Interview with afterlife researcher and philosopher Titus Rivas about near-death experiences, survival of consciousness, the Pam Reynolds case, the Denture Man case, reincarnation and related matters

by Jime Sayaka

This is a long interview with afterlife researcher and philosopher Titus Rivas. My main purpose with this interview is to discuss in depth about the best cases of NDEs and press as hard as I could the skeptical objections against such cases in order to see how much strong the cases are. I hope this interview will become an helpful online standard reference for afterlife researchers and students of NDEs and other lines of evidence suggestive of survival of consciousness. I thank Titus for taking the time for answering all of my questions. Enjoy. (This interview was originally published on Jime Saya's weblog Subversive Thinking, January 2013. - website has been discontinued)

1) Titus, tell us a something about your background?
Hi Jime, thank you for this interview! I'm Titus P.M. Rivas M.A. M.Sc., an independent author, researcher, lecturer, and writer of various courses on philosophy and (para)psychology. I'm Dutch, but my late father was Spanish, which explains my surname. To a certain extent, I have been raised bi-culturally and I'm rather fluent in the Spanish language. This has influenced me in that I don't identify with a particular country but consider myself a cosmopolite.

My education includes master degrees in philosophy (University of Amsterdam) and theoretical psychology (University of Utrecht) and I would one day like to get a Ph.D., but so far this has turned out to be quite difficult due to my 'eccentric' convictions, so that I've postponed this to the future. My intellectual endeavours concern psychical research and parapsychology, the philosophy of mind, the philosophy of religion, the psychology of consciousness (both human and animal consciousness), general psychology, clinical psychology, and last but not least animal psychology.

I'm also active as an essayist about several areas in practical philosophy, such as animal rights and veganism (See: Respect for every individual, http://www.animalfreedom.org/english/reaction/titusrivas.html), social ethics, tolerance, and spiritual pluralism. I was raised a Roman Catholic and I used to be a rather fervent believer, until my 18th birthday more or less. There were two things that had been confusing me during my adolescence. On one hand, I had always been very disappointed about the Christian animal ethics. Even though my parents had not allowed me to become a full vegetarian before I turned 18, by then I'd been concerned about animal welfare for years. On holidays in Spain, as a young boy, I had been the only family member who refused to attend bullfights and I had asked my Spanish peers to refrain from hunting, at least for as long as I would be around. I knew there had been vegetarian Roman Catholic Saints such as St. Martin de Porres, but they really formed a minority. I also found the typically Christian idea that unlike humans, animals have no immortal soul extremely counter-intuitive and even irrational, because: how could animals possess consciousness and cognitive abilities if their souls were really essentially different from ours? On the other hand, there were serious theological core issues that seemed unsolvable to me. For instance, rather early on, the Holy Trinity struck me as an incoherent, incomprehensible concept, as in my view, one and the same personal God could not really be three partially independent 'persons' (at least not in any sense that would go beyond multiple personality).

Also, Christ's 'human sacrifice' on the cross appeared to show that deep down God was vengeful and cruel (even though it was his own incarnation or Son [one of his very own 'persons'] that quenched his thirst for a bloody atonement), and his supposed decision to punish stubborn atheists with eternal damnation reinforced that unattractive impression. Most fellow ex-Christians I knew, simply no longer believed in a spiritual side to life, but this did not exactly apply to me. For some time, I felt attracted to liberal types of Christianity (I even voted for a left-wing and green evangelical political party), but ultimately I decided I just wanted to find my personal path, separate from any specific denomination. I realised my mother had already called me her 'little philosopher' when I was four years old. Similarly, I had been actively interested in psychical research ever since I was a young boy. When I was 11, I tried to convince the boy next door of a spiritual dimension by showing him photos of ghosts in a popular magazine. The reality of the 'paranormal', of a non-physical, spiritual dimension, was always self-evident to me. I've doubted many things, even the existence of a theistic God, but I've never seriously doubted the existence of a non-physical mind or soul, an afterlife or psychic abilities and phenomena in general.

This is also related to the fact that I have had various paranormal experiences both in my childhood and later in life. Mainly with telepathic and precognitive dreams, synchronicity, deja-vu pointing to precognition, and strong intuitions. Mind you, I'm certainly not a real psychic, but I've always been open to paranormal experiences and accepted them as a natural part of life. As a teenager, I even used to be very afraid of ghosts, precisely because I strongly believed in their existence...

I left the Roman Catholic Church around the year 1982. Subsequently, I first combined my philosophical and psychical interest with a strong involvement in esoteric movements, mainly with the Theosophical Society that appealed to me because of its broad intellectual program. After about a year, I decided esoterism really was not the path for me, partly because it has its own non-rational revelations and dogmas, but also because Theosophy turned out to reject a truly personal survival after death and its 'Secret Doctrine' defended very dubious racialistic notions. I believe that ever since I've been a truly independent intellectual with no specific ties to either established 'exoteric' religions or esoteric currents. In 1996, I was one of the founders of Athanasia Foundation, a foundation for philosophical, psychical and psychological research, which encompasses many of my scholarly interests. Since the 1980s, I've published hundreds of articles and more than 10 books. A few years ago an English e-book about reincarnation research was issued, written by my Indian friend Dr. Kirti Swaroop Rawat and myself (anyone interested in it should send me an e-mail: titusrivas@hotmail.com), and I'm planning to write quite a few new articles and books, in part also in English. Since 2003 Athanasia Foundation is closely collaborating with Merkawah Foundation/ÍANDS The Netherlands.

2) Do you think a basic training in philosophy is useful to weigh and evaluate the evidence and controversy about parapsychology and the afterlife?

Certainly! Philosophy makes scholars more aware of the underlying ontological presuppositions that guide and limit any empirical-theoretical research program. As you know, the dominant framework within contemporary science is naturalistic physicalism, which holds that anything within reality is caused by material or physical processes. This implies our whole inner, mental life is reducible to – or at least completely and utterly produced by – the physical brain. If so, it seems a priori impossible for the mind to possess any faculties that would transcend the neurological limits of the brain. Also, it seems unthinkable that the conscious self or soul could survive irreversible brain death.

Unlike many scholars seem to think, there are conclusive analytical, philosophical arguments against all logically possible manifestations of physicalism (epiphenomenalism, identity theory, reductive materialism [including physicalist functionalism], eliminative materialism). For instance, if consciousness is a completely powerless by-product or epiphenomenon of the brain, it would be impossible to base any statements about consciousness on information about conscious experiences as these could not in any way affect our brain, voice or hands. This is more serious than it may seem, because it implies that in a physicalist universe, a non-physical consciousness would be wholly unknowable as such a consciousness would never play any causal role in the formation of concepts of consciousness. Any epiphenomenalist implicitly claims to know that there is consciousness, but if (s)he is right about this, epiphenomenalism must be wrong as it rules out such knowledge a priori! This is because epiphenomenalism is not an agnos-

tic position but it rests on the implicit assumption that we know that we have conscious (or 'phenomenal') experiences and thereby implicitly contradicts itself. Epiphenomenalism is incoherent and should be rejected for analytical reasons. See: Exit Epiphenomenalism (http://www.txtxs.nl/artikel.asp?artid=624) by Hein van Dongen and myself

I know that some empirical scientists refuse to take such arguments seriously, because as they say "philosophical argumentation is merely analytical rather than based on empirical evidence." This is clearly absurd, because if something is analytically impossible, it cannot be demonstrated to be true empirically. I'm aware that some would object to this 'extreme' rationalist standpoint, and point to weird, 'illogical' aspects of quantum reality that would show the ultimate impotence of rational thought. However, in my view this objection is self-defeating, because if the validity of rational thought is really 'falsified' in quantum experiments, then this conclusion could only be the reached through... rational thought. Instead, as a layman in the field of theoretical physics, I would conclude that there must be something wrong with any empirical theory that implies that analytical reasoning is untenable. Reason cannot show itself wrong without resorting to reason!

