

## A Life-After-Life Vision for Improved Psyches and Their Inevitable Addictions

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### ABSTRACT

*Previous work has highlighted basic problems with the scientific model of life, in particular about health and behavioral tendencies. A possible explanation was introduced involving a reincarnation- (or transcendental-) based understanding of life. Associated with that premodern understanding of life (and death) was potential insight into a number of behavioral enigmas; a more constructive vision; and consistency with a number of religions on the opportunity for deeper meaning and a profound release (or transcendence) from suffering. Herein this approach is furthered via discussions on - the modern default understanding, scientific materialism; reviews of reincarnation research; our innate religious/spiritual beliefs; and medium-based communications with the dead. The closing discussion and conclusions then summarize the basic points herein, consider some implications, and offer a few suggestions. If people want to address our challenging mental circumstances, they should consider looking beyond the contemporary paradigm.*

**Keywords:** Genetics, behavioral genetics, mental health, reincarnation, religion, spirituality.

### The Scientific Understanding of Life and an Introduction

I initiate this paper's coverage with some brief quotes capturing the skinny on the scientific understanding of life. As that materialist understanding or model is the default educated perspective on life and its challenges, it is worth stating and digesting. For a relatively uncompromising depiction of that understanding the work of one prominent biologist stands out. The depiction:

[A]ll of us, and scientists are no exception, are vulnerable to the existential shudder that leaves us wishing that the foundations of life were something other than just so much biochemistry and biophysics. The shudder, for me at least, is different from the encounters with nihilism that have beset my contemplation of the universe. There I can steep myself in cosmic Mystery. But the workings of life are not mysterious at all. They are obvious, explainable, and thermodynamically inevitable. And relentlessly mechanical. And bluntly deterministic. My body is some 10 trillion cells. Period. My thoughts are a lot of electricity flowing along a lot of membrane. My emotions are the result of neurotransmitters squirting on my brain cells. I look in the mirror and see the mortality and I find myself fearful, yearning for less knowledge, yearning to believe that I have a soul that will go to heaven and soar with the angels [1: pp.46-47].

It is noteworthy that this depiction is somehow found in Ursula Goodenough's arguably neo-religious book, "The Sacred Depths of Nature". Is this vision realistic and/or helpful?

An additional insight can be found in the novelist Julian Barnes' very fine 2008 book, *Nothing to be frightened of* (Barnes). Barnes' book focuses on his take on death and along with it quite a bit of life. The book opens with the sentence, "I don't believe in God, but I miss Him" [2: pp.93-4]. The essential backdrop to the work is that Barnes has opted for the default educated understanding which of course means science, and this is not surprisingly quite limited. With this perspective Barnes can still intellectualize and philosophize around a bit - including taking some shots at atheists, philosophers (his brother is one), and more generally modern trends (although there he shortchanged what has become frenetic distraction-ism in favor of more traditional "frenetic [commercial] materialism"), but to little end he concluded. In a summer quote:

We discover, to our surprise, that as (Richard) Dawkins (i.e., "Mister Meaninglessness") memorably puts it, we are "survival machines - robot vehicles blindly programmed to preserve the selfish molecules known as genes". The paradox is that individualism - the triumph of free-thinking artists and scientists - has led us to a state of self-awareness in which we can now view ourselves as units of genetic obedience. My adolescent notion of

self-construction - that vaguely, Englishly, existentialist ego-hope of autonomy - could not have been further from the truth. I thought the burdensome process of growing up ended with a man standing by himself at last - *homo erectus* at full height, *sapiens* in full wisdom - a fellow now cracking the whip on his own full account. This image ... must be replaced by the sense that, far from having a whip to crack, I am the very tip of the whip itself, and that what is cracking me is a long and inevitable plait of genetic material which cannot be shrugged or fought off. My 'individuality' may still be felt, and genetically provable; but it may be the very opposite of the achievement I once took it for [2: pp.93-4].

Further, "[n]ow, alone, we must consider what our Godless wonder might be for" [ibid.: p.93]; Christianity is a "beautiful lie" [ibid.: p.53]; and modern alternative pursuits - the "secular modern heaven of self-fulfillment" - and their purported realization of happiness is "our chosen myth" [ibid.: p.59]. And of course, "[t]he air has been let out of the tyres of free will" [ibid.: p.181].

To the contrary, earlier work by the author suggested that the above molecular-only vision of life is easily rebutted via some accepted, albeit unusual behaviors [3-6]. Children are very unlikely to know things they never learned, be they associated with adult occupations or religious teachings. They also should be unlikely to grieve over a lost connection to their biological parents if they were adopted at a very young age [7]. Additionally, the innate intelligence of humanity should not have ramped up by remarkable degrees (i.e., the Flynn Effect) during the twentieth century [4]. Monozygotic twins should not be so consistently different in their health and behavioral tendencies independently of the degree of overlap in their upbringings. Finally, and embracing a number of these anomalies, variations in DNA - the presumed language of life - should in detectable fashion be correlated with many of our innate behavioral and health tendencies (as expected in behavioral genetics and personal genomics, respectively).

