
MORTALITY AND SELF-REALIZATION

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*"There is more in all the world than dreamt of in your philosophy,
dear Horatio."*

William Shakespeare

In the course of the next thirty minutes, there are three interrelated ideas that I would like to weave together for discussion. The first of these is my view that psychic phenomena exist as a by-product of self-realization, not an end, and for that reason, not the mere replication of psychic events in some controlled experimental setting, but self-realization should be the proper subject matter of research into the paranormal. Second is the idea that active exploration of the subconscious in some way simulates or actually brings us closer to the death experience. In both cases, personality transformation is the result. And finally, the main point I would like to leave you with is that while psychic phenomena and near-death states may be real, it hardly occurs to most of us, when we attempt to describe them to our neighbor or to construct a science about them, that our descriptions may have little to do with actual experience.

At the very least, in the end I hope to have left no doubt about my view that the totality of our experience in the immediate moment far transcends our conceptualization of it; that the symbolic capacities each one of us has constitutes an essence extractor far superior to any man made method or apparatus for measuring reality; and that in the final analysis, not scientific data, but our immediate experience is the doorway to an awakened consciousness, the realization and clear articulation of which constitutes one of the most important challenges facing any legitimate science of the future.

I would like to begin by recounting two personal events about our mortality. The first concerns the death of my maternal grandfather at the age of seventy-nine. I was seventeen at the time, attending high school across the street from the rest home where he stayed. You should also know that he had lived in the same room with me for a year before he went in there, so we had developed something of a personal connection. The day he died the authorities would not permit me to leave school when the rest home called to say he was failing, so

I went over immediately at the last bell and arrived just moments after he had passed away. My mother met me in the front waiting room and asked me if I wanted to see him. I reflexively said yes.

What happened next came very quickly. He was still in a room with six other patients, but his bed was surrounded by a screen. The nurse who showed me in suddenly walked away and I was immediately confronted with a lifeless body. I did not feel the presence of the other people just beyond the screen. Instead, I was hypnotically focused on the figure in the bed. I spontaneously sought for the person I knew and, in a whirl of ever-widened telescoping sensations, the answer I got was that he was both there and not there. He was not in the body, but I sensed that he was present. Well then, I asked myself, where was he? It was at this point that I had an oceanic experience. I felt as if my horizons expanded incredibly fast into some farther reaches which had no end. He did not speak to me, there was no voice, only communion. I suppose I was only in there for a few minutes, but I had lost count, as it was a time transcendent moment. I live with that moment to this day, as if the past was not dead, as if there wasn't even any such thing as a past, because that moment for me is now the eternal present.

The second event concerns the recent death of my father this past Mothers' Day. If there are Fates at work in the World, or if there is a Divine personage synchro-nistically rolling the dice, surely such forces were symbolically at work for his death to have occurred on that occasion. I will spare you the details, except to say that my father had been mortally ill for five years, during which he had survived, even recovered, from heart surgery and multiple operations. Then, despite the agony which preceded it, he left this world in no pain, a completely changed man who all along, it turns out, had been courageously unafraid of his own death.

His eminent demise was expected by the family, but the reality of his passing, its enormity, its finality, nevertheless radically changed my consciousness. My state was profound, a hyper-suggestible and surreal condition—the kind of which psychic events are made. I saw visions, heard voices, foretold events, transported objects, had out-of-body experiences, and in general understood that our run-of-the-mill, business-as-usual state of mind was a complete illusion, despite the fact that I was hopeful to get back there as soon as possible. No fact could

help me. No amount of objective information would suffice. I had no theories. I was beyond theory. Well, yes I did. Actually I had many theories, but, of course, none were the right one. I could only exist in an infinite sea of emotion.

I am telling you this because there is likely no one among us who has escaped these experiences. Their relevance to the present discussion is that when they come to us they are among the few most important events that shape a person's life. Usually we can count the number of these experiences on one hand. They have primacy over all else. They are the benchmarks of our unfolding personal destiny.

Further, they put scientific facts in a light not normally conceived by all the textbooks of experimental method and all the pundits of high culture combined. They remind us of the important distinction made by Western and Eastern philosophers alike, what William James called the superiority of immediate "acquaintance with" versus simply "knowledge about" something. The Buddhists speak of *paramartasatya* versus *samvritisatya*—mere factual knowledge of the world as compared to the direct transcendent experience of totality.

We tend to forget that experience is primary and scientific knowledge is at best only an approximate model of reality, a probability statement about the norm, a working representation and not the actual reality itself. Even in science, the meaning context always has to come from within. Mind always has to intervene. Even the most exact measurement has to be interpreted by someone.

