

Does consciousness survive?
Inquiring minds want to *know*.

BELIEF IS SO LAST CENTURY

**How status quo science is failing us and
solutions for moving the research forward.**

CYNTHIA CLAYTON PARENT

Dear Reader~

One of the biggest fears in life is death. Most people turn to religion or spirituality, a worldview based on belief to come to terms with what is considered a mystery.

The 21st century promises continued technological wonders that we dared not even imagine just a few decades ago, but our real failure of imagination is that in spite of scientific discoveries the afterlife is deemed unknowable. Is it?

Are we wet computers, our mind equal to our brain, or do we in fact have a dual nature? Is consciousness our true essence surviving when our brain dies, as many having a Near Death Experience believe to be the case? My research revealed not the impossibility of confirmation of consciousness survival but to other factors including an area of research that is underfunded and unsupported by the materialist scientific community.

If you like your news with a bit of an edge then you might appreciate the tone of this book as I attempt to convince you that we move beyond belief. I'll argue that the question of consciousness survival, what we might call 'inner space', deserves and requires equal resources and determination currently applied to outer space exploration.

Thanks for reading!

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About the Author

Cynthia Clayton Parent is a designer. She also holds a certificate in Transpersonal Psychology and is an ordained interfaith minister. She submitted this work to complete her master's in Critical & Creative Thinking at UMass Boston. This synthesis received the top standing of a "High Pass" and contributed to her graduating "With Distinction". Reviews and comments included;

"I think that one remarkable aspect of the writing is that you present your own point of view in a way that is very clear, thoughtful, and engaging, and at the same time, you present multiple sides and perspectives of others in a way that is thorough and balanced."

"I found your way of weaving together multiple strands – current cultural commentary (including literary and movie analysis), utopian vision, big picture and out of the box thinking, humor and edgy commentary, and scientific studies quite original, creative, and impressive."

Cynthia lives in Colorado and Vermont with her husband and 17 year-old 'puppy', Hans.

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Cynthia Clayton Parent
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For
Mom & Dad
With
Love

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I Preface

“It wasn’t my beliefs that caused me to heal. My Near Death Experience was a state of pure awareness, which is a state of complete suspension of all previously held doctrine and dogma. This allowed my body to ‘reset’ itself. In other words, an absence of belief was required for my healing.”

Anita Moorjani

Dying to Be Me: My Journey From Cancer, To Near Death, To True Healing

The *Big Question Online* is a blog that asks for consideration and discussion some of life’s compelling questions, for instance: ‘Is There Intrinsic Morality of the Free Market?’ While the question is not one we tend to bat around over a beer unless you happen to be someone with a soul working on Wall St., the essay eventually meanders to this point, “So the real issue here is not a financial one, but an anthropological one: What is man? Who am I? Why am I here? Where did I come from? Where am I going? What are my responsibilities to myself and others? How we answer these kinds of questions will have an enormous impact on every facet of our lives, including how we work and buy and sell, and how we believe such activities

should be directed— in other words, on economics.”¹ Yes, who the hell are we anyway?

This perennial question of philosophy that has haunted us from the beginning of time is actually the foundational question of every big question we wish to answer accurately. We’ve tried to hypothesize throughout the centuries on why we are here, why we are conscious beings and does our consciousness survive, but so far it’s all speculation. Clearly, we can keep running from this difficult question but we can never really hide. I propose that we stop running from it and more actively pursue the answer. My sense is that who we are can be answered at least in one aspect, as it relates to the question, “Does Consciousness Survive Death?” Personally, I believe it does and here’s a dramatic story of why I, along with millions of others who having unexplained experiences, still find ourselves leaning on belief. However, unlike many others, I think it is crucial that we move beyond belief and instead look to science to deliver us the facts.

Twenty years ago I lost my fiancé to suicide. It took me about seven years to process this shockingly tragic event,

as we were less than a week from getting married, and I believed he was the most 'together and loving' guy I had ever met. Neither of those realities was present the night I found him dead. The blood red neon sign, blinking 'WHY' flashed in my brain never stopping, as I tried to solve a puzzle with any pieces of evidence I could uncover, desperate to understand why this man in his prime followed through on such a horrific plan.

