



Immortal Remains: The Evidence for Life After Death

This may seem like a bizarre topic. Actually, it's the name of a book I just read by Stephen E. Braude, professor and chair of the philosophy department at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Ten years in the making, this is quite likely the most informed book you'll ever read on the subject from the perspective of a highly intelligent philosopher, not a New Age guru, and it makes connections to creativity you might not have otherwise suspected.

Braude supplies in-depth analyses of famous cases of trance mediumship (or channeling), possession, ghost hauntings, reincarnation claims and near death experiences (NDEs) before coming to a conclusion on the final page of the book. In the preface he describes his own scary experience with a table tipping out messages letter by letter (A=1 tip; B=2 tips, etc.) during a slow day in graduate school with friends, not knowing how frequently this very method had been used in the late 19th century. Yet, anyone who has ever used a Ouija Board under the right circumstances with the right people (for me it was childhood with family), knows you can get messages and predictions for the future.

What I find compelling about Braude's research is the accent on the incredible creativity of the mediums, resembling the output of savants who lack basic forms of knowledge, but have supernormal potential in others. (I discussed some of these in a previous blog (*Right Brain News from an Incessant Reader*). Pearl Curran / Patience Worth is a prime example. With little education or interest in literature, she was able to produce a huge body of dissociative texts, including poetry, novels, short stories and plays, some written in an archaic Anglo-Saxon dialect of Patience, the person she claimed to be channeling. Pearl could even be self-aware, that is, co-conscious: while Patience Worth was dictating a poem she could simultaneously write a letter to a friend.

Braude considers the possibility of rare talents and phenomenal memory coming out in a dissociative state as well as "super-psi," i.e. telepathy among the living that might supply information about people from the past. He makes a further connection to the psychology of the living that would explain their need to make these connections. He does not doubt that telepathy and clairvoyance can occur, citing many examples. He also lingers long on the evidence for xenoglossy, i.e. the ability to speak a formerly unknown foreign language while in a trance.

While he doesn't address the neurology of dissociative states, his mediumistic case studies are a treasure trove of examples of unusually creative possibilities that allow me to speculate for him. A musical savant had the ability to improvise the styles of various composers at the piano, with the right hand playing in one style and the left hand playing in another. Similarly, Mozart could compose a piece by hand while composing a different one in his head. But, whereas Mozart had had intense training, the savant had reportedly never played music before, making it all the more incredible. Comparing the two, I would say that while both had exceptional talent, the savant had a very unusual brain organization, probably with right hemispheric superiority, that allowed her to process musical notes automatically and then replicate them on the keyboard. She was not creating new musical scores; Mozart certainly was.

I know about competence in learning a foreign language, having taught French for over twenty years. Not everyone has the same capacity to pick up a foreign language. Amongst adults, engineers are particularly pitiful, because of left hemisphere dominance that wants every piece of grammatical expression broken down into a hard and fast rule. Children learn the best because their young minds are still malleable to accommodate the new sounds into their spoken repertoire. Even amongst children, some have great difficulty, especially dyslexics who have enough trouble parsing their own language. If we're looking for unusual cases, I can supply a 12th grader who was learning French for the first time, while already competent in Spanish. I had never seen anyone so adept, so fast, in language learning. One day she got up in front of the class and wrote with both hands, simultaneously and backwards. This indicates to me a very unusual brain organization with strong linguistic facility in both hemispheres.

I can only surmise that mediums with unusual linguistic talents are working bi-hemispherically as well as bi-directionally. In another case of Braude's, a child was producing automatic scripts without having learned the alphabet. She had, however, observed her older sister producing automatic writing. She may then have been hyperlexic, with the supernormal ability to decode patterns in letters and words precociously. Telepathy can play a role too. Often when a foreign language is produced by a medium, one of the sitters present knows the language, as when Victor Hugo's seance group occasionally got messages in English.

