

BRAUDE SYNOPSIS

THE QUESTION: would a [certified] veridical OBE, indicate that mind and body can exist separately?

Dr. Stephen Braude (2001)

(from a non-Braude website):

...a self-defensive strategy in the face of imminent extinction, and so forth. Although Ring and Rosing view dissociative tendencies as a **psychological defense mechanism** to "tune out" physical threats to one's well-being while simultaneously opening a door to "alternate realities" (Ring and Rosing 217-218, 231), their hypothetical status as a defense mechanism makes much more sense if OBEs and NDEs do *not* literally involve any form of disembodiment.

... Some NDErs report seeing *living persons* in their NDEs while in an ostensibly transcendental realm.

... BODY SENSATIONS: I left my body and went walking towards a very bright white light which was at the end of a long tunnel. At the same time I could see three figures standing at the end of the bed and I kept wishing they would go away so that I could go to the light, which to me was lovely and warm. **Just as I neared the light I felt a stab in my thigh** (Fenwick and Fenwick 91).

With that stab in the thigh this near-death experience ended. But if NDEs were literally journeys of one's 'spiritual double' traveling through the physical world, free of the normal physical body, and entering a tunnel into the afterlife, one should not have *any* sensations arising from the normal physical body during any part of an NDE.

... **How Consistent Are NDE Features Across Cultures?**

Despite a few core elements—such as having an OBE, going through a tunnel, encountering a light, and meeting deceased relatives—descriptions of the world encountered during Western NDEs are nearly as variable as dreams.

[Question at the onset: has new and better evidence been introduced in the 12 years since Braude penned these criticisms?]

Braude critiques this speculation:

“...OBEs provide at least indirect support for the survival hypothesis. They claim that OBEs show that the self, personality, or mind can operate apart from the body, which in turn shows that a human being is not merely a physical system. In that case (so the argument goes), we have a good reason to believe in survival of bodily death.”

[The author concludes that non-survivalist explanatory strategies are generally more compelling, especially those which appeal to phenomena, including ESP [or super-esp], whose existence and features have already been established].

"Why is it unsatisfactory to explain veridical OBEs by appealing to ESP, rather than some sort of traveling consciousness?"

TANOUS STRAIN GAUGE: But clearly, there's no compelling reason to accept that conclusion unless we can rule out explanations in terms of both clairvoyance and psychokinesis (PK). Clairvoyance would explain Tanous's ability to identify the targets, and PK (from either subject or experimenters) would account for the strain-gauge readings. I see no compelling reason, then, for regarding the strain-gauge readings in the Osis-McCormick experiments as anything other than examples of PK, which - like the many other well-documented PK effects they resemble - neither suggest nor require the externalization or independence of mental activity from bodily states. But in that case, we must ask again: "Why reject ESP explanations of veridical OBEs and appeal instead to externalism?"

Let us assume, as I think we must, that we have ample independent evidence for the existence of ESP.

As far as OBEs are concerned, the most we are entitled to say is that the evidence is compatible with externalism--- but because the OBE evidence is also compatible with explanations in terms of ESP, and because we have independent evidence for phenomenologically diverse and robust forms of ESP, it would be premature (at least) to say that the OBE evidence *supports* externalism. A more cautious and parsimonious view would be that veridical OBEs are simply a particularly vivid (or imagery-rich) subset of ESP experiences. In fact, in light of the totality of evidence for ESP, we should probably *expect* some ESP experiences to take the form of OBEs. ...it is reasonable to interpret OBEs as imagery-rich manifestations of ESP, and it's reasonable to conclude that for some the information gathered is accurate and perspectival, just as it may be for ESP not accompanied by an OBE. So it then follows that there's no need, (and certainly no compelling reason), for saying that subjects actually leave their bodies in veridical ESP *or* OBE experiences.

...in clairvoyance we needn't physically face the object in question, and apparently every object is transparent to clairvoyance. For example, ESP of sealed objects suggests strongly that ESP differs profoundly from ordinary visual perception

"Externalism does not entail anything about survival of bodily death, except that it does not rule it out. It is a tremendous conceptual jump from, say, a 30-minute OBE to immortality." (Woodhouse, 1994b, p. 14)

"Even if OBE research should support the existence of a non-physical element of being, it might not bear directly upon the issue of whether this element is immortal." "... it should not be assumed that during life the non-physical element animates the body. In fact the reverse may be the case, so that destruction of the body occasions the death of the non-physical element." (Irwin, 1985, pp. 25-26)

As Woodhouse, Irwin, and others have noted, it's not enough simply to claim that mind and body are distinct. What matters is the *way* in which they differ.

Even if we concede that the individual leaving the body is something more than the organism described by physical science, that won't give Almeder what he needs. In particular, and contrary to what Almeder claims, it doesn't warrant the conclusion that a person can exist independently of the body. Ducasse's underlying point, for instance, is that mind may be causally dependent on body even if mind and body are distinct; many philosophers take mind and body to be different, while at the same time holding that mind cannot exist without the body. It is then clear that one can take mind and body to be distinct while rejecting the survival hypothesis.