Therefore, I consider ontology or 'metaphysics' (here used as a near synonym of ontology), as a philosophical discipline, to be the foundation of any theorizing within the empirical sciences, including of course in psychical research, parapsychology, and any type of survival research into an afterlife or reincarnation.

Armed with the right type of philosophical training, many scholars could come to realise that there cannot be any empirical evidence for materialism or physicalism, because both positions are analytically incoherent. (See: Dualist Articles by Titus Rivas: http://www.txtxs.nl/artikel.asp?artid=445)

3) What do you think are the main reasons for the strong hegemony of the materialistic paradigm in mainstream academic circles?

Personally, I think that historically speaking it is mostly the result of the effective societal eradication of most non-materialist currents in philosophy by the Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. As believing in the existence of a soul, an afterlife or even a God was regarded as intrinsically linked to Christianity, and heretics were repressed, persecuted, tortured and killed for centuries, most Western intellectuals (both believers and non-believers) have come to associate the serious rejection of materialism with the acceptance of Christian dogma. There have been two important types of counter-forces, I know, namely (a) the very spiritual heterodox currents persecuted by the Church and surviving today in esoteric movements such as Theosophy, Rosicrucians, Anthroposophy and in a broad sense the New Age, and (b) independent rational thinkers who rediscovered the joys of non-dogmatic philosophy (by 'dogmatism' I mean any system deduced from indubitable non-rational, divinely revealed scriptural truths) of the kind that used to be common in Ancient Greek and Roman philosophy. The problem is that these were to a great extent marginalised. The main battle within society continued to consist of the clash between the Church and materialism and the latter came to stand for 'intellectual independence and freedom' and 'the rejection of dogmatism'. Pretty soon, materialist thinking was broadly considered indicative of intelligence and education, of humanism and progress, and of the victory over destructive and inhumane superstitions.

For most contemporary materialists and physicalists, there simply is no serious alternative to 'naturalism' and its age-old counterpart (dogmatic Christianity). As they find religion backward and irrational, they wish to protect 'reason' and science from reactionary impulses to return to the Middle Ages. Many materialists even name their ontology 'rationalism'. This is clearly absurd, because many rationalists are not materialists and also because rationalism is not an ontological but an epistemological position. But it certainly shows that in their minds reason and materialism really, intrinsically, belong together.

The self-confidence of materialists within the sciences has been strengthened by their immense success in realms such as Newtonian physics, chemistry, geology, physiology, biochemistry, and astronomy. Of course, this self-confidence is misguided because materialism will probably suffice for realms that are wholly physical, but certainly not for other realms such as ethology, psychology, psychiatry, parapsychology, sociology, and possibly even parts of biology outside ethology as is suggested by scholars such as Rupert Sheldrake and Michael Nahm.

4) What do you think of the so-called organized skeptic movement?

In the early 2000s, I've had quite a few clashes with members of this movement. To my surprise, local Dutch

skeptics are mostly even more impolite than American skeptics. They simply do not wish to tolerate it if someone with academic credentials rejects and attacks their world view and they will do almost anything to ruin their opponent's reputation. I for one have been called 'insane' by one of Holland's main debunkers in a review of a book about reincarnation research. I mean, they get really upset if anyone claims to have serious, analytical arguments or empirical evidence that would run against their theories and they can't help to show their strong, emotional aversion. This might be related to a particularly militant anti-spiritual tradition in the Netherlands.

In contrast, I've also had my clashes with skeptics from outside Holland, and many of them could be just as rude, but generally there seemed to be more respect.

On the whole though, I find the idea of a skeptic movement, in the sense of a 'debunkers club', rather ridiculous. You can only be very 'skeptical' about certain phenomena if you first have every reason to expect that such phenomena do not exist. In my view, the basic, underlying world view of skeptics is philosophically untenable so that their skepticism is totally unfounded, especially concerning psychical research and parapsychology. A few years ago I tried to start an online debate about ontological issues with major Dutch skeptics, but they simply did not show any serious interest. For this reason, I have given up on the idea of entering any meaningful dialogue with them, unless it is absolutely necessary for the public defense of important evidence. My previous clashes were rather naïve as I believed I could really convince them they were wrong. I had underestimated their closed-mindedness.

All this does not mean that skeptics are even mistaken when they state that any evidence should be as strong as possible. However, for this insight, we really don't need debunkers.

Also, I do share some struggles of prominent skeptics and theists, particularly when they try to counter traditional scripture-based ethics by what I sincerely regard as more enlightened values. For example regarding the societal emancipation of women or gay marriage, but also animal rights. I have nothing against liberal types of religion because in practice they allow for liberal values but I sometimes do worry about the influence of more 'fundamentalist' currents I think skeptics are right that it would not be good idea if conservative brands of religion became as influential as they used to be. For me, this applies to things like political islamism, but equally to right-wing 'Bible Belt' Christianity or terrorist Hindu cells.

I'm a pluralist so that I'm not struggling for the abolition of the skeptical movement and I don't hate individual skeptics enough to be obsessed by their complete personal downfall, but I do largely consider my own interactions with the skeptical movement as something that belongs to my personal past. Nowadays, I find most interactions with skeptics quite boring and very predictable.

4) As a psychologist and philosopher, do you think the split-brain patients cases provide empirical evidence against mind-body dualism?

Not at all. The phenomena that were demonstrated by experiments with split-brain patients only provide evidence for the impact of partially severing the corpus callosum (in order to reduce epileptic seizures) on the behaviour of such patients. It shows that the conscious integration of sensory data may become limited in such patients. It does not demonstrate that conscious awareness itself gets divided in two separate streams of consciousness. It may appear that way, because each hemisphere seems to act on the basis of a different set of data, but there is no reason to explain this result by the literal splitting of consciousness.

'Emergent dualist' William Hasker seems to think that it does, but that is only because he already believes that a working brain is necessary for the production of a substantial soul. For me, the idea of the creation of a conscious self by the destructive (even though physiologically therapeutic) act of severing the corpus callosum is incoherent. As long as we can explain such data by the hypothesis that whenever conscious integration is not possible, at least one behavioural chain should be explained by non-conscious parallel processing rather than a separate stream of consciousness, we should. It could only become threatening to non-emergent substance dualism if the interpretation of behaviour by non-conscious cognition were utterly (i.e. logically) impossible. Opponents may think such an interpretation is implausible because they already believe in a emergent production theory, but they certainly cannot demonstrate why it would be impossible. A priori, it is not possible to provide a conclusive proof for the creation of a new, substantial conscious self as that would imply that we could literally infallibly take a first person perspective regarding another person's behaviour. We cannot,

not even through telepathy because we cannot independently verify whether that person is conscious or not. So our interpretation of such experiments will always have to be based on our ontology rather than the other way round. See: Neuropsychology and personalist dualism (http://www.txtxs.nl/artikel.asp?artid=622).