The latter missing heritability phenomena suggests that the sacred DNA-based model is overbooked as a vehicle for inheritance. Something else is happening. Further, if as commonly believed in the premodern era there are underlying souls which tend to be drawn to their future parents, then along with a tendency to maintain behavioral inclinations and also be subject to a mysterious karma-like influence, then such a dynamic could provide a gross explanation for the critical missing heritability problem. In a succinct example, it could provide an explanation of the health and behavioral differences observed between monozygotic twins. In another example, instead of expecting a DNA basis for an (apparently heritable) addiction like smoking or drinking [8], the premodern transcendental alternative is to view such addictions as expressions of behavioral continuity across lives. Such a hypothesized dynamic offers a basic soul-bearing model of life which offers a window to a potentially deeper vision and motivation. Beyond this, though, it is worth noting that there are still a number of conundrums exceeding the plausibility of any material-only model, and moreover any straightforward transcendental (or sequential lives) explanations. Perhaps it is here where the traditional - and innate-given - belief in God (and/or gods) comes in.

There really are deep and meaningful mysteries facing humans (and other animals), and these appear unlikely to receive much attention from scientists.

## Reviews of Reincarnation Research

Much of modern attention on the subject of reincarnation is derived on the reports of cases suggestive of reincarnation. With regards to this in a 2013 blog entry for *Scientific American* a psychologist and self-identified skeptic Jesse Bering reviewed Ian Stevenson's reincarnation work [9]. In that review, entitled "Ian Stevenson's Case for the Afterlife: Are We Skeptics Really Just Cynics?", Bering detailed some of the strength of Ian Stevenson's work and with it Bering's apparent positive assessment. Bering therein wrote:

when you actually read [the cases] firsthand, many are exceedingly difficult to explain away by rational, non-paranormal means. Much of this is due to Ian Stevenson's own exhaustive efforts to disconfirm the paranormal account. "We can strive towards objectivity by exposing as fully as possible all observations that tend to weaken our preferred interpretation of the data," he wrote. "If adversaries fire at us, let them use ammunition that we have given them." And if truth be told, he excelled at debunking the debunkers.

Bering's piece also mentioned the support of a prominent scientist, the physicist Doris Kuhlmann-Wilsdorf, who claimed that Stevenson's work provided "overwhelming" support for the existence of reincarnation.

Further, I add mention of an extraordinarily detailed case chronicled in the book *Soul Survivor: The Reincarnation of a World War II Fighter Pilot* by Bruce and Andrea Leininger (with Ken Gross) [10]. *Soul Survivor* chronicles the Leininger's experiences with their son as he appeared to vividly recall or relive a tragic death as a World War II fighter pilot. The strength of their case was substantially bolstered by the fact that the devout Catholic father, Bruce, went to extreme lengths to investigate the possible reincarnation explanation in hopes of debunking it.

I suggest here that Jesse Bering's conclusions with regards to Stevenson's work are self-evident. Stevenson really did go to remarkable degrees to hedge against explanations involving reincarnation. At times it can appear overdone but perhaps such efforts were in part motivated in an attempt to overturn the position of skeptics and behind them the scientific community. Materialism is essentially a fixture throughout those ranks, though. The bigger question with such reincarnation research efforts - as with many forms of paranormal research - is the extent of the suggested dynamic. Are such events extremely rare? This possibility was acknowledged by Stevenson's successor (and an improved writer), Jim Tucker [11]. If individuals with claimed memories from a previous life are exceedingly rare - Stevenson cited an approximate 1 in 500 occurrence rate from an Indian study [12] - and furthermore they could imply rather limited impacts on the affected individuals - should reincarnation be considered that significant (other than to intellectuals bent for or against it)?

Since Stevenson carried out so much work investigating possible cases his conclusions are quite significant. In his condensed 1997 book, *Where Reincarnation and Biology Intersect*, Stevenson wrote that:

I do not propose reincarnation as a substitute for present or future knowledge of genetics and environmental influences. I think of it as a third factor contributing to the formation of human personality and of some physical features and abnormalities. I am, however, convinced that

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it deserves attention for the additional explanatory value that it has for numerous unsolved problems of psychology and medicine [13: p.186].

In particular, Stevenson wrote that those contributions might include:

some cognitive information about events of the previous life; a variety of likes, dislikes, and other attitudes; and, in some cases, residues of physical injuries or other markings of the previous body [13: p.182].

The last point refers to reincarnation's possible contributions to birthmarks and birth defects which became a significant focus in his investigations (and was largely the basis for the 1997 book's title). Also note the possible contributions towards "likes" and "dislikes" and the potential relationship with addictions.

In a later paper Stevenson wrote that:

[s]everal disorders or abnormalities observed in medicine and psychology are not explicable (or not fully explicable) by genetics and environmental influences, either alone or together. These include phobia and phobias observed in early infancy, unusual play in childhood, homosexuality, gender identity disorder, a child's idea of having parents other than its own, differences in temperament manifested soon after birth, unusual birthmarks and their correspondence with wounds on a deceased person, unusual birth defects, and differences (physical and behavioral) between monozygotic twins. The hypothesis of previous lives can contribute to the further understanding of these phenomena [12].