Braude would like to think that all children have these kinds of capacities, but are stifled by a dreary educational system. True, in part. But I would maintain that a dissociative capacity as well as an unusual brain organization would play equal roles. The dissociative state would definitely play a role in releasing the creative hemisphere to invent away with fluency and agility. To exemplify the unusual brain organization argument, Nadia, an artistic savant, was autistic with little to no speaking ability (ten words at age 6), but could draw life-like pictures of moving horses and other animals at age three, comparable to prehistoric cave art of Chauvet and Lascaux, and even to Leonardo da Vinci, who was dyslexic and wrote backwards, by the way. Nadia's defective left brain allowed for hyperability of the visually artistic right to replicate animal imagery from pictorial memory. Furthermore, after intensive therapy in acquiring more language skills, Nadia lost her spontaneous ability to draw her animals. (See also Betty Edwards's book, *Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain*, which teaches you to access the kind of realistic perspective of someone like Nadia, rather than rely on what you think you see.)

Ah, we've peered into the unusual minds of savants and mediums, but we're far afield from the survival of death. I guess you'll have to read Braude's book!

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Book Review: Immortal Remains: The Evidence for Life after Death by Stephen E. Braude

In his book "Immortal Remains", Stephen E. Braude examines the evidence for life after death. Braude is a philosopher and this book is heavily laden with philosophical arguments and analysis. In that way it is different from other books that just report the evidence for the afterlife. The book discusses how well the survival hypothesis and the super-psi hypothesis fit the empirical data. It isn't written for the reader who is new to the subject so I would recommend such readers do some background reading first. Any of the following would be helpful to read before tackling "Immortal Remains":

- [A Lawyer Presents the Case for the Afterlife](#) by Victor J. Zammit:
- [21 Days into the Afterlife](#) by Piero Calvi-Pariseti, MD
- "Is There an Afterlife?" by David Fontana.

There is also a page about the [Evidence for the Afterlife](#) on my web site.

You can get the flavor of Braude's thinking from the following on-line articles from SurvivalAfterDeath.org.uk:

- [Out-of-Body Experiences and Survival After Death](#)
- [Drop-in Communicators](#)
- [Survival or Super-psi by Prof. Stephen Braude](#)
- [Super-psi or Survival A Response to Prof. Stephen Braude by Montague Keen](#)
- [Super-psi or Survival A Response to Prof. Stephen Braude Prof. by Peter Wadhams](#)
- [Survival or Super-psi A Response to Montague Keen and Peter Wadhams by Prof. Stephen Braude](#)
- [Further Response to Prof. Stephen Braude by Montague Keen](#)
- [A Further Response to Montague Keen by Prof. Stephen Braude](#)

In "Immortal Remains", Braude raises a lot of ideas for discussion and tries to consider all sides of the issues. It is worthwhile reading the book to be exposed to those ideas. However another philosopher might not agree with every point Braude makes, so a reader who is not trained in philosophy should not accept everything in the book simply because of Braude's academic credentials.

Braude covers some of the best evidence (but not all of the best evidence) and gives many references.

Braude's reasoning is philosophical and somewhat complicated. Actually, I have to admit that I didn't follow how he came to some of his conclusions. Braude's main conclusion is that the evidence justifies the belief that some individuals survive for a time after death. He bases his conclusion on the argument that survival is slightly favored by the empirical evidence over super-psi but what really tips the scales in favor of survival is something which he calls "crippling complexity".

Crippling complexity is based on the assumption that there are certain factors that that interfere with psi, such as psychics getting in each other's way psychically, or adverse geomagnetic conditions. The more ways psi needs to be used to produce a result, the greater the susceptibility of that result is to this interference. Explaining the evidence for the afterlife using the super-psi hypothesis would often require that a psychic access information from multiple sources. The survival hypothesis explains the same phenomena with only one source of psychic information. Therefore super-psi is more susceptible to crippling complexity than the survival hypothesis. Braude likens it to the fact that obtaining information from several radio stations is more problematic than obtaining information from just one station. The more veridical information in a case, the stronger the effect would be. Therefore, cases with a lot of veridical information are better explained by the survival hypothesis than by super-psi.