5) One of the proposed theories to account for the mind-brain connection is Myers/James transmission theory of consciousness (in contrast with the so-called materialistic productive theory). But some people say that, from a scientific point of view the productive theory is better because it is in principle falsifiable. And the transmission theory doesn't seem easy to refute since that it is consistent with all the facts and even with any imaginable fact, making it untestable and unfalsifiable in principle and hence unscientific. What do you think of this objection?

First of all, I think that the principle of empirical falsifiability only applies to empirical theories. Ontological frameworks for empirical theorizing may be analytically untenable and can be rejected for their incoherence. But this does not mean it should be possible to collect empirical data to falsify them. So if we approach the transmission theory as part of a broader philosophical theory, as part of the ontological framework within which we have to carry out our neurological and psychological work, rather than as a separate empirical theory, falsifiability simply is not a requirement for its status as a respectable theory.

Also, if the productive or production theory is falsifiable, this means that as soon as it gets falsified (for instance by empirical data that point to the survival of consciousness during clinical death) another theory must be true. Sometimes, the truth of one theory is a direct result of the falsification of another, opposite theory. For instances, if one theory implies that all biological life in the universe is carbon based and we find evidence for life that is based on something else, this must mean that another theory about the common characteristics of biological life must be true. Similarly, if the production theory states that the mind is nothing but a product of the brain, any evidence that would falsify this, implies that another theory must be true. Perhaps there are other logical candidates besides the transmission theory, for example some theory that would claim the human body is basically the product of the mind rather than vice versa, but as soon as we are left with the only remaining logical possibility, that theory simply must be true. It is very strange to claim that it should first be formulated in such way that it would become falsifiable. As soon as we have falsified the production theory, at least in that sense the transmission theory cannot be falsified anymore in that it cannot be falsified by evidence in favour of the production theory any longer, because that theory has already been shown false. If we know the mind is not merely the product of the brain, the transmission theory could, by definition, not be falsified anymore by empirical evidence that would demonstrate that the mind is merely the product of the brain after all!

6) Do you think the super-ESP hypothesis is a reasonable alternative explanation for the evidence suggesting an afterlife?

I do not. There may be some parts of the evidence for an afterlife that could be best explained by the workings of subconscious psychic faculties. For example, some poltergeist phenomena seem to be influenced at least to a certain extent by the psychological problems of the so-called epicenter and their manifestation seem to be linked to these problems. However, there is a hard core of evidence for which the super-ESP or super-PSI hypothesis does not offer a good explanation.

This is due to the fact that a hypothesis should explain all important aspects of the phenomenon we're studying. Super-ESP may explain paranormal information in certain cases, but there are cases which cannot be explained by ESP alone, not even if we imagine it to be much more powerful than everyday telepathy. From a psychological viewpoint, we also need a conscious or subconscious motive that would explain why a person would create or evoke the paranormal phenomena in the first place.

There are several types of evidence, such as paranormal memories of a previous life in young children or the manifestation of drop-in communicators during mediumistic sessions that are not aiming at conclusive evidence for an afterlife or so-called Peak in Darien-experiences in the dying, in which such a hypothetical subconscious motive is simply too far-fetched to be taken seriously.

Only if we imagine super-ESP to be motivated by a force outside the human mind, such as a hypothetical 'universal, divine field of consciousness', could we still

account for such phenomena to a certain extent. I personally do not believe in this concept, but if I did, I would not be able to think of a plausible motive for such a 'field' to deceive people into believing in a non-existent afterlife. Thus, even then the psychological rationale would be absent, which, for me, implies it does not deserve serious attention as an alternative hypothesis.

7) Let's to discuss in detail some specific and well-known NDE cases. The case of Pam Reynolds comes to mind. For many people, this case is conclusive evidence for survival because Pam had veridical perceptions while she was "clinically dead" and without brain activity. However, skeptics say that a careful reading of the evidence clearly shows that Pam's flat EEG probably did not last longer than half an hour and more importantly that she had NO verifiable perception at all while in this extreme state. So, it is literally false that Pam had verifiable perceptions while she was "clinically dead". What do you think of this objection and, if correct, how does it affect the evidential power of this case regarding survival of consciousness?

In 2003, I was involved in an extensive debate about this case on the James Randi Educational Foundation Forum. I even personally contacted Pam Reynolds and surgeon Dr. Robert Spetzler and exchanged several e-mails with them. At first, I had not read the original report about the case in Dr. Michael B. Sabom's book Light and Death, but only online summaries of it.

For this reason, I was under the impression that Pam's extrasensory perception did in fact concern events that took place after they had induced an artificial clinical death in her (during the preparation of her brain surgery). It was Julio Siqueira who alerted me to the fact that the skeptics were in fact right that Reynolds observed events that took place *before* the standstill procedure had been completed. I still believe that her perception was paranormal and even that the unverifiable rest of her NDE occurred while she was clinically dead, but the popular notion I used to share that her veridical perception occurred after the standstill procedure had been completed is simply incorrect. It continues to be an important case, but there may be veridical cases that are even more important, including among Sabom's other published cases.

8) Pam Reynolds wore tightly-fitting earplugs during her operation which supposedly excluded all external sounds. However, skeptics argue that earplugs do not totally exclude all external sounds, they only considerably reduce their intensity. Moreover, people under general anesthesia can hear things, specially (in Pam's case) she could hear the sound of the bone saw because as the saw was cutting through her skull, the sound made by the saw would have been conducted directly through the bones of her skull into her middle ear where she perceived it. Is this a plausible objection?

I don't think so, but even if it were, it would not explain how she could have perceived the specific form of the saw (even though her description of it was not perfect, it was much more correct than what Dr. Michael Sabom had expected it would look like), as this could not be deduced from its sound. Also, it does not explain her veridical perception of the drill bits and the case they were kept in. Let's not forget nobody (that I know of) has ever claimed she could see these with her physical eyes.

9) Some have said that the main reason to think the earplugs excluded all the external sounds is because loud clicks were repeatedly being produced by the earplugs. However, skeptics have argued that the loud clicks produced by earplugs were intermittent and that in intervals of silence she would have been able to hear conversations, even slightly muffled by the earplugs. Since this point is critical to the evaluation of the case, is there any good evidence regarding the mode (i.e. continuous or intermittent) in which the clicks were being produced by the earplugs?

As far as I know, the sound was indeed intermittent, but as Stuart Hameroff has commented: "If no auditory stimuli register in the brain, it is difficult to understand how auditory stimuli can reach consciousness." In other words, this particular aspect is only important if we assume that the test for which the clicks were produced failed, meaning that it did not lead to registration of brain response to auditory stimuli. It is hard to believe that Pam's cortex was active exclusively during the intervals between the clicks, and never when the clicks were processed, as that would have alerted the medical team. Therefore, I believe that only if we assume something went wrong with the test, can we really take this hypothesis seriously.

10) The "Denture Man" case has been very controversial in the world of NDE research. You have been involved in a controversy with skeptic Gerald Woerlee,

perhaps the leading critic of the "Denture Man" case. Can you tell us how this controversy began and whether you think that the overall skeptical contribution of Woerlee to the clarification of this case has been, on balance, positive?

The controversy obviously began when Woerlee claimed that the "Denture Man" case was completely explainable by well-known mainstream medical facts and constituted no threat to the materialist world view. He defied us by his very self-confident tone. Woerlee is not just another skeptic but a militant proponent of atheist and materialist humanism. By the way, I must admit that Woerlee has sometimes been just as disrespectful as other skeptics, but on the whole he was a whole lot less rude than most of them. This made it possible for us to take him a bit more seriously than the average debunker. Some of his objections have stimulated us to clarify several points, and in this respect he actually has played a relatively positive role in the whole controversy.