So, in some respects, the relation of body to mind is analogous to that between a thing and its shadow. The object and its shadow are distinct, but once the object ceases to exist, so does the shadow. In fact, the object-shadow relationship is strikingly similar to the alleged relationship between body and mind in OBEs. But ironically, those similarities work against the *OBE Argument* for survival. Notice, first, that the object and its shadow occupy *different locations in space*, just as the mind and physical body purportedly occupy different locations during OBEs. Moreover, shadows are causally efficacious; they *can have effects* on the world around them. (For example, shadows will lower the ambient temperature and affect light meter readings at their locations). Similarly, externalists claim that, in reciprocal OBEs and in the Osis-McCormick experiment, the traveling mind affects the world at remote locations. In reciprocal cases, observers at the remote locations report seeing the OBEr, and in the Osis-McCormick experiment Tanous apparently activated the strain gauge. But then, even if externalists are correct that during OBEs the mind exists apart from the physical body and can affect the world at that place, that will not advance the case for survival--- because the shadow will cease to exist when the object casting the shadow ceases to exist. For all we know, the mind may be similarly dependent on the body. The question for the externalist at this point therefore must be: "*Is there any reason for thinking that the mind is more independent of the body than the body's shadow?*"

Historically, at least, dualists have maintained that one crucial difference between mind-stuff and body-stuff is that the latter is *extended in space* vs. the former being *non-extended*. Even if we grant that during veridical OBEs the mind, or some aspect of oneself (or one's consciousness), severs its normal connection with the body, nothing follows about what sort of stuff this might be. However, mind is not contained *in* the body, because that requires having a location in space. According to the Cartesian dualist, the mind is nowhere in particular, or nowhere at all--- so the problem becomes this: *Externalism holds that during OBEs a person's mental activity detaches from the body and travels somehow to a location different from that of the body. But because only something in space can be at a location, this thing can't be what many substance dualists say the mind is: an un-extended non-physical thing.*

So, let's return to the question: "Is there a reason for thinking that the mind is more independent of the body than the body's shadow?" At this point in the discussion, defenders of the *OBE Argument* might appeal to the evidence from reciprocal cases. Reciprocal cases constitute a subset of veridical OBEs, in which (1) people report seeing the OBEr at the site at which person is ostensibly visiting, and (2) the apparition accurately describes the condition or the surroundings at that time. Many reciprocal cases classify as *crisis apparitions*, in which the OBEr is apparently observed at approximately the same time as the OBEr's death or other emergency.

Yet most of those who have thought carefully about apparitions, explain veridical cases in terms of telepathy--- and for good reason.

First, it makes reciprocal OBEs continuous with a massive body of similar data for ESP generally, including the many crisis and experimental cases in which there are no apparitions. Therefore, a telepathic explanation helps systematize a large and motley assortment of psychic phenomena, and there's no need to make additional externalist assumptions - much less the animistic postulate of a secondary or subtle body.

Second, **telepathy** seems to account nicely for features of apparitions that are troublesome for externalist theories.... but it favors a *PK interpretation* of apparitions as much as an externalist interpretation. For these reasons and others, I argue for a **PK explanation for collective apparitions, where the apparitional figure is similar to the materializations produced by physical mediums**. So once again, PK and externalist theories seem to be on equal footing.

There remains a nagging problem for the externalist, one that afflicts every case for which externalism seems plausible. To see why, we need to consider a modified version of the old question: "Why do ghosts wear clothes?" For example, suppose that, while decked out in my new Armani suit, I try to project myself in an OBE to a friend, who then has an apparition of me in my sartorial splendor. If we explain my friend's ability to describe me accurately by positing a traveling secondary body, how do we explain my friend's experience of my new suit? Does my Armani suit also have a double? So... at our current (and considerable) level of ignorance, we're in no position, theoretically or empirically, to set any limits to the range and refinement of psychic [telepathic] functioning. In fact, survivalists apparently must posit equally refined telepathic influence to explain mediumistic communications.

Near-Death Experiences

It is here that defenders of the *OBE Argument* might appeal to the relevance of near-death out-of-body experiences. **As with conventional OBEs, the most compelling examples of these experiences are veridical.** One interesting feature of near-death OBEs is that those experiences seem to differ considerably from dream states. In particular, percipients comment that their mental processes are *surprisingly lucid* and their sensory experiences are *quite vivid* - sometimes more so than during normal waking states. (Paterson argues that NDEs differ systematically from illusory experiences induced by drugs, stress, or trauma). But contrary to what Paterson seems to think, even if there are such systematic differences, they wouldn't show that NDEs are non-illusory. Moreover, we shouldn't overestimate the degree of similarity among NDEs generally and near-death OBEs in particular.

Moreover, it has systematicity on its side. It makes NDEs continuous with many other altered states (e.g., trauma-induced dissociation) that have the function of alleviating pain or fear. Moreover, NDEs might still genuinely reflect certain states of the experiencer, just as dream content often represents the dreamer's physical state.

