiction”—is growing.

The need to weld these early imaginings into a new cosmology is not being heard in the halls of mainstream academia. Indeed, the very issue of transphysical worlds has been anathema to mainstream academics during the last four hundred years.⁴³ However, as we have already seen, we have no need to start from scratch in such an undertaking. A multi-world cosmology of some sort was held by all cultures with the notable exception of the modern industrial West. Particularly relevant to the model developed in this book, a

⁴⁰ Who Framed *Roger Rabbit*, Director: Robert Zemeckis, Disney Home Video, 2003. *What Dreams May Come*, Director: Vincent Ward, Polygram Filmed Entertainment, 2003.

⁴¹ William Gibson, *Neuromancer*, Ace Hardcover; 20th edition 2004.

⁴² A. E. Powell has admirably summarized the Theosophical cannon in Powell, A. E. *The Astral Body*, Wheaton, Il. :Quest, 1972.

_____. *The Causal Body and the Ego*. London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1978.

_____. *The Etheric Body*. Wheaton, Il :Quest, 1972.

_____. *The Mental Body*. London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1975.

_____. *The Solar System*. London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1930; reprint Mokelumne Hill, CA: Health Research, 1985.

⁴³ Poortman, Op. Cit.

multi-world cosmology was developed by the Vedic tradition in India and Tibet, and has been tested and refined by many generations of yogis.

This Vedic cosmology also has been expressed, with increasing clarity and vigor, by a number of prominent—if extra-academic—writers over the past 150 years. A sampling of these authors include Emmanuel Swedenborg,⁴⁴ Madam Blavatsky,⁴⁵ Annie Besant⁴⁶, C. W. Leadbetter⁴⁷ and other, more recent Theosophists such as Alice Bailey⁴⁸, Rudolph Steiner⁴⁹ and Sri Aurobindo⁵⁰.

These various authors all agree on a cosmology that supports both the existence of the physical world and a variety of transphysical worlds. All of them agree that personality survives the death of its physical body and enjoys further experiences after that death in transphysical worlds. And each of them provides a coherent interpretation for the various stories that are told by modern explorers concerning the adventures of the personality while out of its body.

All of this together amounts to what we might term a “circumstantial” case for personality survival. There is no particular phenomenon that we can isolate and replicate that somehow proves the existence of personality survival. In fact, it is difficult to imagine what such a phenomenon might be. But what we do have is:

- Evidence supporting the proposition that the personality can function independently of its body in dreams, lucid dreams, out-of-body experiences and near-death experiences, even when the electrical activity of the brain is flat-lined.
- Evidence that the personality has causal effects in the physical world—by deciding on the behaviors of its physical body, by directly impacting the feelings and thoughts of other without the mediation of the physical body, and (for

⁴⁴ Emanuel Swedenborg, *The Universal Human and Soul-Body Interaction*, Paulist Press, 1984.

⁴⁵ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Quest Books, 1993.

⁴⁶ Annie Besant, *Ancient Wisdom: An Outline of Theosophical Teachings*, Kessinger Publishing, LLC

⁴⁷ C. W. Leadbetter, *Inner Life, Society of Metaphysicians Ltd; Facsim. of 1910 Ed edition 1999*.

⁴⁸ Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, Lucis Publishing Co., New York, 1977.

⁴⁹ Rudolph Steiner, *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and its Attainment*, Anthroposophic Press.

⁵⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, 2d American ed., Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 1990.

example in remote viewing and psychokinesis) of having a causal impact on the behaviors of inorganic systems.

- Stories from Ian Stevenson's CORT data, which gain strength from their association with the well verified cases of reincarnation that it accompanies.
- All the stories gathered from the extensive literature on dreams, lucid dreams, out-of-body experiences, near-death experiences, and the activities of mediums.
- The corroboration of these stories by people of the historical past who were no less intelligent than we are.
- The ordering of these stories into a general multi-world cosmology that is so widespread and pervasive that Aldous Huxley and others called it "The Perennial Philosophy."

As this book progresses, I hope to strengthen this evidence still further by showing how it not only is compatible with modern science but can actually help to explain certain phenomena with which post-modern science is struggling.

The Stevenson Data

Probably the most conclusive body of evidence for survival and reincarnation is the research done by Dr. Ian Stevenson, a psychiatrist from the University of Virginia. During years of fieldwork in India, Sri Lanka, Africa and Europe he discovered and documented multiple cases of very young children who had vivid and detailed memories of previous lives.⁵¹ At three or four years of age, they said things such as "I really don't belong here, I belong in another house" or "My sister is named _____ and my brother is named _____. My cat is named _____. But in that lifetime I was killed in _____ way."⁵² When Stevenson interviewed these children he found that almost all of them claimed to have lived a previous life in the recent past and in geographical

⁵¹ Ian Stevenson. *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*. University Press of Virginia, 1966. Ian Stevenson. *Cases of the Reincarnation Type, Volume I, II, III, & IV*, University Press Of Virginia, 1975.