11) One of Woerlee's main objections is that the entire case rests on the uncorroborated words of a single nurse (TG). There is not independent cross-examination of the patient's experience (because the man died sometime after the discharge from the hospital) and no cross-confirmation with any other of the parties concerned was possible, or has been done. What do you think of these criticisms?

All of this is true. The case is built solely on TG's testimony. However, there is no specific reason to doubt the general line of his testimony which has remained the same for years, as is shown by a comparison between my interview and an earlier interview by Ap Addink of 1994. We should realise there are various degrees of evidential strength. The case would have been stronger if there had been corroborative sources, but that does not mean that it is really weak or worthless. It is stronger than the average NDE with veridical perceptions which is only reported by the patient, although it is less strong than a case which includes both the patient's own account and corroborative medical records or testimonies supplied by other persons.

12) Woerlee has also complained that regarding the timing of removal of this man's dentures, TG gives two different stories, causing some uncertainty as to the exact time of removal of the dentures. In the first report, TG states that the dentures were removed after starting the Thumper (heart massage machine). In a second statement TG states that the dentures were removed after positioning the man under the Thumper, and only after the mask for artificial respiration was positioned on the man's face was the Thumper started. According to Woerlee, this later explanation makes little medical sense, as it means the patient would receive no heart massage for a while, and continuation of heart massage is the primary objective of basic CPR. What do you think of this objection?

This objection would be quite valid, if we did not know that TG has already declared that the second version is the accurate one. The first description is simply based on a minor error in TG's description during my interview, which TG corrected very rapidly. This is his full description of the relevant events, taken from TG's published reply to Woerlee: "The transport of the patient from the moment of his arrival at the hospital up to the moment of [his] arrival at the [CCU] took more than five minutes. During that period the ambulance nurse could only run beside the gurney; hence resuscitation was hardly possible. It was only tried to maintain some ventilation. In the old Canisius Hospital the distance between First Aid, where patients arrived, and the CCU was considerable. One even had to take an elevator to the third floor as it was there where the CCU was located. So, much precious time was lost to reach the CCU and next resume the resuscitation procedure. Between the lifting of the patient from the gurney onto the bed, the installation of the heart massage pump, and the factual resumption of the resuscitation, much time was lost, certainly more than a minute. In that period no resuscitation took place and there was definitely no blood circulation. The dentures—and I say this with strong emphasis—were removed from the mouth before the heart massage machine was switched on. So it was impossible that Mr. B would have been conscious and could physically have done the observations of his surroundings as Woerlee alleges he [Mr. B.] had done. Besides, as far as I know nobody has ever been conscious when his pupils did not react to light. In addition, to me it seems farfetched that during the resuscitation Mr. B would have done observations of his surroundings in the very brief moments that I opened his eyes to check his light-stiff pupils."

13) Another of Woerlee's criticisms is that the patient reported that, at the same time as he was under-

going an out-of-body experience, he also felt the physical pain of the heart massage due to the Thumper (i.e. he reported a physical perception of pain due to cardiac massage during an out-of-body experience). Perhaps we could articulate more precisely Woerlee's criticism in this way: if the patient was actually out of his body, it makes no sense to think that he felt pain caused on the physical body to which he was not connected anymore. We can't have it both ways: either he was outside his body (in which case no embodied, physical perception is possible), or he was still embodied and having normal physical sensations like a purely physical chest pain (and hence no out of the body experience was factual).

I disagree. First, let us realise that within a dualist ontology there is no such thing as literally 'embodied' perception. Normal perception is the result of the interaction between the mind and the brain. For instance, let's assume the sensory nerves linking a specific part of the body to the brain have been cut. In such a case, any normal sensation from that body part is absent. So the perception is not in the body as such, but our sensations are constructed on the basis of physical patterns in the brain. Even then, the sensations as such are never in the brain, but only in the mind.

If we grant this, we could imagine that a person could have partially left his or her body while at the same time remaining linked to the brain as a source of sensory input. It would then be possible to receive both sensory sensations and veridical extrasensory perceptions. This is not so hard to imagine because most psychics are getting extrasensory perceptions while they're still capable of receiving normal impressions from their brains.

Secondly, it is possibly that the pain in question was not somatogenic, i.e. not based on physical patterns in the brain, but rather psychogenic, or the result of the patient's (subconscious) interpretation of the veridical extrasensory perceptions of what the thumper was doing to his body. In that case, it would be comparable to hypnotically induced pain, phantom pain without a neurological explanation, or recalled or imagined pain (with no physical basis) experienced during a dream.

14) Even though the patient's surname (Beekhuizen) and profession (manual laborer who placed steel reinforcement in concrete constructions) was reported to be known, it has been argued that, even after active searching by some researchers, no independent objective corroboration of the existence (and profession) of this person exists. What do you think of this criticism?

This criticism is certainly valid. My colleague Anny Dirven and myself have done our utmost to find a patient by this name or similar names such as Beekhuis but to no avail. We've concluded that the name remembered by nurse TG is most probably wrong. Perhaps it was distorted by TG's exposure to the name of a popular Dutch NDE-subject, Mick Broekhuysen, which got some publicity in the same period that the denture case first received some attention in the media. This implies the case is not perfect, which doesn't mean the case is worthless as evidence for consciousness during a flat EEG. Evidence is a matter of degree. Even tightly controlled experiments rarely deliver foolproof results. The Denture Man case still remains a strong case.

15) Another criticism is that the patient was undergoing resuscitative measures whilst en route to the hospital in the ambulance and in these conditions we have no good evidence of what exact level or state of consciousness really was when his dentures were removed, specially since there are no official hospital records extant.

Again, we do know what TG claims about this, namely that the patient certainly did not have blood circulation when the dentures were taken out. As a layman I find his opinion at least as important as such gratuitous skeptical speculation. So if he says there is no medical explanation for the patient's NDE I take that very seriously!

16) TG reported that when he shined a light into the patient's eyes, the pupils were unresponsive, indicating the patient was completely unconscious. But, scientifically speaking, the reactivity of pupils is generally accepted as evidence of deep unconsciousness?

Right, as a reflex it would be, but TG claims that even this basic reflex was absent in his patient. w Meaning that in this respect he was more like someone who is (irreversibly) dead than like someone who is merely deeply unconscious.

17) Another objection is that the case is fairly old and it tends to cast doubts on the investigation, specially since the case rests largely in TG's memories and, as psychology has shown, memories sometimes are

not very reliable regarding specific details when time has happened.

It is true that the case dates from the late 70s. However, as I have said before, TG's testimony of 2008 largely matches that of 1994. Also, TG considers this a life-altering, very impressive experience, rather than an everyday occurrence. So it had a deep, very special impact on him. The main part of it being of course that the patient had veridical perceptions during a phase in which, according to mainstream materialist neuroscience, he should have had no type of subjective awareness whatsoever.

18) Woerlee says in the article "Cardiac Arrest and Near-Death Experiences" that "the nature of the deceased relatives seen during these NDEs differs from one culture to another [...]; Hindus have Hindu NDEs, Buddhists have Buddhist NDEs, and Christians have Christian NDEs [...]; the reason for return to life differs from one culture to another". All these 3 factors, taken together, don't show that NDE's are a cultural creation, and not real experiences with spirits?