Furthermore, Stevenson had suggested in his 1997 book that "[w]e may, after all, be engaged in a dual evolution - of our bodies and of our minds or souls" [13: p.187].

The scope of Stevenson's take on reincarnations' possible import, though, is still quite limited as a possible "third factor". Again based on his work we don't know how often it potentially happens. Additionally, although Stevenson cited a 63 percent figure for cases involving an apparent violent death of the remembered individual, there are obviously events with many such deaths - as in major armed conflicts - and is there any evidence that there is an associated subsequent surge of remembered lives? Cases explicitly suggestive of reincarnation do appear to be unique and rare, and this would seem to limit their inferential strength. Additionally, I suggest that Stevenson's apparent over-reliance on investigating suggestive cases could have shortchanged consideration of indirect evidence in the form of noncontroversial phenomena: for example with prodigies, our innate religious/spiritual beliefs, and also with the experiences of adopted children. Careful consideration of such phenomena, including the associated parental experiences, could offer significant insights into a possible reincarnation dynamic.

Furthermore, since Stevenson's work a much bigger potential role - and intersection with biology - has unfolded. That is genetics' missing heritability problem. With that unfolding problem - along with a sober assessment of the limits of environmental influences - the scope of the "not explicable (or not fully explicable)" is much larger. This opening, along with some additional behavioral evidence, represents a chance to markedly advance the reincarnation hypothesis. Additionally, there is a soon to be published paper on some possible evolutionary insights available via a reincarnation dynamic [7].

## Our Innate Religious Beliefs or Instincts

Earlier work described some striking observations associated with the phenomenon terminal lucidity [14,15]. These entailed the return to healthy mental coherence of individuals that appeared to be lost to "dull, unconscious, or mentally ill" conditions, sometimes for years. In those seemingly incapacitated cases a subsequent transition was observed in the form of the "emergence of normal or unusually enhanced mental abilities" with "considerable elevation of mood and spiritual affectation, or the ability to speak in a previously unusual spiritualized and elated manner". This striking phenomenon is suggestive of the presence of a non-material soul which can function independently of the brain's state. It is also appears suggestive of a positive perspective associated with such souls.

As one doctor pointed out after reviewing surveys, "it is safe to say that this phenomena exists, and likely exists more often than we expect". In one such case as described in a 2021 Guardian article, "The Clouds Cleared", a witness recalled the rejuvenation of her grandmother:

She was sitting up in bed, smiling as we walked in. For the next two hours she laughed and joked, completely cognitive, coherent ... lucid. A lifetime of memory had returned, and we took advantage of it as she regaled with episodes from her past. My mum [mother], who knew many of them, quietly verified them. Her funny, eloquent, vibrant mother had returned. 'It all came back to her in one rush,' remembers my mum. 'It was like a bolt of lightning. The clouds cleared.' After we left that afternoon, my grandma slipped back into a semi-conscious state, soon not knowing who my mother was, and died within days (ibid).

Such rejuvenations suggest an underlying soul which can breakthrough material/brain barriers and make some final connections.

Moving along to consider the traditional main domain of discourse on souls - religions. It turns out that we humans appears to come equipped with simple religious inclinations or beliefs. Justin L. Barrett's book, *Born Believers - The Science of Children's Religious Belief*, discussed evidence that infants tend to possess an innate understanding of the existence of souls/God/gods, to be believers in what Barrett termed a "natural religion" (Barrett). The book contained a number of striking examples including ones in which the positions of atheists' had been rebutted by their young children. As Barrett wrote "[c]hildren are prone to believe in supernatural beings such as spirits, ghosts, angels, devils, and gods during the first four years of life" [16: p.3]. He later added:

Exactly why believing in souls or spirits that survive death is so natural for children (and adults) is an area of active research and debate. A consensus has emerged that children are born believers in some kind of afterlife, but not why this is so [16: p.120].

This framework was also discussed in an article at a popular news site where it stated that:

Olivera Petrovich, an Oxford University psychologist, surveyed several international studies of children aged 4 to 7 and found that the belief in God as a "creator" is "hardwired" in children and that "atheism is definitely an acquired position."



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Paul Bloom, a professor of psychology and director of the Mind and Development Lab at Yale University, writes, "The universal themes of religion are not learned... They are part of human nature... Creationism – and belief in God – is bred in the bone" [17].

Barrett also included a chapter listing some elements of our natural religion. These had been gleaned from interviews with young children and they suggest that we are born inclined to hold several positions including:

- 1) That there are "[s]uperhuman beings with thoughts, wants, perspectives, and emotions."
- 2) That "[e]lements of the natural world such as rocks, trees, mountains, and animals are purposefully and intentionally designed by some kind of superhuman being(s), who must therefore have superhuman power."
- 3) That "[s]uperhuman beings generally know things that humans do not (they can be super-knowing or super-perceiving, or both), perhaps particularly things that are important for human relations."
- 4) That "[s]uperhuman beings may be invisible and immortal, but they are not outside space and time". They also "have character, good, or bad."
- 5) That "[l]ike humans, superhuman beings have free will and can and do interact with people, sometimes rewarding and sometimes punishing them."
- 6) That "[m]oral norms are unchangeable, even by superhumans."
- 7) That "[p]eople may continue to exist without their earthly bodies after death" [16: pp.138-39].

