

## REPLIES TO DR. COOK'S REVIEW OF *PARAPSYCHOLOGY AND THANATOLOGY*

[*Editor's Note:* Following are the replies received from participants in the Parapsychology and Thanatology Conference to Dr Emily Cook's review in the preceding issue of the *Journal*. A response from Dr Cook to these replies will appear in the next issue.]

### *Reply from Robert Almeder*

Along with Emily Cook, I believe that the only substantive obstacle to the view that some essential part of human personality sometimes survives biological death is found in the so-called alternative explanation of crucial data put forth by those who think the data can be explained without our appealing to survival or independent existence of minds (as opposed to brains) simply by appealing to psi without survival. In short, when talking about the psi hypothesis as an alternative to the survival hypothesis, I am referring to the hypothesis offered by some to the effect that all the data in the richer reincarnation cases (or the richer OBE or mediumistic cases) can be equally well explained simply by appeal to a natural power of the mind to produce such data and phenomena under conditions of need or desire, and that these powers ultimately reduce simply to the properties of brain states or biological states caused by brains. On this latter view, while the phenomena in these cases are produced by psi (and hence not mediated in ordinary sensory ways), the explanation is ultimately a matter of mental causation understood solely in terms of properties of the human brain. When Braude, and others, for example, appeal to the psi hypothesis in order to explain the data in the richer reincarnation cases and in the OBE cases, the thesis they advance is that, however paranormal such data is, we can explain that data without having to admit personal survival simply by appealing to it as a product of brain states or biological properties of brain states. Again, on this alternative explanation, we need not believe in survival to explain the data; we only need to believe in psi as the cause. . . and belief in psi does not require belief in survival. This psi interpretation of the data is then offered as an equally plausible alternative hypothesis to survival.

Bypassing the possibility of simple deceit, fraud, hoax, sloppy methodology, cultural fabrication, and other failed alternative explanations of the data in richer cases, in showing the empirical falsifiability of this psi hypothesis *as an alternative explanation to survival in the richer cases*, we remove the last plausible alternative hypothesis to survival as an empirical or scientific fact. In showing that the psi hypothesis is arbitrary and unfalsifiable, we then offer the preeminently useful idea that there is no equally plausible empirically testable alternative hypothesis fitting the data, and that the alternatives offered in the name of psi are arbitrary and unfalsifiable. This resolves the survival/superpsi dilemma in favor of survival. No need to repeat here all the arguments on why that psi hypothesis is unfalsifiable.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Professor Cook suggests that I have a particularly narrow concept of psi. Of me, she says:

He seems to believe that, if one has the experience of being out of the body and seeing a picture in a room down the hall, then *either* one's mind really left the body and went down the hall to the picture, *or* one's mind perceived the picture from a distance by psi. He seems not to understand that, in a very important sense, these two possibilities are *not* antithetical. In *either case*—whether in some sense the mind separated from the brain or not—the perception of the picture was accomplished by psi in that it was some kind of perceptual process not mediated by a sensory experience. (pp. 349–50)

Yes, indeed, if I have the experience of being out of my body and seeing a picture in a room down the hall, then either my mind did leave my body or it did not and, if not, then we can explain my success in describing the picture in terms of psi. These two possibilities are antithetical, because I either leave my body or I do not. Moreover, if I had left my body, then certainly the knowledge I had acquired without it would not be mediated by sensory processes. I never claimed that if I had left my body and in that state acquired information, then the information was acquired by mediation through sensory experiences. Denying psi as an alternative hypothesis to survival for the richer cases does not imply that information acquired while separated from the body is not a matter of psi (i.e., information not mediated by sensory processes). Professor Cook goes on to say:

Almeder does not seem to understand the real dilemma behind the survival/superpsi problem. Again, in one very important sense, the survival hypothesis and the superpsi hypothesis are *not* antithetical positions. If, say, a medium provides some information that he or she did not learn normally,

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<sup>1</sup> But the reader may wish to consult a full discussion of this item in the last issue of the *Journal for the Society for Scientific Exploration* (Jan., 1997).