No, at the most they show that NDEs may be influenced by cultural elements. This strongly suggests that NDEs consist of a mixture of purely subjective, dreamlike imagery, clairvoyance of events in the physical world, telepathic communications with other spirits, and possibly intersubjective experiences of spiritual landscapes, buildings, etc. If we accept the possibility of higher, more evolved spiritual beings, these could adapt to one's personal symbolism. By the way, I've encountered an NDE of a Dutch man known by the pseudonym Jan de Wit who had a vision of a deity whose description seems strongly reminiscent of the Hindu goddess Saraswati. He certainly had no Hindu background in this life, and was even completely unaware of this specific goddess. In my Dutch article about this case, I consider the possibility that this particular symbolism derives from a previous life as a Hindu. So not only are such elements compatible with the survival hypothesis, they may sometimes provide evidence for it.

19) These two papers - "Surges of Electroencephalogram Activity at the Time of Death: A Case Series" and "A Theoretical Basis for Surges of Electroencephalogram Activity and Vivid Mental Sensation During Near-Death Experience" could show a normal and plausible explanation for the Pam Reynolds and the Denture Man NDE cases? If not, why not?

No, the concept of surges of EEG activity at the time of death does not explain such cases. First of all, no surge of electrical activity in the brain can explain extra-sensory perception. So not even the veridical perceptions in the case of Pam Reynolds could be explained through such a burst, even though they occurred before the standstill procedure had been completed.

Secondly, what Dr. Chawla seems to have found is a brief burst of EEG activity. Alex Tsakiris has said something valuable about this on an online forum: "we have the fact that Chawla's own data contradicts the NDE lit[erature]. NDErs almost always report an unexplainable continuous stream of consciousness... "I was shot... then I was airlifted to the hospital... then I was instantly outside of my body... I saw them resuscitate me... then I was slammed back into my body". Chawla (great/likable/very-smart guy by the way) suggests a long period of severe brain trauma with no conscious experience (presumably) followed by a burst... this just doesn't fit." Neither Pam nor the Denture Man report only a very short experience, but elaborate experiences. The Denture Man perceived several phases of the resuscitation rather than just a very short episode.

Thirdly, I've read that at present there is no evidence for a surge of EEG activity in cases of NDEs, but exclusively in cases of irreversible death. Apparently, some scholars link this burst to the departure of the soul shortly before death.

20) Let's talk a bit about your research on reincarnation. In your opinion, what is the best case supporting the hypothesis of reincarnation?

There are dozens of very convincing cases, all of which involve paranormal information (sometimes recorded before verification) about a life of a deceased person who is unknown to the child's present social environment, and a strong emotional identification with the past life and appropriate interests and desires linked to that life. Alternatives are extremely implausible (see my answer below, under your question 21). Some paranormal cases involve paranormal, unlearned skills and in some cases there are birthmarks or birth defects that closely match (both in position, shape and size) fatal wounds on the body of the person the child claims to have been. Examples of strong cases are: Jagdish Chandra, Shanti Devi, Bishen Chand Kapoor, Swarnlata Mishra, Kumkum Verma, Sunita Khandelwal, Ramoo & Rajoo Sharma (India), Gnanatilleka Baddewithana, Sujith Lak-

mal Jayaratne, Purnima Ekanayake (Sri Lanka), Imad Elawar (Lebanon), amd Helmut Kraus (Austria). A very good recent American case is that of James Leininger.

21) What other alternatives explanations have been proposed to explain the best cases of reincarnation and why do you find them wrong?

I suppose that by best cases you mean paranormal cases that cannot be explained by normal hypotheses such as fraud, self-deception or fantasy. The following derives from adapted fragments of a manuscript which is the result of my close collaboration with my Indian friend Dr. Kirti Swaroop Rawat, for which I wish to thank him here. The main alternatives proposed for paranormal cases are:

- Impersonation via (Super-)ESP

This is a hypothesis defended by (among others) the late Dutch parapsychologist W.H.C. Tenhaeff, Indian critic C.T.K. Chari, British historian Ian Wilson and Czech investigator Milan Rýzl. The main question in this context is not whether these authors were right in attempting to explain reincarnation cases by an ESP-hypothesis. It is quite obvious that they were, as in science we should always try to look for the simplest hypothesis with the greatest explanatory power. The point is whether they are right in their claims that ESP can indeed satisfactorily explain paranormal cases of the reincarnation type.

First, let us consider cases with paranormal skills. At present, no one has as of yet formulated any plausible hypothesis about how a child could acquire such skills through Extra-Sensory Perception. ESP is generally seen as a form of paranormal perception or cognition and it is well known that perception or information processing are indeed necessary but not sufficient conditions for the acquisition of complex skills. For such complex skills we often need instruction, but in any case training or practice to become skillful. Stephen E. Braude has pointed out that we should distinguish between different types of skills, according to their complexity, but it is clear that in some Cases of the Reincarnation Type, such as that of Swarnlata Mishra, the skill was not a simple one.

As far as we know, there has never been any well-documented case of the extrasensory acquisition of skills. General theories about skills indicate that we have no reason to believe that mere perception would ever be enough to acquire them.

This also holds for cognitive skills such as the understanding of religious rituals or other specific cultural customs. Young children age 2 to 4 generally have little or no knowledge of rituals and habits practiced by a group to which they do not belong themselves. And yet, there many cases in which the children had precisely such knowledge.

In a case studied by Dr. Kirti Swaroop Rawat, a Hindu boy named Mukul was born with a circumcised penis. Not only did the boy know exactly how to perform the Muslim ritual of Namaz, but he also remembered the exact process of circumcision.

Now what about cases that only seem to embrace paranormal information? We should realize that such information does not appear to stand on its own, but it is always part of the child's conviction that he or she has lived before; i.e. of the subject's identification with the past life. In most cases, this identification is not just an unemotional, detached affair. It is usually accompanied by strong feelings, affections and longings, which fit into the life the subject claims to recall.

The only ESP-hypothesis we could regard as a serious candidate for the explanation of cases with paranormal information is a hypothesis that would also explain the child's identification with the past life. As most paranormal spontaneous cases of reincarnation involve young children, we should specifically be aware of developmental data on young children that may relate to this topic.

It has been found that children who are the primary subjects in reincarnation research usually start talking about their memories of it before their third year. Thus, it is relevant to note that infants and toddlers according to various investigations usually have a self-image that differs from that of older children or adults. While thinking about themselves, they typically put more emphasis on concrete dimensions, like physical appearance, possessions or play activities.

In general, this identification can lead to a shift in a person's self-image, so that it corresponds more with the image one has of the object of identification. We should assume the object of identification is somehow attractive to the child. This implies it corresponds to his ideal self as a concept. An ideal self-concept amounts to the way a subject would like to be more than anything else or to the way he would like to lead his life. It would in general be awkward, even embarrassing, for any child to choose an identity outside their direct social environment.

The question is: What could possibly motivate a two or three-year-old child to prefer a recollection of being a deceased, usually fairly remote, stranger as an object of identification, rather than a beloved relative or even a neighbour?

Let us assume therefore that ESP is used by the child subconsciously to be able to choose a dead stranger as an object of identification.