It appears thus that children are inclined to believe that there is a kind of parallel, unseen complementary living realm. That realm is also believed to somehow to provide design-oriented contributions to the natural realm.

Barrett went on to qualify these findings. In particular he emphasized that such beliefs are conceptually primitive and that their agreement with typical religious theology is very crude. It appears that young children (and he suggested adults too) might be naturally religious in a primitive way, although they are not inclined in a theological sense.

Barrett did not address the possible validity of any of the beliefs, including the afterlife belief which was nominally an "area of active research and debate". These striking findings were simply placed within the scientific framework, as fallout from evolution and nurture - or "biology plus ordinary environment". Justin Barrett, in fact, even went on to suggest that research into "systems of the human mind" "make belief in some kind of god almost inevitable" [16]. This statement and Barrett's followup, as well as similar content in Tanya M. Luhrmann's *How God Becomes Real* [18], appear to be fine examples of the hegemony of materialism, since confidently concluding that our innate religious beliefs were the "almost inevitable" outcomes of evolution is a gigantic stretch. For context here Steven Pinker succinctly described our particular slog through evolution as having been akin to a "camping trip that never end[ed]" [19: p.207].

Barrett and other researchers apparently found satisfaction, though, in rebutting the routine argument that religious beliefs

are simply parroted information or stories. Barrett did offer an alternative explanation that he heard from an Indian man who had explained to him (in Barrett's words):

[T]hat on death, we go to be with God and are later reincarnated. As children had been with God more recently, they could understand God better than adults can. They had not yet forgotten or grown confused and distracted by the world. In a real sense, he explained, children came into this world knowing God more purely and accurately than adults do [16: p.2].

Consistent with findings on our natural religious beliefs I give two relevant personal experiences and then proceed to introduce how a reincarnation dynamic could help establish those beliefs. One experience involved having a child of about 3 years of age walk into an adult conversation I was in and simply say, "There is a God". The child then paused and repeated this. I remember that the adult conversation I was involved with had touched on the subject of God and could well have involved a questioning of God's existence. As far as I know that 3 year old had no supporting religious background and even if he did I doubt it would have mattered. It was striking to have an obviously sincere child insist on the existence of God with a conviction seemingly on par with a declaration of "I need to go to the bathroom".

In a second incident a child who was about 5 or 6 years matter of factly said to me, 'And when we die we go around and find a new mother and go in her tummy and then get born, isn't that right?' I do know that this child was part of a Muslim family that didn't teach reincarnation. Along with the first case these stand out as sincere, out-of-the-blue comments by children that seem consistent with our purported natural religion.

A straightforward reincarnation (or transcendental) based explanation here is that our religious instincts reflect our experience in the disembodied state. Somehow as souls return from the disembodied state that experience stays with them along with a somewhat crude understanding of the interplay between the two realms. In relation to the above claim that we eventually grow "distracted and confused by the world", perhaps the initial fading out of the religious vision reflects the onset of infant amnesia in which we somehow lose the memories of our first three or four years of life [11: p.90], and also potentially what preceded it [14: pp.156-57]. Prior to such an initial shift in perspective, it appears there can be some vivid expressions of our natural religious beliefs and also - albeit much less frequently - some possible explicit expressions carried over from an earlier life.

Perhaps the experience of one historical figure reflected a little of this innate spiritual dynamic. The physicist Albert Einstein as described in Roger Highfield and Paul Carter's biography, *The Private Lives of Albert Einstein*, may have gradually transitioned from an natural reverence for God to a subsequent reverence for science and a resulting rejection of religion at about age 12 [20: p.17]. That initial reverence for God was described in another biography as involving his "compos[ing] his own hymns for the glorification of God, which he sang to himself as he walked home from school" [22: p.16]. But at age 12 his plunge into reading popular science had led him to believe "that the stories from the Bible could not be true, and [he] swung to the opposite extreme of fervent doubt" [20: p.17]. Transitions like this might be common, in particular for the intellectually oriented.

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A possible complication, though, with regards to our natural religious beliefs is that it would seem that just as the interpretations of our ordinary experiences can be shaped by conditioning, our subsequent out-of-body experiences might be too. One interesting example might be with near-death experiences (NDEs). Some sincere Western NDE accounts such as those chronicled in *Heaven is for Real* by Todd Burpo [23] and sincere Eastern accounts such as those given in *Peaceful Death, Joyful Rebirth* by Tulku Thondup [24] appear to strongly reflect details consistent with the local religious teachings. Perhaps then our interpretations of our post-death experiences could tend to fall back on established conditioning (as can happen in everyday life). In Thondup's book it is suggested that our experiences after death "reflect our habits and emotions" as were established by "the way our culture and belief system" conditioned us (ibid.: p.7)