Think, on the one hand, of the scientist who chooses his subject matter because that is where the grant funding is; or the investigator who, before he even launches his research, formulates his hypothesis by eliminating large parts of experience because they are not testable; or the researcher who is confronted with conflicting results which nevertheless require a final judgement. In the last analysis his choice will always be based on personal sentiment.

On the other hand, we who are the recipients of its largesse have taken the scientific method and reified it into a worldview. We have sometimes unwittingly, but more often with eyes wide open, bought into the assumption that only by objective methods can truth be known. And, perforce, it is only a short further step to the larger metaphysical

belief that the philosophy of science is, then, the only legitimate philosophy upon which modern people should build their lives.

Meanwhile, we may hold conceptualizations about ultimate reality radically different from those required in reductionistic science. Such differences in worldview, even when we think we are being scientific, lead, in my opinion, to radical differences in what we consider legitimate evidence.

Here is one instance where an older woman, the supervisor of a retirement complex, believes she has the power to be a channeler. She takes a continuing education course on the subject and informally tries her skills on some of the tenants where she works. She finds that she is able to make accurate readings on many of them, corroborated by their verbal reports to her of foretold events that later came true. This woman is now absolutely convinced that these powers are real, precisely because they are real for her and she has tested them. Her evidence, however, is all experiential. No amount of laboratory data and no scientific theory to the contrary will convince her otherwise.

Here in another case is a distinguished team of researchers at a prestigious Ivy League University who have set up a laboratory to study the effects of conscious choice on the measurement of objective recording devices. After several years of exacting trials, they believe they have statistically significant data to show the effect of consciousness on matter, independent of mediating influences through the sense organs. The problem is that none of their more skeptical colleagues will believe the data. No one will replicate their work, much less discuss it in a scientific forum in a manner that would have any impact on the way most sciences are conducted. In this case, their colleagues throughout the university and the professions have implicitly proclaimed by their silence that if new facts do not fit prevailing theories about reality, then so much the worse for the facts.

As one distinguished molecular biologist put it, if what the psychical researchers said were true then it would already have been taken up by other laboratories and tested and we would have heard of the final results by now. We have heard nothing. Ergo, there must have been nothing there in the first place. Sentiment again, I maintain, plays a major role in such responses.

What then is this penchant in parapsychology for exact measurement and replication of minute effects in the laboratory? What is this drive toward the objective collection of anecdotal facts in a clinical setting? And what can this mode of investigation have to tell us about psychic phenomena and the experience of death? The very history of the field suggests that psychical research has survived because it has already made major contributions, not to physics, but to experimental psychopathology, to psychotherapeutics, and to the evolution of the so-called soft sciences of personality, abnormal, social, and clinical psychology (Taylor, 1985, 1986).

Yet these advances were not solidified and built upon, but rather marginalized within the field under the rubric of parapsychological depth psychology. Instead, psychical research, in being renamed parapsychology, has come to mean laboratory based experiments performed according to the methodology of the natural sciences or else the collection of verbal reports in a clinical setting which are then analyzed and cast into the context of some theoretical model.

By giving preeminence to this approach, parapsychology has thus made many of the same epistemological mistakes that the rest of the sciences continue to make about the nature and province of inward experience. We now must ask ourselves, even if we can show data for the existence of psychic powers in some laboratory or some clinic, what does it mean? Cast into the wrong context, I maintain, the inward meaning of such events can never be revealed.

Their proper context, I shall maintain, is not the replication of psychic phenomena in the laboratory, or the finding of lost children, wallets, or dead bodies, or even communication with departed loved ones. The proper context lies within the domain of self-knowledge, the refinement of character, the evolution and transformation of consciousness, the actualization of our higher nature (Taylor, 1993). In Zen they refer to both the experience of polishing this inward mirror as well as the transcendence of all such formulations. Its language is not the measurements of the mathematicians, the syllogisms of the logicians, or the abstractions of the philosophers. Its discourse is rather carried on in the songs of the heart, the intuitions of poetry, the light of insight. It is neither numerical nor logical, but it transcends both—it's true power is symbolic, metaphoric, mythic, and visionary.

The inward method, moreover, is any means by which we can effect an internal opening of the doors of perception. Psychologically, this may be expressed in the various kinds of techniques we master to induce an altered state at will—the practice of breath control, the performance of meditation, the contemplation of inspired poetry, an act of hallowed movement. We may actively try to find ways to free the mind from its lower fetters. So the Zen koan asks, where does the white go when the snow melts? What did your face look like before your mother's womb? When you die and they scatter your ashes to the wind, where are you?