This must mean that there is some kind of process through which the child tries to find a deceased person that would correspond as much as possible to his or her ideal self-concept and notions of an ideal life. We should in that case only expect cases with deceased 'objects of identification' that would be attractive to young children, primarily because of their external characteristics. It seems highly improbable that they would choose characters of dubious backgrounds or scenarios that might test the limits of their family's tolerance. The deceased personality should not suffer either from unappealing inner conflicts that are linked to his or her life. That would be unattractive for any young child. Now, neither of these properties is typical in seemingly paranormal cases of reincarnation.

Some may object that a motive to identify with someone does not always have to be inherently positive. For example, it is known that people may identify with an aggressor and adopt his or her ideas, attitudes or behaviour. However, this phenomenon only occurs under severe emotional or physical stress and there is a direct link with an agressor in the immediate environment of the subject. These conditions clearly do not apply to typical paranormal cases of spontaneous reincarnation memories.

Another negative motive to identify with a less attractive personality roots in low self-esteem or outright self-hatred. Such a psychological condition would show in the general behaviour of the person in question, which is destructive, extremely insecure and pessimistic. All this bears no relation to the average (present) personality of children in paranormal cases either.

Therefore, I think it is fair to say that the ESP-hypothesis turns out to be insufficient for most Cases of the Reincarnation Type with paranormal features, when approached from a motivational, developmental psychological perspective.

Dr. Stephen Braude grants this point, stressing, "Subjects in typical reincarnation cases are children. So at the age when they start speaking about a former life, it's unlikely that they're strongly motivated to simulate the behaviour of a previous personality. Therefore, super-psi explanations of those cases will usually have to posit relevant motives in people other than the subject -probably, one or the other set of parents or members of the immediate families." and, "As I noted, if we can't plausibly attribute relevant unconscious motives for simulating survival of the child subject, then the next most likely culprits will be members of either the subject's or the previous personality's family. But it's not easy to defend treating these family members as psychic agents, even if we find plausible motives for them. For one thing, their presumed motives may not mesh neatly with other observed fact... And for another, we may have to posit even more hopelessly convoluted and complex causal chains than we'd need if we treated the subject as the psychic agent."

Some proponents of the ESP-hypothesis deny that the child (or his parents) would subconsciously search (by ESP) for information about a personality who attracts him (or his parents). They state the identification is not something the child really wishes to achieve as a desirable goal. Instead, the child – at a subconscious level – just randomly receives information about a completely arbitrary deceased personality and then only after this strange process of gathering information about them has been largely completed, he identifies emotionally – at a conscious level – with the previous personality, with an increasing illusion that the personality and circumstances relating to it were his own.

These proponents claim that our knowledge of ESP is too limited and that we still have to learn how it works. For example, many precognitive dreams involve trivial events and it seems almost unthinkable that we have acquired the information about such trivial events because we were so interested in them.

This theory of ESP is misleading. Most recorded instances of spontaneous Extra-Sensory Perception point to a clear psychological motive in the person who experiences it. For example, most cases of spontaneous telepathy occur under emotional circumstances. Even if some precognitive dreams provide seemingly trivial events, those events are at least to a certain extent noteworthy to the person dreaming about them. This also means that he or she gets to experience them after the dream. In that sense, the experience related at the very least to the person.

Should ESP as a human faculty be completely severed from human motivation? There is no convincing evidence that it stands on its own, functioning completely separately from the rest of our psychology.

It is sometimes claimed by survivalists that a strong Super-ESP or Super-psi hypothesis based on (in principle) limitless and unmediated retrocognition of information about the past is an unacceptable hypothesis because it could never be falsified. Any type of information could be explained by retrocognition and no case could ever show that the Super- ESP theory is wrong.

However, in our view this is misguided. The Super-ESP theory may be unfalsifiable if one exclusively looks at paranormal information without taking into account the context in which the information shows up. The falsification of Super-ESP is not primarily linked to its explanatory power of purely informational aspects of cases, but to its capability to explain cases as a whole.

Even if one went as far as to ignore the motivational, psychological argumentation against the theory of arbitrary, random Super-ESP (or Super-PSI), one would still find that there are only a few, really exceptional cases, in which a child recalling the past life also expressed the faculty of ESP. When reincarnation subjects do seem to be somewhat gifted in this respect, it is never to the extent of more notable psychics (claimed) abilities.

Moreover, as Dr. Stevenson stresses:

"The unusual behavior related to the memories that most subjects show (usually over several years) has no stimulus in contemporary events of the previous personality's family; events in the subject's family may stimulate it, but it derives from past events in the previous family..." and, "The subject's sometimes show emotions that the previous personalities did not have, but that are appropriate from the point of view of a previous personality perceiving himself in a different, and often disagreeable, situation."

Furthermore, as we have seen, some cases involve birthmarks and birth defects relating to a traumatic or fatal injury that ended the previous life. How could we explain such cases by even the far-fetched variant of the Super-ESP hypothesis?

If we still wanted to explain those cases by ESP, we would first have to say that someone else, let's say the mother, created the birthmark and/or birth-defect through psychokinesis during pregnancy. There is some evidence for this possibility of so-called maternal impression but it would not suffice to explain classical paranormal cases, because afterwards the child should subconsciously try to find a person whose mode of death seems to be related to the physical characteristics shown in his own body.

Therefore, birthmarks and birth defects show very clearly how far one must stretch the hypothesis of some sort of bizarre and random ESP-processes to explain certain paranormal cases of the reincarnation type.

In conclusion, any Super-ESP or Super-psi hypothesis that leans on a general theory of ESP as a completely random and non-psychological phenomenon is mainly based on the desire (inspired by a dogmatic world view) to explain away important evidence for reincarnation.

– Morphogenetic Fields

The morphogenetic fields postulated by Dr. Rupert Sheldrake would not only contain information about the formation of an organism's various organs, but also about the instincts and behavioural patterns of a particular species. All the morphogenetic fields of a species would be connected and exchange information.

If a member of a species acquires some new bit of information about something, its morphogenetic field would also make it available — albeit on an unconscious level — to the morphogenetic fields of other members of the same species. Telepathy would be just one, conscious, expression of a very common biological phenomenon of so-called morphic "resonance" between fields. This resonance would presumably take place outside the defined boundaries of time and space.

Now, by the same token, paranormal cases of the reincarnation type would have to be explained by morphic resonance between the field of the previous personality and that of the present one. What can we think of this? It was Alan Gauld who addressed this issue in a review of one of the volumes of Stevenson's series Cases of the reincarnation type.

Gauld's main point is that there is no reason to believe that the morphogenetic field of a deceased adult — as most previous personalities were when they died — would particularly resonate with that of a young child. Especially if the adult and the child are biologically unrelated, there can be no special resemblance between the two so there is no reason to suppose that the resonance would be strong enough to create the cases we are trying to interpret here. The paranormal information that a particular child shows about a particular deceased adult

is such that a special linkage would have to exist between their two biological fields.
There is no reason to think that there is such a linkage, unless perhaps if the two organisms would be very closely related genetically. It is important to stress that most subjects in paranormal cases of reincarnation are not at all closely related genetically to the previous personalities.

– Influence from a discarnate personality

Trying to explain cases of the reincarnation type by some kind of influence from a discarnate personality, ranging from an interference known as overshadowing to total possession, is popular among people who do believe in survival after death but for some reason reject the concept of reincarnation. For example, spiritualist and anti-reincarnationist James Webster claims the hypothesis of a 'visiting spirit' could explain all paranormal cases of the reincarnation type.