Braude emphasizes that when analyzing the evidence for the afterlife, one must examine the empirical evidence both for and against. However, I didn't completely follow Braude's explanation about what empirical evidence there is that supports his theory of crippling complexity. Braude also didn't specify any means to quantify the effects of crippling complexity which I think would be helpful in justifying the claim that it actually pertains in cases of survival evidence. However, it is interesting that his own theory, as he says, tips the scales in favor of survival. When analyzing of the evidence for survival, Braude advocates a psychological analysis of the people involved to assess whether or not super-psi is a reasonable interpretation of the case. If there are reasons to suspect that living people might benefit psychologically from a phenomenon, there is reason to suspect they might be using psi unconsciously to produce the phenomenon. I think it would be helpful in assessing Braude's analysis of the evidence for life after death if Braude was psychoanalyzed to determine if he benefited psychologically from his finding that his theory of crippling complexity tips the balance in favor of survival.

Another area where I had trouble following Braude's reasoning was when he concluded that super-psi is a better explanation than survival for the Patience Worth case. Patience Worth was a spirit who communicated literary works of the highest quality through a medium.

The samples of Patience Worth's work reprinted in "Immortal Remains" included this one:

Mrs. P.: The world is crying for proofs of immortality.

P.W.: To prove a fact, needst thou a book of words, when e'en the sparrow's chirp telleth thee more?

A tale unfolded by the Bishops' drudge may hold the meat for thousands, while dust and web are strong on his Eminence.

The road to higher plains leadeth not along the steeple.

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"This book is impressive. The author is a respected philosopher and parapsychologist whose works on psi, multiple personality, and other subjects are exemplars of scholarship . . . Superlatives are in order. This is the best book on survival that I have read." —**Frank B. Dilley, University of Delaware**

"Braude's treatment is psychologically much more sophisticated than most previous attempts to evaluate the literature. The book is worth close study. There are also touches of humor that lighten the seriousness of the topic. Professor Braude has produced a prodigious and fascinating work for which we can only offer our thanks." —**The Australian Journal of Parapsychology**

"By far the best treatment of the philosophical complexities involved in the empirical case for survival of death. Stephen's treatment of the super-psi hypothesis (as an alternative to survival of death) is highly insightful and challenging. His various comments on the theoretical presuppositions involved in arguments for survival is incredibly lucid. The chapters on mediumship are the best philosophical treatment of mediumship since C.D. Broad's Lectures on Psychical Research." —**Prof. Michael Sudduth, San Francisco State University**

"Braude takes great care to clearly define concepts and summarize the case material in sufficient detail for the educated lay reader to follow his argument. This book does much more than present a case for personal postmodern survival. *Immortal Remains* not only contains Braude's personal perspective, but also highlights the state of the debate thus far. Even one with just a slight interest in survival research would do well to get acquainted with Braude and the philosophers with whom he puts himself into conversation throughout the book. Finally, he tackles these difficult issues with clear language and suitable wit, making *Immortal Remains* both a thought-provoking and entertaining read." —**Journal of Scientific Exploration**

"Stephen Braude is unique among those evaluating the evidence for an after-life in that he manages to combine a sympathetic consideration of favorable cases with an honest, penetrating philosophical critique of them." —**Richard M. Gale, University of Pittsburgh**

"Lucid and comprehensive, Stephen Braude's *Immortal Remains* is certainly one of the best assessments ever written--perhaps, the best ever written--of the evidence for human survival of bodily death." —**Raymond Martin, Union College**

"As one would expect . . . Dr. Braude gives us a solid work of critical scholarship. He employs considerable philosophical and psychological sophistication." —**The Christian Parapsychologist**