Within the first days I felt I was given signs from him that I would understand to mean he was still with me. They were all comforting but I knew that in my state of 'drowning', everything looked like a life-raft. What wasn't comforting was my now haunted house. "*Haunted! Really?* This only happens in movies!" I thought. For months smells traveled around the house, noises heard in the attic were loud enough to call 911, voices came from empty rooms... all of these experienced by anyone coming into the house. Finally, I had the house 'cleansed' with a sage burning by a woman who claimed it was Michael, my fiancé. I wasn't sure I trusted her claim in spite of the fact that I did want to believe he was still with me. Still, I now believed in cleansings, because it worked!

A few years later still immersed in an exhaustive search for clues to try to understand “WHY!” I was visiting Cassadaga, Florida, *the* place to hook up with spirits. I went to a psychic card reader and choosing someone randomly I knocked on her door at the appointed time. She was sitting at her table shuffling her cards and hit me as I walked in, “Who’s Michael?”

“My fiancé”, I told her.

“He shot himself didn’t he, I hear a gunshot. He did it in front of you.”

“No, I was ten minutes behind him coming home.”

She looked up at me and said, “Well he might as well have!” insinuating that what I endured was about the same. I agreed and sat down. She explained that he wasn’t the strong and secure man he presented himself to be and didn’t know how to tell me how ‘on the edge’ he really was. His idea was just for me to find him toying with the gun as a sign of his true state of mind.

“When you were late coming back, as he sat there he got caught up in his own drama. He said it was an accident and is very sorry and loves you very much.”

Skeptics reading this will go right to their 'trick and rigged' file to figure out how she did this. I knew the story of Michael's death was never published, I had never been to this town before and this appointment was the first thing I did coming to town. I lived in another state, I chose this person randomly and had never written a blog or a book... it was pre-Facebook, any and all of which might have left clues for her to recognize my face and the story. The fact is one would have to do a statistical analysis regarding her guess, which includes every name both male and female she could have chosen, added to the guess of 'death' and add in all the various ways to die, along with the fact that she knew I had found him. I quickly did the math...the chances for getting it right was about two trillion to one. The neon sign blinking 'WHY' finally began to short circuit.

Maybe, had I been with Derren Brown at the time of this reading, world famous for his amazing illusionist performances along with his ability to flush out the cons of the psychic industry, we might have landed a blow to what was possibly a very sophisticated deceptive reading...or not. What I am left to conclude is that, although Derren Brown is a master of illusion, it does not follow that

everything that falls outside of our current scientific understanding is an illusion.

It is convincing performances such as Derren Brown's which supports the materialistic paradigm; "Who we are is only flesh and bone", alongside the equally influential and frightening power of the churches that conversely insist we rely on belief in their version of a story, some proclaiming "Repent! ...or die in the fiery pits of hell", which demand we become proactive in answering this ongoing central and fundamental question, "Does consciousness survive?" Both 'yea and nay' positions are powerfully represented in all cultures creating conflicting and clashing worldviews. It is time we end our belief in belief as the superior position as religions dictate, and apply critical thinking to the question. This requires that we review the possible forces at play preventing a critical analysis and deeper scientific research. Which brings me to my next story.

With this work my synthesis will be complete and I will be awarded a masters in Critical & Creative Thinking from UMass Boston. (People ask, "What can you do with that type of degree?" which strikes me as ironic because it

assumes I'm neither critical nor creative enough to see the options ahead.) Friends and family saw me as the creative nut; too many ideas equals too little direction. Throughout my academic and work careers, the problem was always that only one of my strengths could 'drive', while all other interests had to sit quietly in the back seat with no whining. As a fan of Leonardo da Vinci, I related to the cartoon I once saw, which was him sitting in a 1970's guidance counselor's office with the caption reading; "Math? Philosophy? Science? Art! Really Leonardo...focus and pick one!" Not just my guidance counselor repeated this sentiment, everyone in my life nagged - "Make up your mind. Stop telling us about all these ideas and do one!" I understood however that pursuing every idea is like planting every single acorn that falls from the tree... rather a single acorn planted in the right conditions is required for success. And so I patiently waited until I hit on an idea that only needed planting in a garden so rich, everyone agreed it would produce an amazing money tree!

I managed to be one of only two non-Fortune 500 companies to be awarded an exclusive product license for the Centennial Olympic Games, which was hosted in

Atlanta where I was living in the summer of 1996. This was seen by not just me, but the former CEO of K-Mart, whom I happened to be able to link up with for a short chat after having procured the license, as a slam-dunk million dollar product, "Double your order!" was his advice. Some little wise critical voice in my head said, "Don't get too greedy nothing is a guarantee!"