Here we come upon the fruitful idea that exploration of the subconscious simulates the death experience, that there is some intrinsic relationship between our ability to transcend the bounds of everyday waking consciousness and the experience that happens to us at the end of physical life.

This process, in simulating the departure of the spirit from its material form while remaining alive in the same body, I shall refer to as a symbolic death of the ego. Here, the filtering mechanism that separates us from the world is disbanded. Individual identity merges into the collective; we are inundated by contents from the collective reservoir; self and not-self become one for a moment until we recollect ourselves at a new level. We are called upon at certain prescient moments to leave behind a former self and take on a new and wider identity. We die in order to come to life. All this lies within our grasp in the immediate moment, either because we have found meaning through suffering or we have discovered a higher life through the less painful but more difficult process of actualizing our values.

Because we are constrained by our ability to conceptualize the whole of reality, all of psychology, as William James suggested, may be nothing more than a colossal elaboration of the ego. The very act of conceptualization dooms our expression to the inherent limits of language and discursive thought. The school that has dominated linguistics too long is the one which believes that if a word does not exist for something then that something must not exist. Normative language and thought are, of course, always going through their own evolution. They will always lag behind experience, just as our social institutions, founded on insight, by their very nature work to prevent

the kind of innovation that created them in the first place. The process of personal transformation proceeds apace, nevertheless, meaning that our present day cultural institutions, now more than ever, no longer accurately express the breadth and depth of the experiences brought to those institutions by its members.

Experience always transcends thought. Our forgetfulness of this in a modern technologically driven society dooms us to the insanity of believing that if we only had a model of death we will know what it is. A comedian recently pointed this out to his audience when he made a few jokes about the concept of a living will and the desire to avoid heroic measures at the end. But suppose, he said, that the vegetative state is the most desirable from the standpoint of achieving both our narcissistic wish to cling to life and our urge to experience eternity. Suppose that in this condition we actually get all that we have been looking for. All of our material needs are taken care of through life support systems; we do not have to struggle to survive; we do not have to answer what our detractors have to say about us or listen to the triviality of the masses. We even find out who loves us the most because they are the ones who keep us constant company at the bedside. Meanwhile, we supposedly remain conscious at a very deep level to all that goes on. It is just not apparent to anyone else. Yet there we are, perched on the edge of the abyss. All of inward creation lies before us. The firmament is constantly within view. We bask in the higher light. Why on earth, and in heaven's name, would we want to pull the plug? But who, of course, could foretell this in advance?

Death and the Transcendent

Our sensibilities are repelled, however, at the implicit narcissism of presuming that we could still cling to this earthly body and also be able to enter into the next life. There are numerous injunctions against this throughout the history of ascetic spiritual practice, where it is generally believed that one has to starve the appetites of the flesh, abstain from all foods that are the product of sexual reproduction, cease violence against all living organisms, and in general turn the senses away from their slavish attachments to all external objects in order to witness a

vision of higher consciousness. So the Theravada Buddhists say that when arriving at the farther shore, one must perforce leave the boat at the river bank.

One cannot fail to be struck by the implicit relationship expressed here between the experience of death and our conceptions of ultimate reality. People who have near-death experiences come back and report the beatific vision of something much higher and more perfect than they had ever known, and once having seen this, if permitted to re-enter what they now call the physical plane, for ever afterward their lives are changed. What had been before a complete unknown, or perhaps only an intimation or an occasional glimpse, now becomes the permanent and unceasing ground of all material existence.

Here is the celebrated case of the respected physician Dr. George Ritchie (1978), a man who died and came back to life, having seen the realms of the heavens and the hells, events that were to later happen to him, even the Great White Light of the Void, but whose single most important characteristic was a transformed consciousness. People afterwards described his immense peace, his even-mindedness, his beatitude. He himself said the most significant change that came over him was his neverceasing awareness of the divinity in each person, which he saw to one extent or another as he gazed into the soul of every individual he met afterwards. Experientially he had discovered that only love overcomes death, transcends death, is the very bridge between life and death. As a young doctoral student, Raymond Moody heard Ritchie speak in 1965, and, believing this to be the first fully documented case of near-death experience, Moody was led into his further now widely known investigations.

