MORNING GENERAL DISCUSSION
DAY ONE

EDGE: The juxtaposition of these two papers is very interesting. We have John Palmer's paper where he says that there are essentially three possibilities: materialistic monism, idealism, and dualism; John chooses dualism. Yet I don't see Bill Roll fitting into any of those three alternatives. I see Bill, in fact, trying to do something else. I suppose the question is something like: What is going on here? Dualism certainly is the traditional understanding behind survival. What we have with Bill is another kind of approach. Does it make sense to have another kind of survival? Or are we limited to a dualistic approach in parapsychology?

BRAUDE: I would like to address that for a minute. When John said in his paper that there were three possibilities—materialism, idealism, and dualism—those do not exhaust all the possibilities. I think Hoyt's right that Bill Roll's position illustrates that there is at least one other option. It may be an instance of something which we could call a kind of neutral monism, perhaps. It certainly is a more traditionally mystical view, as I understand it, in the sense that (according to what Bill was saying later in his comments at any rate) there is no preferred level of description that we can appeal to here. That is, from certain perspectives it's appropriate to talk of small selves. From other perspectives it might be appropriate to talk about large selves. But if I understood what Bill was saying, whatever level of description we resort to we would do so for presumably decent reasons of some kind or another. Different levels of description might be pragmatically justified in different contexts. Maybe that's not what Bill was saying. But the standard mystical view, as I understand it, is that any time we try to describe nature, we are going to misdescribe it to some extent because whatever descriptive categories we use will involve a certain process of abstraction. And the process of abstraction means leaving out certain aspects of nature in order to focus on certain others. So, no particular way of describing nature could be inclusive. Even if that isn't what Bill Roll is getting at, that is another approach to the kind of problem that John Palmer was trying to address; that is, certain questions of survival could be addressed by means of an ontology that

doesn't insist that there is any preferred level of description. How we describe nature and discuss survival may have to be different from different points of view, no one of which is inherently any deeper than any other.

PALMER: I agree with Steve's point, that you can think of these things as levels of description. It's not that any particular approach is right or wrong. It just leads you to look at the world in a different way and draw certain implications from it.

As far as the definition of terms is concerned, I can tell you how I thought about it. To me the crucial distinction is, "Do you need two kinds of stuff or not?" A basic definition of dualism is that there are two kinds of stuff. Traditionally, one of those is physical and one of those is mental, although conceivably there are other possibilities. But do we need more than two? I got into an argument like this a couple of years ago at a conference with a Whiteheadian. It was being claimed by David Griffin, who was speaking for Whitehead, that his cosmology represented a fourth ontology. It seemed to me that it was more economical, more clear, to describe it as idealism or idealistic monism, because his basic stuff clearly had mental properties. It consists of occasions of experience which interact with other experiences in kind of a chain. It is an extremely mental kind of terminology, therefore, it makes sense to simply call it idealism. Although it's not the same as Berkeleyan idealism, it seems to fit that basic definition. It is a violation of the economy of terminology to treat it as a fourth category. Granted, maybe this is nothing more than a semantic quibble. There's nothing terribly wrong with adding another category, but it seems to me if we are talking about mental stuff, why not just stick with idealism.

EDGE: My own view would be to cast doubt on your basic question; that is, how many kinds of "stuff" do we need? An approach may be not to talk about stuff. What makes us think experience has to adhere to stuff? Can we build an ontology or metaphysics based on something that is not grounded in stuff? It seems to me that Whitehead was trying to do that although I'm certainly not a Whiteheadian.

PALMER: Well, that would bring you back to something like Heraclitus. Other than that, as long as there's some entity there and we talk about entities, then I think we also need to talk about "stuff".

EDGE: Well, as long as there is something. I'm not sure it's an entity. I'm not sure it's a "stuff".

TAYLOR: At the risk of being labeled a "toe-headian" or a "brown-headian" or a "red-headian," I understood what you meant.

MALE VOICE: A "block-headian".