Moving along here, a classic reincarnation-related source is the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (TBD) [25: pp.4-5]. (I apologize for my limited religious background but did recently broaden it some with Huston Smith's excellent *The World's Religions*.) Somewhat of a modern variant of the TBD is the practically-oriented guide, *Peaceful Death, Joyful Rebirth* [25: pp.4-5]. As suggested in those books the disembodied state is akin to a volatile, dream-like realm in which the soul is ungrounded and tends to vividly experience its own memories or projections (as consistent with the above suggestion). The Tibetan teacher Chogyam Trungpa suggested that those vivid perceptions in the disembodied state (the common Tibetan term is bardo):

[should be] so strong that someone recently born should have memories of the period between death and birth; but then as we grow up we are indoctrinated by our parents and society, and we put ourselves into a different framework, so that the original deep impressions become faded except for occasional sudden glimpses. Even then we are so suspicious of such experiences, and so afraid of losing any tangible ground in terms of living in this world, that any intangible kind of experience is treated half-heartedly or dismissed altogether [25: pp.4-5].

A further point suggested in the TBD is that when the soul is in the bardo state there is enormous freedom including the ability to "arrive anywhere you want instantaneously as soon as you think of it" (ibid.: p.173) and further that a soul can "perform everything [it] can think of and there is no action [it] can not do [presumably within its dream-like experience]" (ibid.: p.174). It is not recommended to exercise that freedom, though. Additionally suggested is that the mind in the bardo state is "nine times more clear" than our everyday mind (ibid.: p.167), but that this clarity competes with the volatility of the bardo state (supposedly akin to being "like a feather in a storm" [24: p.87]. Furthermore the clarity is supposed to allow a soul to "see and hear from many others who, like [themselves], are wandering in the bardo" (ibid: p.87). Altogether then from this perspective, the soul's experiences after death might contribute to our innate sense of the existence of superhumans. Those superhumans might then simply be souls. More subtly, perhaps some of the innate sense of the world being designed could be carryover from the post-death state, a time during which our reality has been suggested to be mostly manufactured by our own psyches.

The large and complementary component of our natural religion (and religions) - the existence of God (or gods) - might best initially be supported via its natural occurrence. Strong or

direct evidence for the existence of these elements, though, appears to be hard to obtain.

For those interested in physical interpretations, the spiritual realm and its dynamics might somehow overlap with the large unfolding physics mysteries, dark matter and dark energy. When much of the inferable mass/energy content of the universe (totaling roughly 95%) is missing that suggest a serious deficit in our physics-based appreciation of the universe.

At a minimum I hope more people can become aware of the mysteries associated with our innate spiritual beliefs. That such beliefs are some how evolution-beget, DNA-encoded phenomena is very difficult to fathom. Herein I have suggested reincarnation's potential to explain some of the features of our natural religion, but the big picture here is of a collection of far-reaching mysteries. Together they suggest that there are deeper aspects of life and further that perhaps religious practices could be helpful in steadying our challenging lives.

### Medium-based Insights as Reported by Chris Carter

Other phenomena that offer possible evidence for the existence of souls include near death experiences [26] and medium-based investigations [21: pp.204-5]. I pursue the latter topic here as it often neglected (even in paranormal literature), unique, and potentially quite insightful. The book by Chris Carter, *Science and the Afterlife Experience*, contains truly remarkable - and remarkably corroborated - accounts of medium-based communications with deceased individuals. These accounts offer what appears to be a consensus roughly consistent with a traditional life-after-life dynamic with strong karma/justice-like moral underpinnings. That dynamic also appears to suggest a potential advancement across incarnations - either in terms of species or ultimately planes of existence. The accounts appear to have been communicated with minimal if any reference to existing religions (a point I will return to).

I get started with an introductory quote reporting on a remarkable effort that aimed to corroborate medium-based communications. That effort attempted to produce a chess game between a contemporary grandmaster (Victor Korchnoi ranked third in the world at the time) and a deceased grandmaster. This effort was introduced by Carter in stating that it:

began in 1985 when asset-manager and amateur chess player Dr. Wolfgang Eisenbeiss decided to initiate a chess match between living and deceased persons. Eisenbeiss had been acquainted with the automatic-writing medium Robert Rollans (1914-1993) for eight years, and trusted his assertion that he did not know how to play chess and had no knowledge of chess history. Rollans was not paid for his services, and his stated motivation for participation was to provide support for the survival hypothesis [21: pp.204-5].

After being given a list of former grandmasters, Rollans reportedly contacted one of them, Hungarian Giza Maroczy, who was willing to participate in the desired medium facilitated match.

The deceased Maroczy was reported to have provided the following motivational statement:

I will be at your disposal in the peculiar game of chess for two reasons. First, because I also want to do something to aid mankind living on earth to become convinced that death does not end everything, but instead the mind is

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separated from the physical body and comes up to a new world, where individual life continues to manifest itself in a new unknown dimension. Second, being a Hungarian patriot I want to guide the eyes of the world into the direction of my beloved Hungary a little bit. Both of these items have convinced me to participate in that game with the thought of being at everyone's service [21: p.205].