A famous and well-documented case of possible possession by a discarnate personality is that of Lurancy Vennum. In 1878 the 13-year-old Mary Lurancy Vennum from Watseka repeatedly went into a state of trance wherein she was possessed by a whole series of "spirits". Dr. E. W. Stevens investigated Lurancy; who advised her to look for a guiding spirit among all the visiting spirits so that order could be created out of chaos.

When she tried to do so, a certain Mary Roff turned out to be prepared to fulfill this function. Mary Roff had died in Watseka (Illinois) at the age of 18, when Lurancy was only 15 months old. Mary Roff took 'possession' of Lurancy and apparently dominated the child for three months: Lurancy talked, acted and seemed to remember things as if she was Mary Roff. Lurancy even went to live with Mary's parents, where everything was familiar for her, and where she met relatives, friends and acquaintances. Also, she was capable of recalling things that did indeed correspond to Mary Roff's life.

The main difference between this authenticated case of possession and cases of reincarnation is that Mary disappeared after three months because Lurancy had been "completely cured". This means she no longer showed any characteristics belonging to Mary and could return to her own house. Later, Mary did occasionally return, with Lurancy's permission, so that she could talk with her parents.

Thus, we see two distinct personalities between whom there is no continuity, in contrast to cases of reincarnation memories. The main argument against the possession hypothesis for paranormal cases of the reincarnation type is there is no alternation of personalities.

Furthermore, there seem to be almost no cases of full-blown secundary personalities among children who remember previous lives.

Similarly, subjects in cases of reincarnation usually show ignorance about changes that have taken place in buildings and in association with people known in the past since the previous personality died. It is also hard to think of a motive for a discarnate entity to possess a child in such a way that the latter comes to believe he was the discarnate entity in a past life and is the child in his present life. Also, why should discarnate spirits only fool children into believing that they are their reincarnations?

In addition and like the case for ESP, possession and other forms of influence from discarnate entities cannot account for paranormal birthmarks and birth defects related to the previous life.

In conclusion, I think that among the survivalist hypotheses, the reincarnation hypothesis is the most adequate one for paranormal Cases of the Reincarnation Type.

This brings us to an important question related to reincarnation: What within a person is it that reincarnates? We basically need to distinguish between two philosophical currents: personalism and impersonalism.

Personalism states that the entity surviving death is reborn into a new organism is in fact the same entity that thinks, feels and strives during this present life. The "I", experient or conscious subject of the previous life is one and the same as the person that recalls this previous life during its new incarnation. Thus, the experient of the past incarnation and the present one would be identical. The personal experient considered as a personal experient has not changed, but only his or her experiences and memories of those experiences have changed over time. The fact that the person inhabits a different body now or functions at a certain psychological level due to his interaction with an immature brain does not imply that it is not the same person but someone else..

Impersonalism declares the conscious subject, personal experient or "I" to be nothing more than a convention or illusion. According to impersonalism, as there was really no constant conscious subject during the past life

so there can be no identity with the (illusory) present conscious subject of this life either.

In fact, both subjects would be mere illusions or conventions and nothing would exist that supported the continuation of life, thoughts, feelings or foresight as part of a total spiritual person. Persons according to impersonalism would not be “selves” in physical bodies, but merely “minds” connected to bodies. To be more precise: there would simply be no (substantial) “selves”. Therefore, at rebirth only certain memories, personality traits and skills would be ‘recycled’ during the formation of a fundamentally new person. In a sense, the theory of reincarnation would be remarkably similar to the materialist theory of extinction after death in that the person as such would really be irreversibly destroyed.

I believe that the impersonalist view of a conscious subject that amounts to nothing but an illusion is untenable, as the concept of illusion only makes sense if illusions are seen as real subjective phenomena. They must objectively (i.e. really) exist as subjective phenomena, as their existence itself cannot be denied.

We can only really have an illusion if we are real (rather than illusory) conscious subjects or experients. It simply does not make sense to hold that a person only undergoes the illusion of his own conscious existence, seeing the presence of any real illusion shows that the conscious subject (or experient) experiencing the illusion must really exist as well. Similarly, the fact that a certain impression is illusory simply means that we get a wrong idea of what it stands for or refers to, not that the impression itself does not exist. Thus, illusions cannot be non-existent themselves, and neither can the subject undergoing an illusion be merely illusory. Instead, I’m convinced of the existence of a substantial personal soul, that is indivisible and cannot be explained on the basis of any divisible psychological or physical composition of elements.

There is a plurality of mental processes integrated into one’s consciousness. As the reductionist philosopher Daniel Dennett rightly states, there is no single spot in the brain on which all the different neuronal information would be integrated. There is a conscious subject or “I” who sees, thinks, feels, wants, etc. all at once.

This can only be explained by a substantial personal soul that is not composed by lower subconscious or non-conscious elements; as such a composition would never create the unity of consciousness. If it cannot be composed or created by other things, and it cannot be affected by the dissolution of any thing, including the brain or body, it cannot be destroyed by material processes and must therefore be immortal.

It is important to note that a personal self should be conceptually distinguished from its personality. A personality may be seen as an acquired pattern of psychological structures, attitudes and skills of a personal self. A personality is dynamic and changes over time, and in certain pathological cases a personal self may possess several personalities simultaneously though it can only be conscious in one personality at the time. Thus, changes of personality and even dissociation are fully compatible with the notion of a substantial personal self.

In my view, in the context of reincarnation we will expect certain changes of personality through the processes of death, rebirth and childhood, but this does not mean those changes imply a new or different personal self. We would remain ourselves just as much as we remain ourselves in the course of a single earthly lifetime.

– Parallel lives

Some cases of hypnotic reincarnation research show an inconsistency between the year of death at the end of the previous life and birth in the present life. A subject would have been born in one life before he would have died in his previous incarnation.

This problem is sometimes explained away through an exotic notion known as ‘parallel lives’. According to this idea, someone could be incarnated on earth in many physical bodies simultaneously, because linear time as we experience it would just be an illusion.

However, the idea of previous life seems a typical ad hoc explanation and mainly serves the purpose of saving the value of certain cases collected during sessions of hypnotic regression or related techniques. No serious, unequivocal evidence for it has been found in spontaneous cases of the reincarnation type.

Sometimes, a child seems to recall a previous life that ended shortly after he was born, but this usually occurs in countries where registration of birth and death is still not very accurate. Even if such (very rare) claims were substantiated they could be explained more easily by a form of ‘permanent possession’ of a child’s body by another deceased personality after the child was born, than by real parallel incarnations.

Also, if linear time as we experience it, were simply a subjective illusion with absolutely no basis in physical

reality, this would mean we could never causally interact with our physical bodies or even be causally affected by them. It would imply that we could have absolutely no reliable information about the physical world, because any linear causation in time would be an illusion, including the causation involved in the processes of normal sensory perception. All empirical evidence for the non-existence of time would have to be illusory as well, meaning that there even could be no evidence for this notion. So it seems that if we analyze this theory more closely, it turns out to be self-defeating.

Finally, it is important to realize that even if the idea of parallel lives were correct, we would still continue to have the illusion of a linear temporal order of lives. One life would still come after the previous life. Now, this would still confront us with the problem that, even if only within the realm of subjective illusions, one life could only begin after the former one has ended. Leaving aside precognition, it would still be impossible to subjectively experience the beginning of a new life before conscious existence in the previous life ended. The idea of parallel lives would not explain why – in the child's mind – his previous life ended before he was reborn.