The idea hatched while I was still in a depressive state after Michael's death. We were photographers and had just renovated a fabulous art deco studio, large enough to accommodate a car for our product work when he passed. I spent the next couple of years trying to make a go of the business myself and then decided to close the studio, as I wanted nothing more than to get away from all of the memories of our promised future together. Leaving the studio behind helped me move on even though I still found myself dealing with his death, which set me on a path of discovery regarding the afterlife. Then my new olympic job became so challenging it made me wish many days that I were dead, so the question became even more pressing! I had read an article stating that the Atlanta Committee for the Olympics Games (ACOG) reported to the IOC

(International Olympic Committee) that the average temp in Atlanta in July was 78 degrees. Maybe true if one averaged in the nighttime temps, but in any case it was story designed to deceive. Failing to notice this red flag regarding how business might be conducted by the group in charge, I focused instead on the empathy I had for the future crispy critters traveling to Atlanta from around the globe and thought of the only relief from the heat they could grab...a hat, a cold drink and my product idea, a fan.

Ah, the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat! I found out the hard way that it is in fact a 'wild world of sports' even on the business end at the highest level. (Lance Armstrong and the cycling doping drama is just the latest to note regarding the level of corruption in sports.) It's a long story so I'll just cut to my kick in the assets. The acorn planted in just the right conditions, turned out to be planted in toxic soil. In the end I was refunded half of my \$100,000 license fee if I agreed to sign a paper agreeing to never tell my story to *60 Minutes* or *20/20* or any other national media outlet. So, I won't tell the story and just report the headline: "The Rich & Famous, Breached Their Contracts With Yet Another Poor & Unknown Sucker." (I was no more than a

little pesky gnat in the grand scheme of things, as they were busy dealing with the allegations that they had bribed members of the IOC to obtain the Olympic Games.)

This event combined with my studies on the question of 'consciousness surviving death', had me wondering if in the next world I would at least have the privilege of confronting these nasty players regarding their choice of screwing the little guy. I decided that the line to deliver them a swift kick was probably going to be too long, if such a possibility existed, so I moved on...again. Except on these points, I don't ignore red flags and I question carefully branded campaigns selling respect and integrity. I've made no sweeping generalizations that all corporations are bad, I'm just much clearer regarding the level of corruption of corporations and organizations throughout our capitalistic system. (Which is not to say that I think any system is immune; the problem is corruption not the system per se.) Although I got a quick education about corporate corruption in 1996, many people figured it out in October of 2008. From Bernie Madoff, to the global scams of the Wall St. banksters, whose antics were outlined in

detail in the 2011 Academy Award winning documentary *Inside Job*, along with the best seller by Michael Lewis *The Big Short*, just to name a few. All this, along with the oil companies and their suppression of climate science...well, unless you've been under a rock, you are much clearer about the fact that corruption in this country is a serious concern. In fact, we are so clear about the level of corruption and what feels like a complete lack of power to change it, that many people have opted out of the game during this Great Recession as suicide in the U.S. has soared, "The rate of increase more than quadrupled from 2008-2010."² My awakening, the taking of the red pill, started to seep into my studies and I wondered if the 'hard question' regarding consciousness and the afterlife was in fact just too hard to nail down or was something else less innocent at play?

I offer you an overview of the topic, which suggests a standoff within science and possibly intentional suppression of the research. I've also included a creative solution regarding how to reframe and expand the research regarding consciousness survival, which could also solve one of this country's big, ongoing debates.

Even though most people would love to know if our consciousness survives death, they would rather not contemplate it. But as a critical thinker who has had to look death in the face literally, and having about five very serious and close calls myself, I've learned that avoidance is futile. My goal is inspire table talk and to persuade you that it's time to rally scientists of all perspectives, to take rather a freethinking approach and join forces to unlock the mystery, to lighten the dread that surrounds death and most importantly, to look beyond belief. The lack of not knowing *where or if* we go somewhere when we die creates a fear and negative undercurrent throughout our lives. I contend that while belief in an afterlife is comforting, it is far from *knowing* and we should be looking to and pressuring science to not just explore the question...which invites a 'take your time' approach, but instead challenge science to stick this question in their 'URGENT' file. A bit demanding perhaps, but it's not like we haven't been patient for centuries. So, what's the hold up? For starters, we can be and often are blockheads.