Aldous Huxley, unbeknownst to anyone, read the Tibetan *Bardo Thodol* to his dying wife, Maria. Alone with her, he reassured her over and over that she should turn toward the light, the single most important experience at the moment of transition, the duration of which would determine the next karmic domain of one's rebirth. That he had read the book to her and that she had been guided by this light was later spontaneously reported to Huxley by Eileen Garrett, from what was described as an after-death communication with Maria (Bedford, 1973; Garrett, 1968).

All of Christian Science is in fact based on this revelation of the Light. In 1866, after she had been healed of a nervous condition by Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, Mary Baker Patterson, then recently divorced, had a serious fall on the ice and dislocated her spine. Semi-conscious and initially in great pain, she was taken to a nearby house, but against her doctor's orders, she soon had herself removed to her own home. She refused to take her prescribed medicine, having no faith in it, she said, choosing instead to have only friends and church members around her.

At one point, alone with only her Bible, she turned to one of the healing episodes of Jesus, and she later wrote, His words began to flood into her thoughts. "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man can come unto the Father but through me." She was suddenly filled with the conviction that her life was in God and at that moment she was healed. The core of her realization was that faith in matter was error. "Mind is All, matter nothing," became her watchword. Having recourse, she said, only to her own inner resources, and sustained only by her Bible, she resolved to place herself solely in God's hands, and by this means achieved the regeneration she sought. Christian Science thus dates its beginnings from this experience (Taylor, in press).

Likewise, recovery from alcoholism, it has been found, is often accompanied by an experience of the transcendent. Bill Wilson, the co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, in 1933 had checked into the Townsend Hospital in New York City for the third time, facing, he believed, either insanity or eminent death from his prolonged drinking. Instead, he had a white light experience, upon which he later built the Twelve Step Program:

My depression deepened unbearably and finally it seemed to me as though I were at the very bottom of the pit. I still gagged badly at the notion of a Power greater than myself, but finally, just for the moment, the last vestige of my proud honesty was crushed. All at once I found myself crying out, "If there is a God, let Him show Himself! I am ready to do anything, anything!"

Suddenly, my room blazed with an indescribably white light. I was seized with an ecstasy beyond description. Every joy I had known was pale

by comparison. The light, the ecstasy—I was conscious of nothing else for a time.

Then, seen in the mind's eye, there was a mountain. I stood upon its summit, where a great wind blew. A wind, not of air, but of spirit. In great, clean strength, it blew right through me. Then came the blazing thought "You are a free man." I know not at all how long I remained in this state, but finally the light and the ecstasy subsided. I again saw the wall of my room. As I became more quiet, a great peace stole over me, and this was accompanied by a sensation difficult to describe. I became acutely conscious of a presence which seemed like a veritable sea of living spirit. I lay on the shores of a new world. "This," I thought, "must be the great reality. The God of the preachers."

Savoring my new world, I remained in this state for a long time. I seemed to be possessed by the absolute, and the curious conviction deepened that no matter how wrong things seemed to be, there could be no question of the ultimate rightness of God's universe. For the first time, I felt that I really belonged. I knew that I was loved and could love in return. I thanked my God, who had given me a glimpse of His absolute self. Even though a pilgrim upon an uncertain highway, I need be concerned no more, for I had glimpsed the great beyond. (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1984, p. 121)

Wilson's recovery is well documented. But little known is the fact that he soon became a practicing Spiritualist, held numerous seances to convince atheistic drunks that there was something beyond themselves to believe in, and he allegedly received communications from William James and St. Francis from beyond the grave. This is the inward reason he always recommended to AA readers *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* and James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, and always spoke of James as a founder of AA, although the Harvard psychologist had been long dead before Wilson's organization was actually launched (T. Powers, personal communication, January 1994).

If all of this theistic Christian language is not to your liking, we can just as easily turn to the non-theistic yoga texts of India. I have chosen to comment on Sutra 22 of Book III, *Vibhuti*, the acquisition of supernormal powers. The text says:

sopakramam nirupakramam cha karma
 tatsamyamādaparāntjñānamariṣṭebhyo vā
 (Aranya, 1983, pp. 293-294)

A rough translation of this passage is that karma is either fast or slow in fructifying. By practicing *samyama* on either karma or portents, foreknowledge of death can be acquired.