– Binary Soul Doctrine

A rather recent, original addition to theorizing within the fields of survival and reincarnation research comes from Peter Novak who defends the so-called Binary Soul Doctrine (BSD). According to this theory personal mind would be composed of two distinct parts that may be identified as an individual conscious spirit and an unconscious soul. A person's conscious part or would reincarnate without recollections of its previous life, whereas the unconscious portion or soul would contain memories of one's past incarnation. Only if a person's mind is exceptionally well integrated it will become possible to consciously recall a previous life.

However, contrary to what Novak's theory predicts, children who remember previous lives had usually not been exceptional in terms of psychological integration before they were reborn. In fact, in some cases, they had habits that would conventionally be regarded as signs of a lack of psychological maturity, such as a drinking habit or drug addiction.

22) For the argument's sake, let's assume that reincarnation is a fact. According to your research, everybody is going to reincarnate? Or just some persons?

I'm not sure if everybody is going to reincarnate after we die. There are many traditions about a possible further evolution in another spiritual realm, and this seems a real possibility if one considers NDEs and prebirth experiences in young children. However, I'm fairly certain that everybody has reincarnated before this present life. The reason is that there is a general biological and neurological continuity between mankind and other species. I find it very difficult to believe that each of us started his or her journey through the physical realm as a human being. It seems much more plausible to assume that we all went through a long series of (other) animal incarnations before we became human. Due to the relatively long time that mankind has existed (around 200.000 years if I'm not mistaken or even longer) it also seems plausible that many of us will have had quite a few human incarnations before this life.

Of course, I cannot prove this. It is an extrapolation from information taken from reincarnation research and biological evolution. However, it seems obvious that there have been many more past lives than the approximately 3000 spontaneous cases collected so far. Due to sociocultural and religious reasons, many cases never get public and only a small number will reach serious investigators. In other words, it is very probable that cases of spontaneous memories of previous lives is a truly under-reported phenomenon. Then, even in most cases of young children who reall previous lives, lots of conscious memories fade away. For example, I've spoken to a Dutch girl of 9 who did not even recall having talked about her past life memories when she was a toddler. If it hadn't been for her parents, no one would (consciously) know about them now. This clearly shows that the absence of conscious memories does not at all imply the absence of past lives.

23) In the literature on spiritualism, it is not clear if reincarnation is a fact or not. Mediums have provided different, conflicting information about reincarnation. What do you think about spiritualism and the reliability of the informationcoming from mediums in general?

I'm not a spiritualist in the religious sense and I don't feel attracted to channelled revelations. The main thing I can say about this is that many such revelations contradict each other. What this means is that rationally we

cannot build a sound theory upon them. If anything, channelled information should be tested against scholarly data, rather than the other way round.

Personally, I'm only interested in old-fashioned mediumship that concentrates on contacting the deceased, not in the channelling of supposed higher truths. For me, it is clear that reincarnation is the best explanation for paranormal Cases of the Reincarnation Type. I'm not impressed by authoritative claims from channelled entities (or anyone else for that matter) that it is not.

24) What do you think about ufology and the possibility that advanced aliens are visiting the Earth?

I think it is an exciting subject and a few years ago I even wrote a short Dutch paper about the so-called Ancient Astronauts theory. Most of the evidence may be faulty, and some downright fraudulent, but there might really be something in it. I would love to make a systematic study of the best evidence, for instance concerning topics like the Indian vimanas, the witnesses to the Roswell crash, possible abduction experiences, etc. I even would like to write a book about the best evidence in this area. It's one of my wishes for the future.

In my world view, there certainly is room for such beings from outer space. I would find it extremely shocking if they ever discovered that earth is really the only planet inhabited by animals (in the sense of incarnated spirits in a physical body) like ourselves. As stated before, I see mankind as an animal species, not as an 'absolute exception' of any kind.

25) What books or literature on philosophy, parapsycholgy and the afterlife would you recommend to the readers of this interview?

Here are a few suggestions (a complete list would be longer than the whole interview, so that if anyone reading this is not on the list, this does not mean very much):

Systematic philosophy and related areas:

- Karl Popper and John C. Eccles: The Self and its Brain.
- John Foster: The Immaterial Self.
- David Lund: various books.
- John Beloff: The Existence of Mind.
- John Beloff and John Smythies (editors): The Case for Dualism.
- New Dualism Archive (Ian Thompson): http://www.newdualism.org/
- Kelly et al.: Irreducible Mind
- Books and articles by Mario Beauregard about a dualistic approach to neuroscience, such as the Spiritual Brain and Brain Wars.
- Richard Swinburne and Antony Flew on the philosophy of religion.

Practical Philosophy:

- Books on animal rights by Tom Regan and Gary Francione.
- Website: http://www.abolitionistapproach.com/

Psychical Research (general):

- Anything written by the late Dr. Ian Stevenson, including his book A World in a Grain of Sand, written with Mary Rose Barrington and Zofia Weaver.

Survival:

- Books by Bob Coppes, Pim van Lommel, Sam Parnia
- Books by the late Archie Roy
- Books by Chris Carter
- Mediumship and Survival written by Alan Gauld
- Immortal Remains by Stephen E. Braude
- At the hour of Death by Erlendur Haraldsson and Karlis Osis.
- Older books by Camille Flammarion and Ernesto Bozzano
- F.W.H. Myers: Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death.
- William Barrett: Death-bed visions.
- E.W. Cook, B. Greyson, & I. Stevenson, Do any Near-Death Experiences provide evidence for the survival of human personality after death? Relevant features and illustrative case reports. Article published in the Journal of Scientific Exploration in 1998.
- The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences, edited by Janice Holden, et al.
- Anything on veridical cases written by Jan Holden and others.
- Books and articles about Near-Death Experiences by Penny Sartori, Michael B. Sabom, Melvin Morse, Maurice Rawlings, Kenneth Ring, Raymond Moody, Peter Fenwick, Jeffrey Long, Kevin Williams, and others.
- Kim Sheridan: Animals and the Afterlife.
- Books on After-Death Communications, for instance by Bill and Judy Guggenheim
- Articles by Michael Nahm and Bruce Greyson about terminal lucidity
- German Book by Michael Nahm: Wenn die Dunkelheit

ein Ende findet.
- General Website: http://www.survivalafterdeath.info/

Reincarnation Research:-
- German book by Dieter Hassler
- Books by Jenny Cockell
- Soul Survivor (about James Leininger)
- All the volumes and articles published by Ian Stevenson
- Articles by Erlendur Haraldsson, Antonia Mills, K.S. Rawat, and Satwant Pasricha.
- Anything written by Dr. Jim Tucker.
- Reincarnation, e-book written by Dr. Kirti Swaroop Rawat and myself.
- Website: http://www.childpastlives.org/ Prebirth Memories:
- Toni Maguire: Memories of the Light.
- S. Hinze: Coming from the Light.
- E. Hallett: Stories of the Unborn Soul.
- Neil and Elizabeth Carman: Cosmic Cradle.
Website: http://www.prebirthexperience.com/

Here's a general link to English papers written on behalf of Athanasia Foundation:
http://www.txtxs.nl/artikel.asp?artid=758

Here's link to relevant papers on the Merkawah website by Rudolf H. Smit and others:

http://www.merkawah.nl/engels

27) Something else you would like to add to end the interview?

I must say I highly appreciate your efforts. You strike me as a sincere scholar even though we probably have quite considerable differences of opinion in the field of religion and values related to this. –

Thanks again for giving me this opportunity and best wishes.

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