

Postmortem Survival: A Reappraisal of the Evidence

Results:

For more than a century, researchers have studied cases suggesting the persistence of personal consciousness after bodily death. Some of these can be explained in terms of normal or abnormal processes. But that still leaves a significant residue of cases, which apparently can only be explained in terms of one of two strictly unfalsifiable hypotheses:

- 1) the survival of a purposeful and distinctive personal psychology, or
- 2) motivated, and apparently refined and extensive, psychic functioning among the living (presumably disguised unconsciously to present the appearance of survival).

These two hypotheses are traditionally called, respectively, the survival and super-psi hypotheses. Many books have already surveyed intriguing cases suggesting survival. But the literature on survival is plagued by several nagging problems which not even the best works address successfully.

No previous work has adequately evaluated the limitations of appealing to unusual or abnormal processes (e.g., dissociative pathologies, rare mnemonic gifts, extreme or unprecedented forms of savantism, or equally rare latent creative capacities). And no book has adequately assessed the power and scope of the super-psi hypothesis. Both failings, but especially the latter, result from ignorance of the data and deep confusions which this book tries to address. Accordingly, this book takes a fresh look at some of the most puzzling cases suggesting survival, and it considers how we might distinguish evidence for an afterlife from evidence for exotic things (normal and paranormal) done by the living. It assumes (if only for the sake of argument) that psychic functioning occurs, and to a greater degree than laboratory experiments suggest. It explores previously ignored issues about dissociation, creativity, linguistic skills, and the nature and limits of human abilities generally. And it considers why we have some reason, finally, for preferring the survival hypothesis over the super-psi hypothesis.

Published Work:

Stephen E. Braude, *Perspectival Awareness and Postmortem Survival*. *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 23 (2009): 195-210.

"Personal Identity and Postmortem Survival." *Social Philosophy and Policy* 22, No. 2 (2005): 226-249. Reprinted in E.F. Paul, F.D. Miller, & J. Paul (eds) *Personal Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2005): 226-249.

Stephen E. Braude, *Immortal Remains: The Evidence for Life After Death*. 2003. Lanham, MD, Rowman & Littlefield.

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