II Schema

"My mind is made up don't confuse me with the facts."
Anonymous

Critical Blocks

We've all heard the term 'creative block' but seldom if ever do we hear of a 'critical block'. That might be because we are just too egotistical to admit that critical blocks are standard glitches of our amazing brains. Fact is, cognitive errors we all make are numerous and we can trust that they are often what is behind our lack of progress.

Cognitive Psychology is the study of theories regarding how we learn, remember and make judgments and most importantly points out the strengths but also many biases and fallacies in thinking during these tasks. For this reason it is a very humbling course, and critical thinkers might ask, "Why isn't the most important course we could ever take, *'What The Big Tool In Your Head...Your Brain, Can And Cannot Do Well'*, a required course every year from 6th

grade on?" It's like building a house and not knowing the workings and dangers of the circular saw which you must use each day of the build. Eventually the dangers of the saw will get you in a serious hang-up, just as our failing brains often get us into misjudgments, missteps and illogical thinking every day.

Imagine the calm and quiet created, not to mention the avoidance of the messy job of cleaning up the blood from a lack of religious and resource wars, if we simply admitted openly our 'cognitive dissonance' instead of rejecting facts if they happen to conflict with our schema or worldview, a view that makes us feel safe and warm...but mostly it makes us feel right! For instance, "I believe the Bible word for word, except I only apply the Word to others and I fudge when it comes to me. I didn't stone my wife on her doorstep when I discovered she was not a virgin on our wedding night as instructed in Deuteronomy 22:13-21, especially because it was I who took her virginity...that just didn't seem fair." The hypocrisy of taking only the passages of the Bible literally which condemns others is the rejection of the fact that a literal interpretation is not a 'pick and choose option'. One is now in a cognitive

dissonance bind. There is a variety of ways that one can react to the dissonance: one can suppress or deny the fact, in this case a literal interpretation means taking *everything* written as literal, or one can also react to dissonance by paying attention to it and working to resolve the dissonance. Although we all aren't guilty of suppression when it comes to cognitive dissonance, we still do have schemas we operate under that must be identified in order to make clearer judgments.

My Schema, Your Schema, Everybody's Got a Schema

Schema is important and defined on two levels; in a synthesis such as this the first definition speaks to a diagram or plan of a project, while the other speaks of the conceptual framework. Many writers choose to suggest but not reveal their underlying schema, as if by omission of stating their bias, it might not be noticed. Here's mine; while some people refer to themselves as a lapsed Catholic I call myself a collapsed Catholic, as the former just means 'currently not practicing' while my definition of

the latter means 'Facts won, I'm done!' I went to Catholic school K-4, and church every Sunday until I was about twenty-five. Although I gleaned many good insights, which have served me well, many issues arose. For instance repeating, "I am not worthy" my entire youth as part of a standard prayer, did nothing for my self-esteem. You'll note that I'll single out the Catholic Church for criticism more than a few times, suggesting it's a corrupt patriarchal empire which should be brought to its knees, because having been part of the club I'm more aware and angry about the exact actions it said we burn in hell for doing. My philosophy is throw the book at the single sinner like Jerry Sandusky or the big sinner like the Catholic Church, especially because they preach from said book. Sandusky's good works performed through his national non-profit does not give him a pass to abuse kids entrusted to him. Church organizations also, no matter their age, power, influence or good works must be also be held accountable for corruption.^a My focus on corruption in

a

I'm not the only collapsed Catholic that feels passionate about holding the 'powers that be' accountable. Prolific documentarian Alex Gibney's latest film *Mea Maxima Culpa: Silence in the House of God* is an indictment of the Catholic Church's handling of sex abuse scandals, concentrating on one particularly

the Catholic church has not however taken my attention away from the corruption throughout many religious organizations or as I mentioned earlier to note the corruption of corporations or even of my own government. My bottom line schema, which I freely admit to; no more naïve *believing* in best intentions, trust must be earned not once but everyday. I'm not willing to turn a blind eye to corruption or manipulation by power brokers, period.