What stood out in this lengthy account of a medium-connected chess game was first the fine and fitting chess performance Maroczy purported to communicate through the medium Rollans. Maroczy opened weakly as expected - "chess theory has made enormous strides in the way games should be opened" - but as was Maroczy's trademark, he finished with "a strong end-game". Korchnoi and another strong contemporary player felt that the medium-communicated performance was consistent with Maroczy's history. Another impressive point was that via the medium a number of extraordinary details were uncovered and subsequently confirmed about an obscure grandmaster's life. This chess match by the way was not an easy short term affair. Due to health problem with the medium Rollans and also the far-flung lifestyle of the contemporary grandmaster Korchnoi - all in an era prior to mega-electronic communications - the match lasted over 7 years. Rollans in fact died just 19 days after Maroczy resigned the match.

I include the above as a small sample of the remarkable efforts that have been made to corroborate the communications of mediums. If such communications are legitimate (albeit apparently taboo for many), then it is certainly worth trying to check them with a proverbial fine-tooth comb. Carter and others certainly appear to have done that (such work used to be considered legitimate intellectual fare). Interested readers are encouraged to read his book and also be forewarned to bring along an extra helping of patience as the descriptions of the corroboration efforts (like the efforts themselves) are often involved. Chris Carter did his homework.

I think that such medium efforts might be analogous to the communications offered by mediums with regards to living people. There are a number of such striking examples included in Elizabeth Mayer's excellent *Extraordinary Knowing* (Mayer). Additionally, the related fascinating phenomena of remote viewing also reported on in Mayer's book was then also followed in Mark Guber's subsequent *An End to Upside Down Thinking*, which included very positive official classified reviews of the process [27]. Also perhaps akin to those medium efforts, though, I have to wonder if connections to the deceased are rare as well.

I move along now to some descriptions of the upshot of these medium-based communications. A number of such accounts are considered by Chris Carter in his book. Some of the communications involve notable individuals (as in notable during their recent lives) and some are with relatively anonymous people. A man who identified himself as Rupert Brooke described his death in World War I and his subsequent experiences and confusion. After getting an inkling that something profound had changed - he couldn't see his reflection in a river and apparently being invisible to former colleagues - he added:

I realized that the reason they couldn't see me was because if my body didn't have a reflection, it couldn't be solid to them. It just couldn't be the same vibration: it couldn't be the same sort of matter. I had to adjust myself to the fact that I had a body which was to all outward appearances

the same [to him], and was obviously not a real body from the point of view of Earth. Therefore I was in what I suppose one would term a spiritual body, and yet I was not particularly spiritual. I was puzzled and bewildered [21: p.295].

The above period of initial confusion seemed to be the norm amongst the mediums' reports. Also of note was that in several cases the purported communicators told about the particular dynamic of the soul body exiting the physical body at death. Some of these reports involved a severing of two "silver cords" between the two bodies and that the cord was deemed to be analogous to an umbilical cord. One notable communicator, purportedly the mathematician and philosopher Bertrand Russell, his initial adjustment came to a realization that:

[n]ow, here I was, still same I, with capacities to think and observe sharpened to an incredible degree. I felt earth-life suddenly very unreal almost as though it never happened. It took me quite along time to understand this feeling until I realized at last that matter is certainly illusory although it does exist in actuality; the material world seemed now nothing more than a seething, changing, restless sea of indeterminate density and volume. How could I have thought that that was reality, the last word of Creation to mankind? Yet it is completely understandable that the state in which man exists, however temporary constitutes the passing reality which is no longer reality when it has passed [21: pp.296-7].

In terms of the big picture and associated meaning there were a number of relevant descriptions. The philosopher Frederic Myers suggested an almost ladder-link progression as souls move up from simple life forms (including plants). In a concise assessment he stated that souls:

must gather ... numberless experiences, manifest and express themselves in uncountable forms before they attain to completion ... Once these are acquired, [these entities] ... take on divine attributes. The reason, therefore, for the universe and ... the purpose of existence ... [is] the evolution of mind in matter [21: p.305].

The popularly communicated (through Jane Roberts) figure "Seth" in a summary of his work was thought to believe that:

each individual consciousness must undergo a long period of training and learning through repeated physical embodiments. Being human is simply one "stage" in this process of development, and when, through related incarnations, this stage is finished, one passes onward to other planes of existence which offer more exalted opportunities for development. The most crucial "lesson" to be learned is karmic or ethical [21: p.304].

Further in a passage written by the medium Jane Roberts, Seth was claimed to report that the (all bracketed content here is from Carter's original quote):

responsibility for creation must be clearly understood. [In physical life on earth] ... you are in a soundproof and isolated room. Hate creates destruction in the 'room' and until the lessons are learned, destruction follows destruction ... the agonies ... are sorely felt ... you must be taught ... to create responsibly. [Earth life] ... is a training system for emerging consciousness.



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“If the sorrows and agonies within your system were not felt as real, the lessons would not be learned ... [It] is like an educational play” [21: p.305].

In all an immense learning or educational system is conveyed, although helpful strategies were minimized.