TAYLOR: A block-headian, as in the uncarved block of Zen. I would like to propose an alternative category for purposes of transcending it. We've heard of idealistic monism, materialistic monism, and neutral monism as opposed to dualism. I think unless someone else speaks up here, I am the only pluralist at the table. James was a pluralist because he said monism could always be one of his options. He was making a serious statement. For a monistic interpretation of ultimate reality, you really only have one choice when it comes down to the final conclusion no matter what the proliferation of categories are. The dualistic position, the double aspect theory of the mind-body problem, has an alternative explanation, and that is that both views could be wrong. It could be something else other than that. James' point was to try and raise the issue of how we could have unitive spiritual experience and still a plurality of selves. He spoke about a so-called noetic pluralism. This is very Whiteheadian in the sense of what you were just describing, John, which is the idea of trying to account for the unity of phenomenalogical experience, at the same time the radical difference between individual centers of experience. I believe the pluralistic hypothesis is really quite significant for certain issues that we are dealing with. I think we basically operate out of different philosophical frames of reference and certain normative clusters of thought which can be identified. That's the reason why you said, "Monism versus dualism." I'm trying to propose another option—pluralism. First of all I have a sense that personality is not a unity. The normal state may, in fact, be an ultimate plurality of selves in whichever way we may wish to describe the "normal" condition. It may be because of certain actions of intention or will that we have the opportunity to unify different parts of personality in wider and wider domains. True transformations of consciousness, I think, have psychic phenomena as their essential by-product; they are guides along the way that indicate that this process of personality transformation is actually happening. I grant that it is a visionary, metaphysical, and mythic

language that I am using to describe this process because I don't claim to be a scientist or a clinician. I don't think I have any adherence to the worldview that those people espouse if they think that that is going to describe my reality for me. So I would just simply try to interest you in at least the pluralistic hypothesis as we continue in our discussion.

ALMEDER: I would like to talk to John Palmer about his concept of a psiad. I take it psiads do survive, and they are consciousness.

PALMER: Some of them survive.

ALMEDER: Some of them? Some of them. The good ones, hm?

PALMER: They incorporate the potential for consciousness.

ALMEDER: Well, which ones survive? What I'm getting at is you say a psiad is consciousness and consciousness survives. But this seems to me to be a classical form of dualism—causalistic interaction. I am trying to figure out why the rest of the paper goes on to give an alternative explanation of this data for survival that makes it such that you don't really need to believe in personal survival. What was going through my mind is that a lot of people have said that human beings are not simply reducible to discussions about brain states. If consciousness is distinct from brain states, then certainly a very important part of human beings survive: their consciousness and their dispositions to behave in certain ways and have certain mentality. What I was trying to get at was how this thing that you are proposing relates to personal survival? Are you saying that in so far as the psiad is consciousness, consciousness survives as a part of a person? Is the person, the besouled consciousness or the consciousness embodied? I'm unclear and am having a problem trying to figure out what part of me is surviving. Then again, I don't know what your reasons are for saying that. Why would you ever think that consciousness should survive unless you defined it as quite different from say biology? There are dualisms that are materialistic. For example, John Searle has argued that people do have mental states but they are just biological properties of the brain. He has no problem with talking about dualism and then talking about materialism. Then when we die, we just go. With Searle what you are in headlong flight from in contemporary philosophy of mind is the idea that there is something that survives that is essential to human personality.

Now, if you are a Platonist and you identify the self with consciousness totally, then you are going to have more than just person parts surviving; you are going to have real personal survival. But if consciousness is not part of the total of our personality, then I might be happy to have consciousness surviving if that is a major part of my personality. By the way, I wouldn't be happy to have any of this happen to me. I would be interested in having my body, of course. But you can't have everything.

TAYLOR: I think I would be willing to trade this body in; perhaps for another one after this one runs down.

PALMER: I'm not sure I like my theory's consequences either. Consciousness is purported to be a substratum. To the extent that my theory is mystical, it would be in that sense. In that sense consciousness survives. It might be analogous to space and the physical world. The psiads have or get, by virtue of being within this substratum, the *potential* for subjective awareness. So, if by consciousness you mean subjective awareness itself, that per se does not survive. What survives is the potential for having a conscious experience as a result of the psiads interacting with the brain. Does that help any?

ALMEDER: So, the consciousness doesn't survive. It's just the potential for conscious experience that survives?

PALMER: That's correct.

ALMEDER: How do you get that without consciousness? Is that in the body?