The general meaning of this sutra is that the effects of all thoughts, words, and deeds come to fruition either right away or over time. If they come to fruition over time they have been stored as unconscious seeds (*bija*), which will sprout forth when conditions are right. If the conditions are ripe in the immediate moment, they will have their effect right now. In advanced yoga *samyama* means the three fold tool of attention, concentrated meditation, and absorption into any object of perception. The purpose of yoga is the promotion of insight, not into the objects themselves, but into their illuminating quality, which leads to the experience of pure consciousness independent of inert matter. One by-product of achieving this experience is the ability to see into past and future lives, or into successive individual moments of consciousness. In this process, past karma is either burned up or to be lived out. Burning is immediate liberation, while residual karma defines the state of the next rebirth. *Samyama* on the effects of karma thus allows one to witness the speed of karmic fruition and thus, knowledge of the present end of this life can be gathered.

I should also note that the mention of portents simply means that one can foretell one's death by looking within: there is no sound on closing the ears or visual illumination when pressing the closed eye; one may see messengers of death or wraiths of departed relatives; or one may suddenly see the heavens or spirits, or perceive everything contrary to what has been seen before. These explanations come directly from the standard textual commentaries. All of these examples, taken from the Eastern and Western literature suggest an intimate connection between psychic phenomena and the death, or near-death, experience.

Conclusion

So you see that, rather than more science or more clinical data, I am an advocate of the poetic imperative. Instead of always allowing external circumstances to define our inward reality for us, I feel that we need to rekindle living myths and energetic symbols as the basic tools that assist us in defining what is most central to our true nature. We need to realize that, despite the fact that words are a major source of pain and misunderstanding, language can be a vehicle for its own transcendence. We must emphatically assert that the iconography of the transcendent cannot be excluded simply on epistemological grounds from any science that purports to explain the whole of reality.

This charges us, however, with the necessity of framing a psychology of inner experience subtle enough and significant enough to speak to the hidden assumptions of current rationalist thought; to pose a significant enough alternative to the long standing and reigning drift toward nihilistic materialism; and to create a new way of thinking about reality fit to address the complex demands of the future.

What is at stake is tremendous. For one, there is the cultural definition of personality, and hence how our educational experience will be shaped. Are we going to continue to train only the rational and sensory faculties, to the detriment of the emotions and intuition? Are we to continue to produce generation after generation of people whose main purpose is to spew out more data? Are we to ignore the attendant growth and refinement of the moral and aesthetic qualities that must go into guiding science and the larger enterprise of human thought toward higher ends?

Another issue is the role of the mind in healing—will it be eliminated and forgotten? Or, more hopefully, will it be incorporated into an integrated picture of higher human functioning? Will mechanistic biology continue to find innovative ways to appropriate from the domain of the spirit in a way that reduces effects to mere technique? Or will the legal and exclusive power to heal pass out of the hands of specialists and back to the patient, but now in some new collaborative effort that neither could have foreseen in the past?

There have in fact been generations of visionaries who have spoken to the same old themes that confront us anew, but now more

urgently—the death of personal freedom, the enslavement of the individual, the destruction of the planet, as well as the more existential questions of who we are and the meanings we attach to life and death. We are called upon as the voice of a new generation to forge the base metals of science and the spirit into some as yet unidentified alloy that adequately speaks to the modern problems of consciousness. It seems important to remember that this process goes on nowhere else but in the crucible of our own immediate experience, in an expansion of our present state of consciousness; it is here that these questions must be confronted. And even if we cannot fashion a final objective answer about them, suppose, by considering them in this admittedly tenuous and uncertain light, that personality transformation is still the result?

I see, however, that I have at last run out of time, so I will leave you with that proverbial epitaph carved onto the tombstone of a recently deceased Spiritualist, which read: "To be continued..."

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DISCUSSION

BRAUDE: Eugene, I appreciate your emphasis on experience and its proper role in any kind of reasoned and full-blown view of reality. But I want to make sure that you're not saying something which is obviously false. You say that we tend to forget that experience is primary. You say that experience always transcends thought. And you draw a distinction between say the scientific way of understanding the world and the direct experience that we have of various kinds of events. What concerns me about that is the suggestion (and maybe you didn't mean to be making this suggestion) that when we leave the scientific mode of cognition and resort to the more direct experience of whatever it is we're experiencing, that somehow that mode of understanding nature is more direct and more likely to be accurate than the other. I mean, it may be true that there is a respect in which experience transcends thought. But it is never exactly independent of it. And especially once we're adults, all of our experience, it seems to me, is shot through with cognitive elaboration that we couldn't divest ourselves of even if we wanted to. That's one reason why Humean empiricism is doomed to fail.

TAYLOR: I noticed that you made experience the mere object of a preposition.

BRAUDE: What did I say? You expect me to remember? Egad!