A musician Donald Tovey reportedly communicated that:

[e]ach and every soul meets here with its just des[s]erts, not because they are dispensed by a presiding deity, but because it is literally true that one reaps what one has sown. If one has endeavored to make the lot of others easier in earth-life and sought to promote the welfare and happiness of one's fellow beings, then one finds oneself in a pleasing environment among congenial companions, and able to adapt without difficulty to the new mode of living. But those who have deliberately deprived others of their material rights and human needs, or have wantonly caused suffering, will find themselves in turn deprived and also imprisoned by their own meanness of outlook. This does not mean that they are trapped for ever in their self-made hell; the moment a soul sees and confesses its past misdeeds and attempts to rectify them, the way opens for it to evolve into the light [21: p.309].

Among the prodigious communications of the philosopher Frederic Meyers was the sense that this dynamic could in part be the result of a dynamic of projections, and that eventually the soul will want to move beyond this dynamic and thus obtain deeper freedom.

Before moving on to some general observations about these medium communications I consider a potentially significant insight they contain. In apparent consistency with the aforementioned terminal lucidity, Frederic Meyers also reportedly communicated that the:

very old may, before their passing from earth, in part lose memory or their grasp of facts, their power of understanding. This tragic decay all too often causes the observer of it to lose faith in an After-life. For the soul seems, under such circumstances, merely the brain. This, however, is a false conclusion. The soul, or active ego, has been compelled partially to retire into the double during waking hours because the cord between the brain and its etheric counterpart has either been frayed, or has snapped. The actual life of the physical body is still maintained through the second cord and through any of the threads which still adhere to the two shapes. So the aged, apparently mindless man or woman, is in no sense mindless. He or she has merely withdrawn a little way from you, and has no need for your pity [21: p.308].

This medium communicated point appears consistent with the otherwise stunning rejuvenations associated with terminal lucidity. Instead of seemingly requiring an overhaul of long degraded brain-ware, the onset of lucidity might then require only the brief reconnection of a subtle cord connecting the brain and the soul. It also somewhat provocatively suggests that brain-based understandings and treatments of Alzheimer's - which have shown very limited return - might be up against a non-materialist dynamic [28,29].

Next, I take a critical look at some aspects of Carter's presentations of the mediums' communications. First, it is worth

remembering that non-psyche observations of young children are suggestive of a transcendental life with moral underpinnings. That inferable “natural religion” appears to be generic and is not based on select communications with select (or self-selected) individuals. Consider the medium's dynamic and along with it think of yourself visiting a college and getting a tour of the campus via a probably optimistic tour guide. How representative would such a tour guide's perspective tend to be? An analogous bias could be present with the medium communications. Additionally, in Carter's book there is little mention made of God or other religious elements which appear as default ingredients in our innate religious perspective. It would be nice to see a followup to Chris Carter's book.

### Discussions on a Life-After-Life Perspective

In earlier writings - most succinctly [30] - I have described some of the goals or endpoints associated with Buddhist and analogous religious practices. This section attempts to extend those earlier efforts. First, there really is a long historical record of profound transformational experiences associated with Buddhist meditative practices. Associated with that history, though, is also a sober record of the rarity of such experiences which have tended to be viewed as a goal to be pursued across lives. The exception to this point, though, is that most religions appear to offer one or more post-death shortcuts towards such a transcendent state. This includes Buddhism, see for example (Thundup). Such shortcuts would seem to be a simple matter of faith, though.

A more practical and tangible point is that at least based on my own observations, a focused spiritual/religious oriented life appears to be helpful. A general point is that some people seem to have found real benefit, and with it be quite beneficial, as a result of their spiritual/religious efforts (even if they don't achieve a deep transformation). Two aspects of such a life have been helpful to me personally. One is simply an insistence on focus (or paying attention) that is prevalent in Buddhist teachings and likely present in one way or another in other religious teachings as well. That could be a generally helpful strategy and seemingly ever more apt in our increasingly distraction-prone era. The second helpful aspect is the focus on the well being of others (a common expression in Buddhist teaching is a commitment to “all beings”). With such ongoing commitments it might be easier to move away from our default self-centered visions (and the underlying ‘blah-blah-me-blah-blah-me...’ mind-state). The default selfish perspective and tendencies are not only socially-limiting, I think they ultimately tend to increase our frustration levels which in turn furthers our inevitable unfortunate drift towards attachments and addictions.

An interesting and poignant example was presented in a fine *New Yorker* magazine article “The Last Call” by Larissa MacFarquhar [30]. (It was also discussed elsewhere in my writings including [31]. That article discusses some of the life of a Japanese man Ittetsu Nemoto. Upon hitting an existential crisis as a young man Nemoto moved to a monastic Rinzai Zen training center and in so doing plunged into a very demanding routine centered on paying attention and secondarily breaking down selfish tendencies. In his case this very demanding routine eventually led to a significant introductory enlightenment (or transcendence) experience. Armed with his acquired paying attention abilities - and apparently furthered by his transcendent experience - he subsequently found himself committed to helping out with suicide prevention efforts in Japan. Then after a sustained period of commitment and some subsequent burnout, Nemoto returned to his monastic routine to regroup and regroup himself

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for further suicide prevention efforts. One way or another finding ways to help others can be simultaneously very rewarding and of course demanding. An ongoing spiritual or religious practice could be an aid to such efforts.