PALMER: Consciousness is not in the body. Consciousness is not something that matter inherently has. This is an assumption; like many assumptions in this theory, it is arbitrary. This represents a kind of top-down theorizing. Whether it is useful or not depends on its empirical consequences.

BRAUDE: I'm also puzzled by the connection between psiads and consciousness. One of the things you said is that psiads have no process analogous to thought, yet you give them various sorts of intentional states. You say psiads are motivated to attain experience through a receptive brain; they seek to actualize their potential. Now, all of that sounds "quasi-conscious" or "Quasi Modo"—I don't know, "quasi something." You try to explain consciousness in terms of psiads, yet you're attributing to psiads what look like conscious states, seekings,

motivations, and so on. So, you are giving them intentionality of some kind or other. I don't see how psiads are going to help explain what consciousness is in that sense.

PALMER: The best I can say at the moment is that I'm thinking of consciousness as a primal quality, something along the line of what you talked about in your book on PK. It is not reducible to other concepts.

TAYLOR: Returning again to the pluralistic hypothesis, I am thinking about a number of classic analogies both in James as well as in Buddhism, that have to do with this idea of moment consciousness. These systems present an epistemological analysis of conscious experience from moment to moment. The Buddhists particularly talk about the aggregation of conditions based on a completely different theory of causality than the one that we use here in the West. Therefore, you cannot superimpose normal Western causative thinking onto these views that they are describing. Buddhist psychology of consciousness has to do not only with an understanding of the way in which conditions aggregate and arise in material reality, but with how they aggregate and arise in the experience of consciousness and in the experience of personality. It is basically a pluralistic hypothesis which sounds strikingly similar to your idea of psiads.

PALMER: When you talk about moments of experience, maybe an analogy might be what happens in a movie reel where you have distinct frames and then as they go by at a fast speed you get cohesion.

TAYLOR: It is the analogy of the string of pearls without the string in Buddhist metaphysics. There is continuity but because there is no self and everything is continually changing, it is the karmic conditions of the past which are unconscious seeds to be burned out in the future. Basically, promoting the sense of continuity until liberation; then there is freedom.

PALMER: I think that is very congenial with what I'm trying to say. In fact, when I first wrote this paper, I had a little paragraph at the end on how my theory was linked with some mystical ideas, particularly the exhaustion of the psiad being related to burning off karma. But I thought trying to attach this theory to Indian religion was needlessly complicated, particularly because I was also proposing that there was no such thing as reincarnation per se.

TAYLOR: The Buddhists would agree with you.

PALMER: I think they would.

TAYLOR: It is a Buddhist conception. That is a radically different orientation and actually more compatible with the positivist, materialist, and scientific view than you are trying to present.

PALMER: I guess my own personal interest in Eastern religion tends to go more toward Hinduism. I merely thought of it in that way with a karmic connection. I understand enough about Buddhism to appreciate what you're saying. I could see that that is relevant.

TAYLOR: You might be interested in looking into this. It's the Doctrine of *paticcasamuppāda*—Doctrine of Co-dependent Origination.

ALMEDER: John, I'd like to come back one more time to this business of unconsciousness and the psiads. You don't seem to want to say, in fact you seem to be very reluctant to say that consciousness survives death. You say that it has a potential to. Now, my question is: How do you know that consciousness has any potential to survive death unless someone or some other consciousness has, in fact, survived death? Where do you get the inference that allows you to say that consciousness can survive death? Do you want to say that some have and that would be a basis for the inference? Am I right in saying I get a sense of your being very ambivalent about the question of personal survival?

PALMER: Well, I think it comes down to...

ALMEDER: Consciousness.

PALMER: What I'm ambivalent about is what you mean by personal survival.

ALMEDER: I mean, after you die, this item of consciousness will not suffer biological degeneration, for some time anyway.

PALMER: I'm trying to think of a way to say this that would make sense to you. Consciousness itself is defined as a potential for awareness; it is a substrate. In other words, it continues to exist but it is not personal. Consciousness gets personalized, to the extent that it gets personalized, when it in effect becomes incorporated into the psiad. That is the best way I can describe it. But, again, the psiads per se are not conscious, in the sense of having subjective conscious experience, until they interact with a brain. Now, you ask me, "Does consciousness survive?" I guess it depends on what you mean by "survive". The best I can do is to describe what happens, then if that

fits your definition of consciousness surviving, fine. If it doesn't, it doesn't. Because your kind of language is not part of my theory, we are facing a cross-paradigm discussion problem.