we can say that the information came *either* from a communication to the medium from a deceased person *or* from a (paranormal) communication from a living person. But again, in *either* case, the communication was accomplished by psi in the sense that the communication process was *not* a sensory one (which is the only definition of psi—however unsatisfactory—that we presently have, as Palmer reminds us (e.g., Palmer, 1987). When Almeder insists that some OBEs “cannot be explained in terms of psi, super or otherwise, or that psi cannot account for some mediumistic cases” (p 194), he misses the crucial point that the problem is *not* whether some kind of psi process was involved or not, but what the *source* of that psi process was. Even if one were to adopt the position as Almeder does, that an unlearned skill (such as speaking an unknown language) has been carried over from a previous life or personality to a new one, this is still a kind of psi process in that the skill—or the reincarnating mind that carries the capacity for the skill—was transferred from one psychophysical unit to another by some process that was not sensory. “Psi,” in other words, refers to the transference of capacities—including cognitive or sensory information, memories, emotions, behavioral traits, and skills—between two personalities, by some kind of direct process rather than a sensory process, and the problem for survival research is to trace that transference process back to the source to learn whether that source is a now-deceased, but still functioning, personality or a still-living personality. (p 350)

In response, if a trance medium provides some interesting information that he or she did not learn normally, then we might say that the information came from either the deceased or some living subject, perhaps the medium. But if we say it could not have come from a deceased person because we have this natural but sneaky and undetectable power to unpredictably produce such phenomena under conditions of stress, need, or desire, then the explanation offered is purely ad hoc. In such a world one could never confirm the hypothesis of survival. If a medium, for example, begins to speak in a foreign language that we know she/he has not learned and is the original language of the allegedly deceased person, we cannot explain that in terms of natural psi because outside of these cases there has never been a case where a person has spoken in a foreign language. no matter what the medium's psychological state of mind. Again, this makes appeals to psi an alternative to survival (in this case, purely ad hoc). One might just as well appeal to the action of God as a causal explanation of the data. Similarly, appealing to subconscious psi (as an equally plausible alternative) to explain the data; in the Osis-McCormick experiment that involved the use of the strain-gauge is equally arbitrary because there has never been a case in which anybody moved a physical object regularly and subconsciously without knowing that the object is there. This is not to deny, of course, that the

disembodied mind here is acquiring the information by psi, but it is to deny that we can plausibly explain the data in the case by saying we have as much evidence here for believing in disembodied existence as we do for believing in psi without disembodied mind. In the case of Sharada, for example, it would make no difference what her psychological profile is when it comes to explaining her being able to speak in an unlearned foreign language; no matter what a person's desires needs, or stresses, there has never been a case of a person speaking in an unlearned language outside of these cases. Saying it could be happening here is purely arbitrary as an alternative . . . and unfalsifiable. What evidence would the proponents of psi as an alternative explanation of the data accept as disconfirming their hypothesis?

The crucial point, then, is not whether or not there are two kinds of psi, the kind that goes with personal survival and the kind that does not. Survivalists, like myself, do not deny that. Rather, the crucial question is whether or not alternative hypotheses involving psi without involving survival are empirically falsifiable. As they are generally presented as alternative hypotheses, they are invariably ad hoc. That is a crucial point, because the thesis of survival, in contrast, is often falsifiable.

Recall, for example, William James's examination of Mrs. Piper's mediumship on the occasion when she was supposedly in contact with the deceased French physician, Monsieur Phinuit, who was speaking pidgin French through Mrs. Piper.<sup>2</sup> James thought that the knowledge conveyed by Mrs. Piper was paranormal (and a matter of psi) but suspected that Monsieur Phinuit was basically a dramatization on the part of the medium. He tested his hypothesis by speaking fluent French to Phinuit, only to find silence by way of a response. Mrs. Piper knew no French. For James, the conclusion was as simple as it was uncontroversial: this was clearly a case in which an appeal to psi was fine, but did not carry with it any justification for thinking Mrs. Piper was in contact with a surviving part of a post-mortem person. This makes survival empirically falsifiable as an alternative in cases of this sort. But if Phinuit had spoken in fluent French when James questioned him in French, and if we had known Mrs. Piper had not learned French, then the only way to undermine the survival hypothesis would have been to assert arbitrarily that in this case Mrs. Piper was speaking a language she had not learned, when in fact there has never been such a case outside these survival cases.