For a longer look at a spiritually influenced life the book by Jacque Lusseyran, *And There Was Light*, is quite noteworthy. As a child Lusseyran was blinded in an accident and through subsequent inquiry into his blind state he uncovered an underlying “light”. This realization most tangibly allowed Lusseyran to obtain a seemingly impossible ability to see. More generally, though it established within Lusseyran an ongoing ability to be guided in a deeper positive way by that light and some associated inner clarity. His life appeared to be thus buoyed from within despite very difficult circumstances. Lusseyran, and apparently some of his other brave and insightful colleagues, seemed to have been Christians via their own understanding. Lusseyran was perhaps also influenced by his father’s involvement with the German mystic figure Rudolph Steiner whose teachings incorporated reincarnation.

One way and another the straightforward, humble, and simultaneously stunning chronicle of an individual like Jacque Lusseyran perhaps can offer the rest of us some insight and inspiration into our deeper selves. Along those lines, in a simple quote Lusseyran suggested:

[a]fter all, isn’t true that the realities of the inner life seem like marvels only because we live so far away from them?  
[32: p.35].

Finally, for a more pragmatic look at some of these issues it is good to consider a recent *New York Times* article by Ellen Barry entitled “The ‘Nation’s Psychiatrist’ Takes Stock, With Frustration” [33]. Therein is a look at the career of Thomas Insel who bet big on National Institute of Mental Health’s (N.I.M.H.) commitment to a scientific solution to mental illnesses. As Barry wrote, Insel spent 13 years as head of N.I.M.H. during which he “helped allocate \$20 billion in federal funds and sharply shifted the focus of the National Institute of Mental Health away from behavioral research and towards neuroscience and genetics”. The article contains remarkably disjoint discourses between descriptions of the abject failure of the genetic searches and the hoped for neurobiological solutions on the one hand - including an acknowledged history of huge research commitments alongside mental health “outcomes [which] have deteriorated” - and the continued overt denial in assessing those efforts. Even a longtime critic of big investment in genetics still characterized those efforts with “[t]he end result of these last 30 years is an exciting intellectual adventure, one of the more fascinating pieces of science in our lifetimes, but it hasn’t helped a single patient”. For additional sober perspective I am reminded of the bleak suggested meaning of life made by an astronomer who studied black holes. The astronomer suggested in a *Scientific American* article that “[p]erhaps all that we can look to for real solace is our endless capacity to ask questions and seek [physics-based] answers about the place we find ourselves in” [34]. We humans appear to be gifted in our ability to find meaning in intellectual detours.

Across the proverbial universe from these long and intensely intellectual efforts, is the sober global prospective of relative outcomes. As Tanya M. Luhmann pointed out in her article “Beyond the Brain”, “[s]chizophrenia has a more benign course and outcome in the developing world” [35]. Luhmann touched on the underlying downside associated with science’s bio-robotic

perspective, a perspective nicely captured in the title a *Scientific American* article by Thomas Insel’s, “Faulty Circuits”. In our country people with schizophrenia commonly spend a lot of time homeless in part because “[t]hey dislike the diagnosis even more than the idea of being out on the street, because for them the idea of being ‘crazy’” is worse. Luhmann also wrote that “Indian families don’t treat people with schizophrenia as if they have a soul-destroying illness”. Perhaps our perspectives on life and ourselves matter more than we comprehend. It might thus be good to consider preserving and respecting some traditional views.

## Conclusions

There really are a number of reasons to question the scientific understanding of life. For some this might be a taboo detour, but for others it could be a welcome venture into different perspectives on life. Additionally, when working with other peoples’ psychological difficulties we can sometimes get a nudge towards engaging further with our own difficulties. That nudge might be helpful in particular if we already have some footing with a spiritual or religious practice. For myself a simple sustained practice (mine happens to involve simple Buddhist practices) has proven helpful with staying engaged with life’s inevitable challenges. In Nisargadatta’s remarkable *I AM THAT* he repeatedly suggests what really matters is not technique or sophistication, it is simply “earnestness”. Nisargadatta’s message at times seems to parallel Lusseyran’s.

I close with here with a simple relevant quotes from *I AM THAT*. Having been asked about the importance of experience, Nisargadatta responded:

I have told you already that knowledge is most useful in dealing with things. But it does not tell you how to deal with people and yourself, how to live a life. We are not talking of driving a car, or earning money. For this you need experience. But for being a light onto yourself material knowledge will not help you. You need something much more intimate and deeper than mediate [everyday] knowledge, to be yourself in the true sense of the word. Your outer life is unimportant. You can become a night watchman and live happily. It is what you are inwardly that matters. Your inner peace and joy you have to earn. It is much more difficult than earning money. No university can teach you to be yourself [36: p.318].

Such personal homework might then allow for our improved care of others.

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