TAYLOR: I noticed your emphasis on "experience". This is precisely my point. Yes, I make the claim that direct experience is superior to scientific knowledge within its proper and appropriate domain. What I basically wish to challenge is the notion that objective science and phenomenological experience always operate in the same domain. Suppose that there could possibly be many domains of experience only one of which was available to the methods of science.

BRAUDE: I don't challenge that.

TAYLOR: Then why make the claim, as you just did, that direct experience is likely to be more accurate? Now, did I say that?

BRAUDE: That's what I'm asking you. It seems to me that in fact, calling it "direct" is somewhat misleading.

TAYLOR: I tried to make a preliminary statement about this problem at the recent Louisa Rhine Centenary Conference held by the Foundation for Research on the Nature of Man.⁵ What I tried to say there was, I don't think that we know enough right now to construct a legitimate science of the spirit. I think that we are in a better position to empower the individual separating the domains of technology and immediate experience. I don't think to be more accurate means simply appropriating experience as another category into the scientific domain. What I'm talking about is not just another little item in our pantheon of understandings as far as discriminations of cognitive reality is concerned. I'm talking about a radical transformation of context, of worldview, and that those kinds of transformations happen right here. They happen right here to us. It is at periodic intervals when the most important experiences happen to us that the inward doors are flung open. Those are the experiences that change us, not the scientific information. The only thing I'm trying to posit at this particular point is that I can have an experience and you can sit there and watch me and give me an objective description of it. My claim is that it is different to simply just say, "Oh, you're talking about direct experience." That is a piece of objective information about what you heard me say, and that was not what I was talking about. What I'm talking about is the inner phenomenological domain where I live that has states of consciousness associated with it. I have an elaborate metaphorical and visionary language of inner experience to understand those domains. Maybe I haven't looked within, and basically I stay trapped in that domain between the demands of external material reality and my lack of self-knowledge or my lack of an inward language. But I claim that you cannot take the totality of inward experience, simply put it out there and say, "Well, we can observe it, collect facts about it, measure

⁵ Rao, K.R. (Ed.). (1993). *Cultivating consciousness: Enhancing human potential, wellness, and healing*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

it, make a theory about it, know what it is, learn how to control it, overcome death, and live to be immortal." To me by the time you have gotten there, you have missed the point completely. Personality transformation does not happen by that route. That's really the main point that I am trying to emphasize.

BRAUDE: I understand. I don't believe I'm challenging that. Let me try one more time to make clear what it is I'm saying. Notice one of the ways you describe that. I'm not challenging the transformative powers of certain kinds of episodes in a person's life. I don't mean to minimize those at all. What it has to do with is, for example, you described it as "opening the doors". I think the implication of that is that somehow what you are getting at is reality in a way in which you might not otherwise.

EDGE: Some sort of "Immaculate Perception."

BRAUDE: Maybe something like that. You say when criticizing the scientific way of apprehending reality, mind always has to intervene. All I'm suggesting is that mind is intervening even when it may feel as if it isn't.

TAYLOR: I think that when we take consciousness, extend it out to the material world, and make these discriminations about it, there is a modeling that goes on where we're somehow able to make interactions within the realm of probability which seem to allow us to gain some control over it. As long as we do that and focus on external material reality out there, our attention remains out there and the structures in the mind become fixed when really there is no such thing as structures of the mind. But there is as long as we continue to make these discriminations and lay down the habits, passions, dreams, hopes, and desires that are translated out there into this interaction. However, as soon as you take consciousness and turn it within, the entire fixed structure starts to move around. That is the basic principle of psychotherapy. That is the basic explanation of insanity. That is the basic principle of spiritual discipline. What I'm saying is, we live so much out there at the juncture between external material reality and consciousness connecting with it that we have constructed this great big psychology of everything from that particular standpoint. Not everybody stands there, although that seems to be where Western educated intellectuals, who believe in the Judeo-Christian, Greco-

Roman, Western European, and Anglo-American definition of reality, think that everyone else should be. The majority of the world is simply not in that position and that view does not even square with all of reality. It is not a scientific statement that I aspire to make because what we really may be confronted with is that science may not be appropriate for understanding this domain. If it is, then it will become a transformed science. If it is not, then science will simply become just one other form of useful knowledge within culture. Alternative knowledge-getting epistemologies will then emerge. My claim is that we have not even begun to look at viable epistemologies beyond the rational projections of the mind.

BRAUDE: I'm not challenging that.