"[Braude's] research is thorough. He brings credibility to parapsychology . . . I teach courses in death and dying and we cover a wide range of topics, including many that are raised in this book. I recommend this book. It's the best I've seen in parapsychology." —**Metapsychology**

"Imaginative, detailed, and well written." —**Journal of the Society for Psychical Research**

"I welcome this book as an important contribution to the debate on whether or not we survive physical death. Scholarly, carefully argued and elegantly written, I hope it achieves the success it so clearly deserves." —**Scientific & Medical Network**

The Super-ESP Hypothesis

If information received through a medium exists anywhere, say in the memory of an individual who is living or in a document, then any one of the minds involved in the sitting, the mind of the medium, or of the medium's guide, or of the sitter, could have acquired it by way of telepathy or clairvoyance. It appears that Professor Hornell Hart first called such a hypothesis "The Super-ESP Hypothesis". If it is accepted then it could be difficult or even impossible to obtain scientific evidence for survival. The problem is discussed in Gauld[11] and elsewhere. It is, however, probably fair to say that in many cases the apparent evidence for survival could not be accounted for by "super-ESP" without requiring a far higher standard of telepathy or clairvoyance than has been demonstrated in terms of scientific evidence.

Professor Ian Stevenson has studied the potential for cryptomnesia as a possible factor. This is the recall from the subconscious of memories long forgotten, typically of words read or heard spoken many years ago. This needs to be added to telepathy and clairvoyance when considering the possible effects of super-ESP.

There have been instances in which communications have included information, including errors, that corresponds in some detail with that printed in a newspaper or a book, many years earlier. It is tempting to assume that the medium may have read that earlier record and forgotten it, but we cannot claim to be able to distinguish satisfactorily between cryptomnesia, telepathy and clairvoyance in such cases.

Our model sees all minds being of the HD world and we know very little of the standards of communication in the HD world. It seems to me that much of what is accepted as scientific evidence of telepathy and clairvoyance, based on laboratory experiments, may be at a very low level compared with what can be achieved by unfettered minds. In the field of dowsing it has often been rediscovered that most successful dowsers fail to reproduce the effects when they try to show them at a party, and yet a few have recently told me that they can do that. They might, for instance, seek to locate objects hidden under a carpet. It seems that for dowsing to work effectively there usually has to be a true need. If, however, that factor were necessary for other psychic faculties then we would not expect to see much in the way of success from the typical laboratory experiment.

The best communications when received by experienced and discerning sensitives or sitters frequently appear to provide good personal evidence of survival. This is how it appears to be. "Super ESP" provides a hypothesis concerning how such a situation could arise by other means. We know very little about the likely limits of such effects. Serious investigators with wide experience in the field are generally not inclined to accept Super ESP as the answer, but we need to appreciate that it may not be easy to provide scientific evidence to refute it.

On the other hand, Super ESP cannot be of the physical world. There is no conceivable way of accounting for Super ESP, or even for normal ESP, in terms of received scientific models based on the operation of the world of physics. So we can only consider Super ESP along with a new model of the system in which we live, possibly a model like the one presented here, and with such a model we are free to postulate hypotheses based on information from the minds of deceased individuals or via Super ESP. The important point is that one does not exclude the other. It is, however, unfortunate that the Super ESP idea is frequently put forward by people who have little understanding of the scope of observed ESP and it is wrong to use it when the circumstances would require a higher power or scope than has been demonstrated to exist. Any viable model must cover both, the possibility of evidence of survival through communication from surviving minds and material received by ESP of a high order. And any viable model must leave the question open to the extent that, even in the course of a single sitting, different methods may be used.

So the Super ESP hypothesis was originally set up with a view to possibly invalidating the concept of messages from deceased people. That now seems to be logically impossible and Super ESP needs to take a new place as a possible alternative explanation of some parts of such messages.