But what if the experiencer accurately reports events that occurred, say, more than fifteen minutes after the cessation of vital signs?

Moody recognizes that NDEs are, *at best*, only *roughly* contemporaneous with the cessation of vital signs. **But then we can't be certain that those experiences occurred after the vital signs disappeared. Our ability to date the time of mental activity in NDEs depends entirely on the experiencer's retrospective testimony,** and that measure is simply too crude for us to know when, exactly, the near-death OBE occurred.

We need only concede the following reasonable point made by Moody: "*In order for resuscitation to have occurred, some degree of residual biological activity must have been going on in the cells of the body, even though the overt signs of these processes were not clinically detectable by the methods employed.*"

But, of course, one can then argue, plausibly, that the near-death OBE couldn't have occurred in the absence of that residual biological activity. And in that case NDEs wouldn't show that the mind is less dependent on a body than the body's shadow.

But let us suppose, for the moment, that we had convincing evidence that mental activity in near-death OBEs occurred *in the absence of any residual bodily activity*. Not even *that* would lend much support, if any, to the case for survival. But of course, if the evidence from OBEs is evidence of any kind of survival of bodily death - [which, as we've seen, is far from obvious strictly speaking], it would be evidence only of short-term survival; it provides no justification whatsoever for assuming that mental activity could persist independently of the body for periods significantly longer than an OBE.

Systematicity

Moreover, as headaches and stomach-aches illustrate, it is actually quite common for similar experiences to have a variety of causes.

...perhaps a stronger case can be made by considering how well externalism accommodates a broad range of features of OBEs. Perhaps it has greater overall explanatory power than rival hypotheses. This is the approach adopted by Griffin (1997), and it deserves our attention.

Griffin lists 13 features of OBEs most of which, he says, *prima facie* seem to count against internalist views, and which externalism handles neatly.

[...internalists could plausibly subscribe to a kind of *altered state-plus-psi* hypothesis. They would explain the veridicality of OBEs in terms of ESP operating from within the experiencer's body or embodied mind. ... we'll see that an *altered state-plus-psi hypothesis* handles the data at least as well as an externalist hypothesis. Moreover, the conviction of reality might also be a by-product of the OBEr's use of ESP in veridical cases].

Most OBEs report normally or unusually clear visual experiences and also normal bearing. Again, there is nothing here that hasn't also been reported in connection with dissociative or drug-induced states. In fact, if OBEs are continuous with the dissociative experiences reported throughout the history of hypnosis, this perceptual clarity is precisely what one would expect (Gauld, 1992).

Some OBEs are veridical. We've covered this issue at length, and for the reasons already noted, the veridicality of OBEs doesn't require an externalist explanation. Indeed, it appears that we can account for the data at least as well in terms of ESP. ... many drug-induced hallucinations are also routinely more clear than most ESP experiences. Furthermore, if the better mediumistic evidence can count as evidence of ESP (telepathy or clairvoyance), then the alleged superiority of the *ESP from OBEs* seems more dubious still.

... ESP occurs in many different forms, some more rich in imagery than others. And one would expect a certain subset of ESP experiences to take the form of OBEs, even if the experience of leaving the body is totally illusory.

As we've seen, non-crisis OBEs can be regarded as a subset of an even more widespread set of ESP experiences. Some near-death OBEs would also fall into that category, as a subset of crisis ESP experiences.

So, it is doubtful that externalists have an overall explanatory edge in accounting for the various features of OBEs. Moreover, externalists can only *conjecture* that genuinely leaving one's body would result in ostensibly clear thinking, transforming effects, and an altered sense of time. By contrast, we know that dissociation and drugs can produce these effects.

Conclusion

I think we must conclude that the case for survival receives very little *independent* support from OBEs, NDEs, and apparitions. Indeed, considered apart from other types of evidence which suggest survival, there seems little reason to appeal to externalism to account for the data. **We can do at least as well by appealing to phenomena - including ESP - whose existence and features have already been established.** So even if survivalists can account for most of the phenomena (with the possible and nagging exception of apparitional clothing and accoutrements), other explanatory strategies seem more compelling. *Of course, we might find an externalist view of OBEs and apparitions more attractive in light of the evidence from mediumship and reincarnation. And we might decide that OBEs and apparitions strengthen the case for survival made by the better evidence.* **Whether a super-psi interpretation of all the data reigns supreme in the end, is a matter I'll address on another occasion.**

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Virginia: I agree with Augustine that the NDE research done so far on the question of survival is not compelling. (2007)

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Raymond Moody

Raymond Moody, whom Augustine labeled “the ‘founding father’ of near-death studies,” insisted that NDEs cannot provide evidence of survival. He wrote, “I have never equated – and I never meant to equate – my reporting of so-called ‘near-death experiences’ with a declaration on my part of the unquestioned existence of ‘life after death.’” (1999, p. 8).

Kenneth Ring, the most prolific scholarly near-death researcher, wrote that “we NDE researchers have been virtually unanimous in insisting that these experiences do not and cannot suggest the existence of an afterlife” (1990, p. 204).

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