OWENS: I very much agree with you that our culture needs to be balanced with regard to respecting experience. I have been very impressed with the life transformations following near-death experience in my studies and I have known about those even before I went into it. What I was not prepared for was the agony that these people have gone through in our culture. These extremely powerful, meaningful experiences are not respected the way that they should be. It's very difficult to communicate the distress that these people have been through. I think that the more we can do to change the culture, the better. However, I would really caution against throwing out the baby with the bathwater. As a scientist I use scientific tools in my study of near-death experience. I feel as though I go back and forth between working at the computer and doing my science and using all the methodologies that I have learned and truly appreciating the experience, just feeling a true reverence for it. I think we need both.

TAYLOR: Thank you. But I would challenge that. I would challenge that we would need both. Just because they exist does not automatically mean they are equal or even *should* be integrated. They both may be wrong. That was the point that I made earlier. Suppose, for instance, that the real problem that has developed is an overemphasis on the rational and the material. These have now become the central focus of our reality. It doesn't matter about experience and it doesn't matter about people. Any old subject in a scientific experiment will do. They can be rats. They could be black, white, red, or yellow individuals. It doesn't matter. They just need to be subjects

who can give us data. Well, I am saying no. Any legitimate thoughtful approach to the problems that we have to face personally in our own lives means for me that science is just a tool for me to help get a handle on this greater mystery. Science is not the mystery itself. I revel in the realization that there is no religion and there is no science which has ultimately concluded why you are sitting over there and I am standing over here right now and who we really are. To keep that foremost is, to me, an extraordinarily difficult thing for you and I to contemplate in a modern context.

OWENS: I am often faced with the problem of people thinking that because I'm trying to explain a near-death experience scientifically, I'm trying to explain it away or I don't have respect for the experience. It is a trigger reaction that I think happens in all of us. For example, when I suggested an explanation about the old hag experience with Michael Grosso, his response was to take that off of the list. No, that's not what I intended at all.

TAYLOR: That is my point. In other words, why simply take it out of its context so it looks like any other category in science when to me its true value has to do with a process of personality transformation that we do not even understand yet? Personality transformation—that is the direction to develop. Until then, misunderstandings are to be expected. The fact is, it may not be the positivistic context in which your work belongs because we have no consensually validated language of inner experience. We have no inner framework within our culture to understand the living reality of our ancestors who may be all physically dead beings but still here with us right now in some spiritually living presence. The majority of people in the world believe that the dead are with us now. Yet we say in the name of science that this cannot be true. We take people who live in other cultures and train them in science. Many become neurotic individuals who have to compartmentalize and live in two different worlds at once. When they go into the university setting or the scientific laboratory, they believe that nothing spiritual exists in the material universe and they have to live their lives according to this philosophy of despair. When they go back home they again take on the mystery of where they came from. They have been told by Western culture that their traditional way is a dying worldview, when in fact this to them is the view that lives. So,

I think we have something to learn from non-technological cultures that present us with an iconography of the *non-rational*.

OWENS: I just want to say once more, the key here is transforming science, not putting it down. I think that it is much more productive to think about the way science can change rather than just pointing the finger at it like the bad guy.

TAYLOR: I agree with you that transforming science is a possibility. However, to me scientific information is not necessarily the only possible option.

LAWRENCE: I agree with your basic premise because I, like Justine, study the experiences of people. I think it is very interesting because people who have near-death experiences are convinced that what happened to them was real and that they did share in an afterlife. I mean, you could have all the scientists in the world say, "It was a hallucination; it was a dream" but they are not going to believe it. Their own personal experience is what their reality is. However, I think they still have a question of how that fits into the culture that they live in. People then invalidate their experiences. What is the meaning for them that they were "chosen", or were they "chosen"? They have other questions about their lives and their immediate situation that the scientific community does not address. We as scientific people are trying to address, "Does this prove that there is life after life?" And, "Is this something that really goes on?" But those are not their questions. Their questions are, "Is this normal?" "How come everybody else doesn't have this?"

TAYLOR: I completely agree with you. Your point poses several interesting possibilities. First, I apologize if I appear somewhat militant, especially because this is a sympathetic audience. But in a certain sense, I feel that constant data collection and model building are perpetuating the same mistakes that got us into this problem in the first place. If the transformation is going to happen, then, perhaps here is one of the places to start.