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<sup>2</sup>Phinuit was Mrs. Piper's supposed control at the time. I discuss this case more fully in *Death and Personal Survival* (Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham: 1992), p. 215. There were other reasons why James thought that Mrs. Piper, in these cases, was not in contact with the deceased, although she had paranormal knowledge.

That is the sort of appeal to psi as an alternative to survival we must avoid if the appeal to psi is to have any plausibility. Show us cases outside these cases where people can, for reasons of need or desire, speak fluently in a language they have not learned, play an instrument they have not learned, or move on a regular basis a distant object of whose existence they have no conscious knowledge, and then the appeal to psi as an alternative in these sorts of cases would make sense.

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*Reply from Stephen Braude*

Emily Cook's interesting and thoughtful review raises too many points to be addressed adequately in the space of a short reply, so I will focus primarily on remarks directed toward my own contributions to the conference.

Cook voices a complaint about my position on the competing survival and super-psi (or motivated psi) hypotheses. I have argued that one cannot dismiss the motivated psi hypothesis in a given case until investigators carry out sufficient psychological probing into the lives of the relevant individuals (which, almost invariably, Stevenson and other investigators do not do) And I believe I demonstrated that in the Sharada case, a small amount of probing shows that the motivated psi hypothesis needs to be taken seriously. Hence (I argued), that case demonstrates the importance of carefully studying the psychodynamics of other cases. Cook protests that it is unclear what counts as "sufficient psychological probing," and she points out that "*some people* might argue," (p 351, emphasis added) that no such probing is deep enough until motives are actually identified. So she charges me with having saddled investigators with "the impossible task of proving a negative."

But Cook has given no reason for thinking that I'm one of the people who accept no psychological probing as sufficient until putatively hidden needs and agendas have been uncovered. Indeed, I would have thought I made it clear that my position is more modest. But just for the record, let me state it again. Although there may be no conclusive way to determine whether or not explanations in terms of postmortem survival fare better than counterexplanations in terms of motivated psi among the living, certain cases may tip the scales in one direction rather than another. When a little depth psychological investigation reveals obvious, relevant motives (as in the Sharada case), we clearly

have a counterhypothesis worthy of serious consideration. And more generally, a reasonable amount of digging should reveal at least whether or not there is cause for suspicion and additional probing. If no such clues emerge, one can justifiably end the search. But what is not acceptable is rejecting the motivated psi hypothesis without taking a careful and sensitive look below the surface. Moreover, the difficulty (in principle) of falsifying the motivated psi hypothesis is no different in kind from, and is no more fatal than, what we encounter in cases of everyday psychological explanations.

In fact, it is odd that Cook regards as mistaken my "suggestion that we can determine the source of psi by examining the psychological needs of the subjects." It sounds as if she would have to reject as equally mistaken the analogous claim that we can learn about people's everyday reasons and causes for action by studying their psychological needs. I believe I have made it quite clear that I consider both projects to be Ultimately inconclusive, but also do-able. In fact, generating (strictly unfalsifiable) explanations of human behavior is essential just for getting through the day, and clearly some people are better at this than others. All I have suggested is that we apply the same aptitudes and sensitivity in generating psi hypotheses. I submit that most survival researchers have eschewed this practice either because (a) they lack the requisite aptitudes or (b) they fear their treatises will appear less scientific if they engage in depth- psychological conjectures.