EDGE: As I understand it, what survives is the psiad so long as it is intense enough to survive. Consciousness comes when the psiads match up to or use PK on a particular brain. Then there is consciousness.

PALMER: Right, if by consciousness you mean conscious experience. You could easily spend a week of conferences trying to define what consciousness is. It's defined in many different ways. In this theory the word "consciousness" is defined as it would be in some of the mystical literature as an aspect of reality. This is different than in ordinary psychology where it's basically a synonym for awareness.

BRAUDE: Hoyt raised the issue of intensity. I wanted to say something about that, too, because that's another part of your proposal, John, that I had a little trouble with: the idea of an intensity code as if this could be some sort of straightforward or perhaps a quantitative measure of an experience. Do I understand, for example, that my dislike, let's say, of musical theater might have a specific and quantitative level that's either clearly the same as or different from say my dislike of the sound of a fortepiano? I mean, this is going to be the sort of thing that actually has an intensity level, some sort of straightforward level?

PALMER: I'm not sure how straightforward it would be. But in principle—and I stress the "in principle"—it would be quantifiable. I don't mean to imply that this is totally accurate. But if I were to try to apply a quantitive measure to it, it might be something like the degree of autonomic arousal that the thought presents to you.

BRAUDE: But excuse me, John. My like or dislike of something, just to take two kinds of states of mind, are dispositions. It may be true of me that I dislike musical theater and there may be lots of times where that's true of me, but I'm not having any particular current experience of disliking musical theater. So, it would be inappropriate to say that that state of mind has any intensity level whatsoever.

PALMER: For your state of mind at that moment, that's correct. What the theory talks about is parsing the stream of consciousness, to use William James's terminology. You're talking about dispositions,

and I'm not quite sure what their relationship is to the particular elements of the stream of consciousness. However, a disposition would not be the sort of thing that would be represented by a psiad.

LAWRENCE: I have a general question for both John Palmer and Bill Roll about how emotional responses relate to this. I think Bill alluded to that when he presented his point of view that people feel connected. For example, one of the first things that near-death experiencers talk about is how wonderful and how almost euphoric they feel. They have this sense of being total, feeling that they are connected to something else. They are fully appreciated, valued, and accepted. What they come back from the experiences with are the two things that are most important—love and knowledge. This seems to me two different things that relate to consciousness, maybe an emotion, if consciousness goes back to the real definition. I mean, the definition that some people use in terms of awareness. There is some distinction that could be made between cognitive consciousness, so to speak, and some kind of emotional response. I would be interested how these two perspectives relate.

ROLL: We were talking about observation and participation. Observation goes with science, observation goes with knowledge. You might say observation results in knowledge. In that respect you are still standing outside, gaining knowledge, talking about things, and so forth. Love is participation in this way of looking at things, that is, the experience of connectedness happening. In terms of the value of what we are doing or what we are exploring, you cannot have one without the other. You have to have both. You have to have both participation and observation; you have to have love and knowledge. We have made parapsychology so dry. We're taking all life out of it. Nobody pays any attention to us because we're so boring and so insignificant. What we are exploring is the most significant thing that exists, namely the human mind, the human psyche, the human soul. That is an intensely living and loving thing. The near-death experience unfolds this loving on several levels. I think a very significant dimension to our exploration is this participation, this loving. Maybe the mistake is to place parapsychology outside psychology. It should be in psychology. The psychic dimension of the psyche is the most important dimension of it. It is the connective, loving dimension of the psyche. Once you enter

that, you enter relationships with people, with things, and with environments. You see that the environment is something lovable. You see that people are lovable and capable of being incorporated into you. You are not complete without that incorporation. So, parapsychology is to me, or let's say full psychology, un-amputated psychology, the most significant exploration of all because it asserts that. It points the way to enriching our lives in immediate existential ways.