Belief: It's Easier & Safer Than Thinking

The vast majority of people on the planet like myself rely or relied on a schema of belief because we were indoctrinated into a religious perspective, and questioning God and the concept of the afterlife over which He resides apparently does not make God happy. For those raised

disturbing case, a priest abusing over 200 boys at a school for the deaf. Gibney echoed my position, where at one point during an interview he also drew a comparison between the Church and the recent Penn State scandal. 'The Catholic church is not unique in the way in which it seeks to protect itself as an institution and to allow horrible things to take place because the grandeur of what is being accomplished in the other sphere is so important, and that's really at the heart of this. There's a key phrase in the film, a phrase that police departments often use called 'noble cause corruption' and I think that's the theme of this. It's not evil men doing evil things, it's good and holy men allowing for evil to be done because the view is if you're holy you can do wrong.'³

Catholic like myself, questioning was treated as a sin... the sin of insult. If we so much as entertained the idea of asking the nuns to 'prove it' regarding any of the many mysteries we could be sure to expect grave consequences. I was never sure of what those consequences would be but now I know. On November 23, 2012 a story in *The Guardian* reads, "Sanal Edamaruku faces jail for revealing 'tears' trickling down a Mumbai church statue came from clogged drainage pipes." Sanal Edamaruku who was charged with blasphemy told the Guardian, "There is a huge contradiction in the content of the Indian constitution which guarantees freedom of speech and the blasphemy law from 1860 under then colonial rule." He went on to say, "This was sewage water seeping through a wall due to faulty plumbing," he said. "It posed a health risk to people who were fooled into believing it was a miracle." Apparently under the blasphemy law you cannot get bail until the court case begins but he managed to escape for now to Delhi and he has spurned an offer from a top Indian Catholic bishop to apologize for exposing the miracle. ⁴

India is not the only country where speaking up against belief could get you crucified. A report just released, which

is based on a study from the International Humanist and Ethical Union states, "In a range of other countries - such as Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Kuwait and Jordan - publication of atheist or humanist views on religion are totally banned or strictly limited under laws prohibiting "blasphemy". In many of these countries, and others like Malaysia, citizens have to register as adherents of a small number officially-recognized religions -- which normally include no more than Christianity and Judaism as well as Islam. Defection from the official religion can bring capital punishment (in) Afghanistan, Iran, Maldives, Mauritania, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Sudan." ⁵

Of course by buying into the 'belief should be enough' premise the church through indoctrination, coercion, or fear of prosecution and a hefty dose of good old-fashioned shame, maintained and still maintains control in many parts of the world with the help of laws that should have been abandoned with the crusades. In order not to be labeled a 'blasphemer!' we fell and still fall into line when we accept religious teaching without question.

I gave up the Catholic Church for Lent one year and never when back, but still like most people failed to take a hard look at the concept of belief. My studies in consciousness led me to a more new-age philosophy, also based on belief but because it aligned more with my gut, all was well. During this time I earned a certificate in Transpersonal Psychology, work that brought me to this conclusion; the most transformative healing power is love. I then took a look at the world's religions, becoming an interfaith minister in the process. I however, like Alan Watts, who's theological thesis *Behold the Spirit*⁶ didn't hide his dislike for any and all religious outlooks that he noted to be 'militant, guilt-ridden, dour' or in my case prone to corruption, I instead focused on finding foundational truths in all religions. This four-year search brought me to this; '*God*' is the energy of love. It wasn't until I started my graduate work in Critical Thinking however, that I truly examined the concept of 'belief beyond question'.

The Belief Schema and Critical Blocks

The fact is that when we buy into the concept of blasphemy; *seeking proof for the afterlife and/or God's existence is the extreme insult to God*, we fail to note that

the authors of the concept rely on more than a few fallacious arguments to make the concept stick. For instance:

- ❖ 'Appeal to Authority' - Because they, 'the supreme authority' pronounce something to be true then it must be true.
- ❖ 'Burden of Proof' - The burden of proof lies not with the person making the claim, but with someone else to disprove.
- ❖ 'Appeal to Emotion and/or Fear' - Manipulating an emotional response in place of a valid argument.
- ❖ 'The Fallacy of Numbers'- The fact that many people 'buy in' suggests a legitimate claim.
- ❖ 'No true Scotsman' - Making what could be called an appeal to purity as a way to dismiss relevant criticisms or flaws of an argument.
- ❖ 'Appeal to Tradition' - Time and custom equals legitimacy.

Prove it!