I am also puzzled by Cook's complaint that, apart from those contributors who study the "tangentially relevant" phenomenon of NDEs, "not a single contributor to this conference was someone actively engaged in empirical research on the question of survival" (p. 346). I would say that claim is false for two reasons. First, Roll has for many years investigated ostensible haunting, apparition, and mediumship cases, and I also have investigated cases of apparent haunting and: mediumship (although I have yet to publish anything on them). My own reticence to publish in those areas reflects my general misgivings about the literature on survival (which I outline in my contribution to the conference) I have complained repeatedly that most work in the area (in addition to being conceptually naive) is empirically narrow, and I did not feel sufficiently well prepared to tackle the topic. But that brings me to the second, and perhaps more important, respect in which Cook's claim is false. It appears that Cook mistakenly considers only a certain kind of field work to count as empirical research into survival. However, I would argue that empirical research into survival proceeds along several different fronts, only one of which is actual field investigations into cases suggesting survival. For example, I would suggest it is equally important to study the exceptional human capacities of prodigies, savants,

mnemonists, multiples, and other dissociative virtuosos, the understanding of which is essential for generating and competently evaluating motivated psi alternatives to survival hypotheses, and that is an area in which I have done a good deal of work. I also submit that it is equally important to have a much deeper grasp of human abilities generally than one finds in the literature on survival, so that one can know (for example) whether or not and to what extent it is acceptable to generalize across abilities or compare learning a new language to learning to play bridge (see Braude, 1992a, 1992b, 1996, for more on this topic).

I was also puzzled by Cook's remark that "if survival of personal consciousness is a fact . . . then we will directly experience it one day" (p 347). First, if, as Cook says, this "direct experience of survival will be our only real 'proof' that such survival occurs," it is odd that she complains about the paucity of conventional advances in survival research supplied in the conference, as well as the inconclusive nature of motivated psi counter-explanations to survival hypotheses. If actual survival is the only way to know whether or not survival occurs, no conventional advances in survival research are possible. The best we can do, then, is to speculate competently.

Moreover, it is unclear what Cook means when she says we will "directly experience" our survival if it occurs. Does that mean we will know if we survive? One would think not, especially if there is survival without identity (a topic much discussed by philosophers). But even if our personal identity persists after death, so that in some nontrivial sense it is *I* that survives, there is no reason to insist that we would realize that fact. For all we know, survival might entail processes analogous to various humdrum forms of amnesia, self-ignorance, or stupidity that do not undermine identity in our daily lives. Depending on my mental impairments (or lack of mental development, as in the case of an infant), I might not know who I am from moment to moment. And Cook has offered no reason for thinking that these scenarios—much less their alleged postmortem counterparts—would undermine identity. But if experiencing our identity means simply that we have some experience or other, even if we do not know it is our experience, then that would not constitute personal evidence for, much less proof of, survival.

Finally, I would challenge Cook's concluding remarks on the relevance of the brain sciences and the philosophy of mind. Contrary to what Cook claims, there is no data from the neurosciences or anywhere else that "*demonstrate[s]* that mind is *wholly* dependent on the brain" (p 353, emphasis added). I also challenge her contention that further empirical research will settle long-standing issues in the philosophy of mind. Empirical research is never purely empirical, it always rests on a deep network of philosophical assumptions (for example, there is

nothing even remotely empirical in the very concept of a memory trace). No matter where you turn, you will merely find another nest of philosophical puzzles (that is what keeps people like me in business). Moreover, it is unlikely that developments in the philosophy of mind will settle the survival question. As Cook notes, the debate has been conducted for centuries, and it shows no signs of ending; only the form of the debate has changed. So there seems little cause for optimism. And besides, it is odd for Cook to make this claim; she has already conceded that nothing less than one's own survival will solve the problem.

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#### *Reply from Michael Grosso*

I understand Emily Cook's impatience with the slow progress of survival research. We needn't be told it's a stalemate, she observes, I would, however, like to comment on this interesting and, from one point of view, surprising stalemate.

First, that there is a stalemate is significant, for it implies that we have evidence at least suggestive of survival. For the uninformed skeptic, the survival hypothesis is apt to be a nonstarter. The good news is that we have started, we just haven't finished. Also, not everyone who has studied the data thinks it leads to a stalemate; some believe the evidence supports the view that some people do somehow survive bodily death.

Another point about this stalemate: in part, it results from a very peculiar type of argument. The superpsi hypothesis says it may be possible to explain away even the most compelling evidence of survival, I happen to believe that superpsi is a self-canceling maneuver, for the more you accept its near omniscient and omnipotent powers as an

explanatory principle, the more you let loose a genie of unlimited potential that makes survival more believable than it would be in the absence of superpsi. The stalemate may therefore be a concealed strength.