PALMER: When I look at Bill's ideas as compared to my own, I see some similarities and I see some differences. One very clear difference is that my theory is about as atomistic as you can get in this area, and I think Bill's is about as holistic as you can get. This remark is a preface to Madelaine's question because I'm going to take a fairly atomistic approach to the relation between cognition and emotion. There were two basic parts to the psiads: the content and the intensity. The content might be more analogous to the cognition, and the intensity might be more analogous to the emotion, certainly the emotional charge that a particular idea has. You cannot think of emotion in isolation. You have to think of it with respect to a particular cognition.

TAYLOR: I have two points I would like to bring up. One is the implicit assumption that I have heard raised here in the past hour, which I would like to bring out and to open up a little bit more. It has to do with what evidence there may be within the biological sciences to prove definitively that consciousness is produced by the brain. It seems to me that it is equally plausible to suggest that whatever descriptions the biological sciences give us of human functioning, they do not rule out the possibility that the brain is a transmitter of consciousness. At death the brain may simply no longer be the wireless that communicates the music through that particular source. I think it is an unwritten and unexamined assumption of reductionistic science to automatically assume that the brain is the producer of consciousness, when the facts do not contradict an alternative explanation.

The other point has to do with this interesting problem of thought and feeling. And, again, we're spinning conceptual theories about life after death. It stands to reason we would only think that thoughts would survive, because we are not being really experiential. We are sitting in chairs talking about it. We are not developing emotional relationships except indirectly, implicitly, and tangentially. So, there is no reason

why emotions should be a focus of our discussion unless we drag them in intellectually into this conversation. Then we are faced with the problem of how two things—thoughts and feelings—can exist simultaneously in the after-life. Feelings in this case become just one more intellectual category that adds to the present confusion. I am struck with the idea that we have such a tremendous problem while we are alive trying to figure out who we are. Who *are* we? What is it that actually survives? We have not solved the problem in the here and now enough to know what it is that actually is going to get to the other side.

ROLL: I think that has been a major problem of survival research. We have not determined what exists before death from a psychic point of view, from a parapsychological point of view. That has not been determined, yet immediately we spring over and set up experiments and hypotheses as to what comes after death. Nothing makes sense because we did not address the first question.

TAYLOR: We are merely plowing the sea.

ROLL: Coming back to what was brought up earlier by Steve Braude, the issue of complementarity relations. Philosophically and logically, the complementarity relation helps clarify our thinking and deal with contradictions. Human life is so paradoxical. I mean, we ourselves are such paradoxes. We have a right hemisphere, a left hemisphere. We have male and female features; we have excitatory neurons and inhibitory neurons, and so on. We are these contradictions. But if you can look at them as complementary, the contradictions disappear. Consider, for instance, feeling and thinking. When you are completely into feeling, you are not into thinking. When you're feeling about something or somebody and really into that, you're not into thinking about the person. When you're thinking about the person, you're not into feeling. Or, atomistic and holistic. Physicists tell us things are little bits and pieces under these conditions and under other conditions they are indefinite waves, maybe all over the place. So, atomistic and holistic also express this complementarity relation that upholds the world. I think in that way a lot of the apparent contradictions and disagreements that have emerged this morning may be resolved. Yes, it's this, and yet it's that. This under this condition; that under that condition. Mystical union—separate entities. You were

bringing in Zen before. There is one statement where that sort of thing is expressed in a Zen way. If you describe the essential quality of the universe in one word or two words, what would you say?

TAYLOR: *Tathatā*, the Buddhist term for suchness.

ROLL: Or, "not two." You don't say "one." You don't say "two." You hold the middle. This thinking brings us into alignment with basic physical and biological concepts. Things can be contradictory and we ourselves are paradoxical because we are made from a world that is like that.