Second, when people have these near-death experiences a series of remarkable transformations always seem to begin afterwards. They make new friends. The books in their library change. They start doing different things with their time. They do not spend much time in front of the television anymore. They begin reading, searching, and looking

more deeply into things. They have effectively experienced two births; there is the biological place where they were born and the place where they became awakened to whom they really are. After the second kind of birth there's always a search for spiritual compatriots and the place where the soul can finally rest and call home. The journey takes place inside yourself and you have to go alone. But then, miraculously, people you never met before start coming out of the woodwork who are much like yourself. They can be old; they can be young. They could be men; they could be women. They can cut across all the categories that we use to judge people. I think we wish that there was more of that inward spiritual quest which leads to high moral and aesthetic ends. At present the diabolical and pathological dimensions seem to dominate the mainstream in which we live. We know that higher consciousness is possible, however. The knowledge is there. The esoteric books of the East have been hidden for thousands of years. Now it's all translatable. It's all right out there. It is no longer the big mystery that it was. What the priests denied to us for so many centuries is now available to anyone educated enough to read and has an interest in the subject. I happen to think that our dominant cultural institutions haven't got a clue to what this transformation is all about. Meanwhile, there is a spontaneous social revolution taking place involving just these very topics. The United States is in the relatively unique position because of its place in the history of the Western visionary tradition. Fueled by the counter-culture movement in the 1960s, present-day folk psychology is having a remarkable impact on the way clinicians deliver care to patients. There is a non-unionized revolution among educated employees who have decided that they are going to take less money and not go up the corporate ladder as fast in exchange for time off so that their lives will be more well-rounded. Management has had to respond or stand to lose some of their best people. Science is being challenged by this popular revolution as well. Parapsychology and the study of near-death phenomena are part of this revolution. But you cannot make the claim that this is cutting-edge science, because it is not. It could influence science, but it is not the scientific mainstream. I think there is a misunderstanding of where these cultural forces are coming from and that misunderstanding is probably preventing parapsychology from being more of what it could really be.

ROLL: First let me say that I enjoyed your paper a great deal.

TAYLOR: Thank you. I enjoyed yours.

ROLL: Thank you. I thought you might say so. I found the experience you had at the death of your grandfather very, very interesting and significant. It opens up a whole realm of near-death experiences that has not been explored but that is out there—the near-death experience of the one who is close to the one who departs. I remember Lawrence LeShan told me about an experience of his wife. She was in California when her father died in New York. At that moment she had a transcending near-death type of experience, without any awareness of her father's death. I often wish that we would ask questions not only of the ones who are dying but also of the ones who are standing by. I remember one or two other persons who got into a euphoric state at the time of somebody's death, somebody very close. It can be embarrassing. People say, "Well, she's in shock or he's in shock." But, you explain it away that way. It seems to be a genuine transcending experience that results when you follow the one that you are connected to.

TAYLOR: If that is the case, then it would probably radically transform simple things like our psychology of everyday perception. Let's go back to the original issue we started with at the beginning of the day, the problem of representation. Suppose that it is not an external world out there independent of the senses but a kind of a colorizing phenomena that goes on, an interaction between human consciousness and material reality which creates these things simultaneously as they happen? The Buddhists call this "dependent co-arising". Now, it seems to me, what you are describing would overthrow some of the basic models and assumptions upon which the current models of experimentation in normative science are based. Isn't that one of the reasons why we are here, to take a look at what direction parapsychology could go to achieve exactly those kind of events?

ROLL: Yes. This is where the participatory approach connects with the objective scientific approach. It reminds me of the claims of physicists that the observer affects the system that he or she observes. There is an interaction there. You can't quite distinguish one from the other.

TAYLOR: Yes. As a matter of fact, I take the issue quite personally. I feel that at some time in the near future that psychology and psychiatry might potentially lead some transformation of the social, medical, and perhaps even the natural, sciences precisely because they are both sciences and arts. Since they are not like the hard-core naturalistic sciences, they are denigrated within that hierarchy. Precisely because they are imbued with the reality of the unconscious, they exude this problem of the personal equation much more than any of the other sciences. It seems to me that they could potentially be the philosopher's stone precisely because they are a bridge between the sciences and the humanities. The late Rollo May, Tom Greening, Stanley Krippner, along with myself and others have been playing around with the idea of reviving William James's metaphysics of radical empiricism as more or less the way James originally meant it—as a critique of experimentalism in scientific psychology. The idea would be to bring about a transformation of humanistic psychology and make it more like the type of influence in scientific psychology, that would bring about the very transformation that we are seeking. Suddenly psychology might become, instead of a methodological science interested in behavior and cognition, a truly person-centered science. Here science would become basically a tool, not an end. So, if the revolution is going to happen within psychology, then why not also within psychical research? But up until now parapsychology has ranged instead across the entire domain of the sciences. I think a much more concerted strategy should be taken up, focused on transforming psychology.