Cook and I agree that widening, as well as deepening, the survival-related database is an important concern; however, she notes that I failed to explain how the examples I gave relate to the survival hypothesis. For example, UFOs, haggings, or the physical phenomena of mysticism and mediumship I cannot go into these connections here

But I will make one point. It has been said that the problem with psi, and with survival evidence in particular, is that they lack cohesiveness; they don't seem to fit into any general outlook, paradigm, or model of reality as a whole. Cook mentions the importance of the mind-body problem. Do we have a theory of mind that renders survival plausible? One way to pursue this question would be to look at effects that prove the radical autonomy of mind presupposed by the idea of survival.

In other words, evidence that expands our idea of mental capacity is *indirectly* related to the survival question. The more we have such evidence, the more the antecedent probability of survival increases. The wider the context of understanding our potential mental capacities, the better for that widest of proposals, survival in an afterworld.

Consider a few examples. In the complex world of the UFO phenomenon one finds a paranormal overlap, especially with the ghostlike features of survival-related reports. So-called aliens are said, like ghosts, to pass through walls, or to levitate, or communicate via telepathy. This is data that needs to be looked at, we don't know what it will tell us, for or against the survival hypothesis, until we examine the parallels and differences.

Or, to take another example, phenomena of haggings, if they are as puzzling as some researchers hold, suggest that possibly unidentified disembodied presences are a relatively common feature hovering in the background of our mental life. The outleadings into the "other" world may be more numerous and subtle than we think. This, I think, would contribute to a more hospitable survival paradigm.

The physical phenomena of saints, yogis, mediums, savants, and shamans also suggest a wider view of our mental capacities. Myers, of course, didn't just look at direct evidence for survival, he looked at a spectrum of interrelated phenomena, including genius, inspiration, automatism, and so forth. Today we would add the savant syndrome. We need to continue on this complexifying path and bring in reports of UFOs, haggings, the physical phenomena of mediumship and mysticism, and perhaps a good deal more, if we hope to put the survival hypothesis into a more credible overview of things in general.

I would add, too, that with Myers, (and, more recently, with Michael Murphy in *The Future of the Body* [1992]), we need to puzzle over the survival question within the current evolutionary cosmology. Murphy argues for a continuum of extraordinary potentials of embodiment that gradually shade into survival and reembodiment. Survival would seem a less jarring hypothesis if we could demonstrate its position on a spectrum of bodily functions defined by their increasing freedom from physical constraints.

My last response to Emily Cook brings us back to the stalemate. Assume for a moment that this deadlock is insuperable. While I don't really believe this, it does seem that breaking it may prove exacting. Given our tantalizing situation, is there a next step that we can take? In my talk, I tried to say there was.

What happens after death isn't just a fascinating philosophical question. It will affect us all in a personal way. When I look at the evidence as it stands, I cannot bring myself to believe that I shall survive the death of my body. Nor, on the other hand, would I be surprised if I found that I did. There is a hurdle I cannot overcome, a feeling of conviction that eludes me. Breaking the deadlock, and producing the feeling of conviction, may be viewed as a practical problem, a kind of experiment. The next step then might be more like surrealism than science, an experiment directed toward producing a subjective conviction—toward changing our consciousness, leaping over the barriers of ratiocination.

Survival research forces us to question the limits of our epistemology; here I would pursue Bill Roll's idea that we study survival through the consciousness of the living and John Palmer's view that parapsychology is a probabilistic science. The kind of certitude some of us crave from the world of psi may forever elude us. The belief in immortality, as Plato said, may just be "a noble risk."

Call this the shamanic turn in survival research. The shaman is traditionally the expert at exploring "other" worlds while still very much an occupant of this world. Several possibilities present themselves, and the list could go on. We might, as Raymond Moody has recently attempted, be able to reproduce aspects of the near-death experience, through scrying and inducing apparitions of the dead. Using psychedelics to enter the "other" world here and now is another possibility, as is mediating, the way of the mystics, or fasting, or using techniques to induce out-of-body experiences.