⁵² *Children Who Remember Previous Lives: A Question of Reincarnation* (revised edition. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2001).

proximity to the location of their current life. Typically, they reported detailed stories about prior family lives, often in other villages they had never visited in this life, and, when checked out, the details of their stories were confirmed. In many cases, the people involved had died at a young age, and usually suffered a violent death. Frequently, Dr. Stevenson found birthmarks on the children's bodies corresponding to the wounds that had killed the person in a previous life (the circumstances of the deaths were confirmed by local records).

For example, one person had been shot through the throat with a shotgun, and the bullet had gone right through and out the back. In this life, the ostensibly reincarnated man has a matching birthmark on his neck. Even more curious, when Stevenson and his team looked closely at the subject's skull they found he had birthmarks where the exit wounds would have been as well.

Over the years, since the early 1960s, Stevenson investigated and meticulously documented thousands of such cases. Quite often, he arrived at the site of the previous-life incident before news of the case of a reincarnated child could have traveled from town to town. Nevertheless, the location and other reported details about the circumstances of the death (often including names) were confirmed. Stevenson's research, documented scientifically, was published in *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* and in four volumes of *Cases of the Reincarnation Type*.⁵³ To an objective, unbiased reader, Stevenson's work, based on robust data, constitutes powerful evidence for reincarnation. In fact, I consider this evidence to be scientific confirmation that at least some people, under certain circumstances, die and are reborn in another body. This is momentous, indeed, and has not received anything like the attention it deserves.

I regard Stevenson's data as substantial proof that at least one type of reincarnation—the type that occurs when a personality leaves a physical body that has died and then, after some interval, reincarnates directly in a new body—is regularly taking place.

⁵³ Ibid.

Evidence for other modes of reincarnation

It is important to note, however, that this type of reincarnation does not seem, on the surface at least, to be the general rule. Very few young children speak about their previous lives. The vast literature on the subject, nevertheless, suggests that reincarnation is a universal phenomenon.

Accounts drawn from Sri Aurobindo and other Theosophically inspired sources suggest that a more frequent type of reincarnation involves first the survival of the personality for some unspecified, but finite, duration in transphysical worlds, then a death of the personality, and then some period of time which is characterized as a “soul” existence.

I will return to this subject and explore it in more depth in Chapter 11. The point I want to make now is that reincarnation of this type does not involve the ongoing existence of the personality *per se*. Rather, it suggests a model in which each personality is unique and mortal, but that each personality is some sense an expression of a soul, and that it is the soul, not the personality that reincarnates.

Buddhists, who reject the existence of the soul but still maintain a doctrine of reincarnation have suggested at least one model in which there is no survival of bodily death in the sense that we are discussing here, but there is still a form of reincarnation that establishes a causal (karmic) connection between two successive personalities.⁵⁴ The evidence for these other types of reincarnation are, it seems to me, less robust.

Arguments made for reincarnation on philosophical grounds go back as far as Plato. Sri Aurobindo makes a particularly sophisticated an argument of this type in his book *The Problem of Rebirth*.⁵⁵ Anecdotal evidence for rebirth comes from “past-life memories,” supported somewhat by data obtained by psychics in “past-life readings.”

Past-life memories are, at least in some circles, far from uncommon, but many of them are difficult to credit. Some of them seem almost mechanical as, for example, when

⁵⁴ Bhikkhu Nanamoli (trans.), *The Path of Purification (Vishddhimagga)*, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka, 1975, p. 451.

⁵⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *The Problem of Rebirth*, Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press.

someone with healing talent discovers a past life as a great healer; and some of them seem entirely too flattering, as when an otherwise unremarkable person remembers himself as having been Napoleon and Genghis Khan. But past-life memories are sometimes quite surprising, and can have a profound impact on the person having them. I have had some personal vivid experiences that I am tempted to interpret as past-life memories. These consisted of sudden, and very vivid, first-person recollections of scenes from other times and other places, as lived through other bodies with different personalities from mine. These memories were far from flattering, though they were related to psychological issues I was working with at the time the memories occurred. I am undecided as to the evidential value of such experiences.

In this book, I will take Stevenson's evidence for at least one type of reincarnation as valid, and I will give the benefit of doubt to the scant evidence for other types of reincarnation. I will explore ways in which the metaphysical ideas in this book can support the existence of reincarnation in ways that might suggest other ways of gathering evidence on this important issue.

Summary

This, then, is a survey of the evidence that supports my five propositions. At this point, I will turn attention to more theoretical issues and begin the task of developing a metaphysical and cosmological framework within which we can understand these propositions, and their relation to the truths of modern and post-modern science.