GLEN JOHNSON: I'm here as an observer and also a listener, which is a familiar role for me. That's what I do for a living—observe and listen to people talk. One footnote about the listening part. I was thinking that I needed the equivalent of closed captioning because so many words were flying by and I wasn't sure exactly what was meant. For example, words like "self" or "psyche" were uttered, but I never knew if these words started with small letters or capital letters. Was it small "psyche" or big "Psyche"? Sometimes you spoke of "small minds" and then I knew what you meant. And that led me to a larger (or smaller) thought. There's a little epigram in Maturana and Varela's *The Tree of Knowledge* that says simply: "Everything said is said by someone." As I listen to the things that are being said by someone or another here, Maturana and Varela remind me that all any of us can do is say things; that is, try to capture something that is pretty hard to figure out. As we muddle around making these sounds at one another, there's a danger that we may be seduced into thinking that we are really describing "what is", rather than just saying things to each other in our own fumbling and ignorance. There were a few jarring moments today when one speaker would respond to another as if some ultimate claim about reality had been made. I don't know that we are competent to say anything about "what is" when it comes to death. After all, the whole topic here is an experience that presumably we have not had yet. We will only know what death is, if at all, briefly at or just after the moment of death. So it seems to me that one very useful function of the moderator, if we can't get the closed captioning, would be to stop us every five minutes and have us take a big, deep breath to remind us that we are just someone saying things and that any clear, well-defined ideas about death will probably elude us by the end of tomorrow. I

think that what we can understand is a function of the states of mind we are capable of entering into. So, when we don't understand one another, sometimes it's the words we don't understand; but at other times we don't understand because we don't know how to get into the proper state. We really can't even get close to knowing what another person is making noises about if we haven't been in a similar state ourselves. I noticed that in the two presentations today, yours, John, was much more conceptual and depended on defining words, while yours, Bill, seemed to me much more evocative, emotional, and coming at us from the side. Those are very different styles of communication, very different ways of telling us something that you know. I was struck that initially so many more of the questions were in response to what you said, John, than to what you said, Bill—which suggests that perhaps it is easier to go at this with words and definitions and their clarification than it is to respond to something more nonverbal and evocative. But I think they are equally powerful ways to try to tell us about things. Somehow it would be nice if our format gave both styles their due.

EDGE: I think, in fact, it may be that Eugene Taylor will back into the same areas this afternoon.

TAYLOR: Eyes closed, backing in. (Chuckle)

BOYCE BATEY: In his *Diary of a Writer*, the Russian novelist Feodor Dostoevski says, "There is only a single supreme idea on earth—the concept of immortality of the human soul. All other profound ideas by which men live are only an extension of it." When John Palmer said, "The older I get, the more confused I become" and when Bill Roll said at one point, "I'm getting very confused" and when Steve Braude said, "I'm very puzzled by something" and Bob Almeder said, "I'm having difficulty figuring this out," it put me in mind of two men returning home from a lecture. One said, "I was very confused by what that lecturer said." The other responded saying, "I, too, am confused but at a very high level." It strikes me that the confusion here is at such a very high level. In dealing with matters of this ilk, it has always been my penchant to consider "both/and" rather than "either/or". In considering mind at large, each of the different modes of consciousness have their own internal validity and consistency. For me it is very much a focus of where consciousness is in this everyday

reality or in the mystical modes of reality where people experientially say, "There are no boundaries to my being. I am one with all that is." In those experiential modes of reality, which are ineffable in their nature and cannot be described, I agree that the reductionistic modalities of science are not adequate to deal with and explore what is happening. To do it in a scientific manner, a new scientific paradigm and approach is needed. That is very much an experiential way—you know by what you experience. Bill, as a meditator for many years, has accessed those levels of consciousness where he understands. For me the best criteria for evaluating these experiences is the test of the Nazarean, the fruits criteria. You know something by their fruit. You evaluate something based on its results. Those who experientially have died and come back to life speak with the authority of their personal experience. I have always trusted such people. Hallucinations in near-death experiences do not adequately explain the transformation that comes about in the personalities of those who have them. For me a reductionistic explanation grounded in philosophical materialism is an inadequate explanation when considering a near-death experience or an out-of-body experience to be a hallucination in concert with guided meditation or imagination. We need to seek a better approach to understanding.

BRAUDE: Just a quick caveat about how authoritative one's first person reports can be in matters of this sort. I think there are lots of things we all do and experience and about which our reports and our understanding are thoroughly unreliable. Just in everyday life we all experience fears and desires. And most of us haven't the vaguest idea what's going on. Our ability to understand ourselves depends on a lot of things, not simply having the experiences but also having an appropriate degree of conceptual sophistication to do something with those experiences.

EDGE: I think we have made progress today. We have raised confusion to a sufficiently high level. And it is probably appropriate that we take a break.