The shamanic turn could go two ways: first, a new state-specific consensus may gradually emerge; and second, we may discover new matters of fact that confirmed or disconfirmed our hypotheses. This Tartean "state-specific" approach isn't meant to exclude or give up the quest for better evidence, respectably objective. On the contrary, it is the evidence

we already possess that lends validity to the type of experiment I'm recommending. If there weren't a robust body of data available, the shamanic turn would be a program for self-deception. And self-deception serves neither science nor our deep soul needs.

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*Reply from Justine E. Owens*

Emily Cook's critique of the Parapsychology and Thanatology conference focused in part on the limited attention to the "survival/super-psi" problem and the lack of real progress in inching this "major stumbling block" out of the path of survival research. This either/or explanatory frame seemed to be unquestioned throughout the review although, surprisingly, at the end of the paper, "arguing from the same polarized positions" is equated with going nowhere. It seems that attempting to solve the "survival/super-psi" problem is a polarized question with an inherent lack of potential for progress. Simply putting this question to rest may be the best way to get it out of the way. Continuing to study information processing of near-death events may be a fruitful approach to the survival of consciousness without trying to move forward with presently immovable questions.

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*Reply from John Palmer*

Emily Cook finds the Parapsychology and Thanatology Conference a depressing reminder of our collective failure to come to grips with the central question of whether or not we survive physical death. She is, of course, correct: progress *has* been excruciatingly slow. An important reason why it is slow, which Cook seems to recognize at some level herself, is that the problem is a very difficult one. The primary reason it is so difficult, in my view, is that the question is basically an existential or ontological one. Science is most comfortable when uncovering reliable

relationships between objective observations and providing theoretical frameworks that economically account for such relationships and predict new ones. The key question in survival research, on the other hand, is whether or not something *exists*, namely, a discarnate mind. In this sense it bears resemblance to the question "Does God exist?", which is often cited as an example of the type of question science is totally un-equipped to address.

For this reason, I doubt science will ever be able to *prove* survival. This does not preclude it, however, from estimating the *likelihood or probability* of survival, which would be no mean accomplishment. Materialist science already does this, albeit in a negative way, by suggesting to us that conscious experience can be completely accounted for by the physical, hence mortal, brain

However, this materialistic conclusion does not follow inevitably from scientific inquiry. It is a legitimate and indeed common move in science to postulate hypothetical or theoretical constructs, or even entities, insofar as they help us to understand a body of data or observations, as discussed above. Many philosophers would argue that we cannot "reify" or attach reality to such constructs or entities, and this is where we most clearly bump up against the limitations of science in addressing issues like survival.

On the other hand, all of us, including materialists, attach reality status all the time to things that are not directly observable, at least if we take these last two words literally. For example, as I sit at my desk I am continuously bombarded by a complex array of visual, tactile, and possibly auditory sensations from which I immediately and implicitly infer that I am confronted with a solid, material object that I call a desk. In other words, I conclude that the desk is real, even though I only have contact with the sensations that it presumably causes. If we look at this argument abstractly, we see that matter itself, the bedrock of materialistic science, is itself a theoretical construct, albeit one that is so compelling and useful that we customarily grant it the status of a fact, and something that is real.

Although it is inconceivable to me that the idea of a discarnate mind could ever achieve the theoretical power provided by the idea of matter, *as concepts* the two have an identical status in the framework of scientific inquiry. Thus, to the degree that the concept of a discarnate mind can be shown to be a valuable tool for integrating and predicting observations using scientifically legitimate methods and standards of evidence, it achieves scientific reality status. In simpler terms, we would then be as justified in saying that the discarnate mind exists as we are in saying that matter exists.

This is precisely why I think it is useful to develop a theory of mind that incorporates discarnate mental activity as a principal construct or core assumption. To propose a first step toward such a theory was the purpose of my paper for the conference. I thus was astonished to find Cook describe it as mere philosophical speculation and an "evasion" devoid of relevance to the question of whether or not we survive death. The answer to Michael Grosso's question, "What is the relevance of all this to human beings?", which Cook quotes in her review, is (despite my convoluted response at the conference) disarmingly simple—it describes what might happen to us when we die. I doubt that either Cook or Grosso found my description very appealing, and it may not meet Cook's standard for the survival of "personal consciousness," but it still directly addresses the question of whether or not, and, if so, how, we survive death. Also, Cook completely ignores the fact that my model leads to testable predictions and thus *does* represent an "empirical approach" to the survival problem.

I was also puzzled by Cook's complaint about "the failure of many contemporary parapsychologists to examine the relationship between the phenomena they study and other normal and abnormal psychological phenomena" (p. 349). This statement simply is not true. One counter-example that comes from the conference itself is Steven Braude's paper discussing purported evidence of past-life memories from the standpoint of depth psychology. A great deal of the experimental research in parapsychology is directed toward discovering psychological correlates of psi test scores. These correlates include everything from personality scales to psychophysiological measures collected during the psi task. I know that Cook is aware of at least some of this research, so I wonder if her real objection is to the *way* the research is conducted or to the specific questions it addresses.

Despite the preceding savagery, there is much in Cook's paper that I liked and agree with. In fact, she articulated quite nicely many of my own views on how the survival problem should be conceptualized and approached empirically. I just wish she could have understood my paper at the conference as being in the spirit (no pun intended) of what we both advocate.

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*Reply from Eugene Taylor*

Parapsychologists should be extraordinarily grateful for the thorough and detailed response about the contemporary state of survival research that Emily Cook has given us. My admiration for her abilities was even more infinitely increased when I finally solved the puzzle of why she gave the type of analysis she did: namely, I believe she was intent on making an important contribution to parapsychology, a field of reductionistic experimental science.

I believe her contribution was indeed significant for that position. But at the same time I feel that, because of her orientation, she has misunderstood the purpose of the conference and also missed the main point of my paper. The subject of the conference was not survival of bodily death, as she maintains. As a participant and therefore a legitimate interpreter of the direction I thought the conference should go, the theme of parapsychology and thanatology as I broadly conceived it meant the relation of psychic phenomena to the death experience. This is clearly stated in several places in my paper, but especially in my title, "Mortality and Self-Realization." My point was to address the issue of whether or not psychic experiences encountered in the context of self-realization over the course of a lifetime in the physical body in some way simulate the death experience at the termination of life in that same physical body. Could a symbolic death of the ego assist us in overcoming the fear of our own physical death? Do our attitudes toward death change as a result of the transformation of consciousness sought through lifetime spiritual practice? Do these experiences help us to understand the place of psychic phenomena in the larger picture of personality and its higher evolution?

The issue I took up about whether or not science can address these questions was a mere footnote. Prof. Cook, however, made this footnote the entire point of my paper. Her statement that I was an empirical philosopher (actually a misnomer) clearly implied that an experiential philosophy was inferior to her position as an empirical scientist. This, I believe, is a mistaken conclusion, since at several places she declares quite loudly (although I do not think she actually realized it) that her philosophy is reductionistic and bound to sense data only, interpreted only within a metaphysics of physicalism. Science and experience are, in my opinion, two entirely different epistemological domains. The repeated claim that scientific kinds of knowledge are always superior to all other forms of knowledge-getting, especially when dealing with the phenomena of consciousness, is mistaken because science is based on its own set of philosophical assumptions. According to F. W. H. Myers, William James, Gardner Murphy, Henry Murray and a host of other

contributors to Cook's field, to deny this is to do really first-rate science a monumental disservice (Taylor, 1996; Taylor & Wozniak, 1996).

Further, Prof Cook maintains that the type of experiential knowledge my philosophical position generates does not help people who have near death experiences, although she clearly maintains that scientific evidence does. My own experiences at the moment of death suggest that all scientific explanation falls by the wayside as naive and irrelevant. What is left is the great mystery, what is before us that we do not know, but must experience nonetheless. Blessedly, both science and religion fail us at that moment, for the adventure appears much larger than these mere products of the human mind have been able to encompass.

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