Once we stop to make this critical examination of our belief schema things start to change. Personally, it dovetailed nicely with my consciousness studies and moved me into a

logical place...to consider proof of consciousness survival beyond belief. But how can we prove or disprove the afterlife and possibly God? Interestingly, I found that we have a thread to pull on if we examine even more closely the Near-Death Experience (NDE) and the out-of-body experience (OBE), which many people report during their NDE. It is the OBE, a time that a person reports leaving their physical body along with the ability to see and hear during an NDE, which could provide proof regarding consciousness surviving death. Just as importantly, it could validate what thousands of NDEers who have returned from dying report regarding our ultimate nature. Their experiences form patterned insights about who we are and the afterlife and interestingly they too report: It's all about Love. All of which tells you that my education and explorations formed another foundational schema: love may be the truth of our existence.

Be Aware

As you continue reading, your personal schemas will have you holding onto the facts and arguments presented which

fit into your frame of reference and hence these will most likely remain in your memories, and the elements that do not fit your schemas will drop out of your memory or you might change them to fit your current schemas.⁷ The big tool in your head hates holding on to two or more conflicting ideas, beliefs, values, or emotional reactions simultaneously, it makes us feel like our underwear has suddenly crept up our brain crack. The adjustment to this very uncomfortable situation means the rejection or the reducing of the new facts coming in. For instance, there is a saying (falsely attributed to Gandhi), which speaks to typical stages of rejecting new facts that contradict our world view; “First we ignore you, then we laugh at you, then we fight you, then you win”. While the time between the first three steps can happen in fast succession, the last step may take decades or hundreds of years depending on one’s attachment to their schema and also the strength and determination of the status quo system pushing back the new facts.

This ‘my mind is made up don’t confuse me with the facts’ level of thinking is not of course the best our brains can do, but when we aren’t careful we tend to reject and make

snap judgments before we take time to open our minds to new ways of understanding. In the end, people vastly more eminent than I have tried with their influence and wealth to bring the study of consciousness surviving death to the forefront and have died trying. So in many ways, I start by feeling like I'm simply mounting a mental tread mill, but the exercise will do me good, I hope it does the same for you.

III The Situation

"I am very astonished that the scientific picture of the real world around me is very deficient. It gives a lot of factual information, puts all our experiences in a magnificently consistent order, but is ghastly silent about all and sundry that is really near to our heart, what really matters to us. It cannot tell us a word about red and blue, bitter and sweet, physical pain and physical delight; it knows nothing of beautiful and ugly, good or bad, god and eternity."

Erwin Schroedinger

Austrian physicist, awarded Nobel Prize in 1933

Progress Please!

I was born in the 1950's, which means I now have lived long enough to reflect back on what I thought about the future, now that I'm here. Did we think that we'd be living in floating space houses, zipping around in flying bubble cars and talking on picture phones like the Jetsons? No, because we accepted a cartoon for what it was...a time to relax over Pop Tarts and Tang. And yet the live, color,

wireless phone called Skype is here, a miracle already taken for granted.

We have in fact made insane progress, and not just in communication or transportation, whatever technology touches is transformed in mind-blowing ways. Maybe you haven't yet heard of 3D printers constructing replacement human organ parts? Just more sci-fi right around the corner. Still in other areas, *nothing!* Progress is dead in its tracks. For instance, is it really progress when the entire planet wears jeans as our default uniform in 1956 and still is wearing them nearly every single day from then until now...nearly 60 years later? It's comical actually, after you get over the fact that, had you decided to go into jean fabric sales you'd be financially flush with cash for the next ten lifetimes. Actually, had fashion moved along at the same clip as communication and computers and blended in technology, we'd be sporting climate controlled suits, which would allow us heat and cool our own little world instead of heating and cooling billions of buildings costing trillions of dollars a year. But we can suffer the fact that *Project Runway* is more interested in highlighting the nasty contestant than delivering us the coolest, smartest clothes

technology could now provide. What we can't and shouldn't abide is the lack of research and progress in several topics in the field of consciousness studies, again if we don't take a hard critical look on what is behind this lack of progress we can expect little change in the centuries to come.

Fictional case in point; The new epic movie starring Tom Hanks, *Cloud Atlas*, is a sweeping saga through time with a message about how our actions affect not only our next incarnation but how even our small acts can shift the world in profoundly positive or negative ways. Although I'm not going to pretend I got more than 50% of this movie, I did get this much, the question of the afterlife even in 2145 is apparently the one thing that we haven't managed to figure out according to the amazing, yet still limited vision of the writers. How is it that they can create a hyper-advanced future world in all its technological, architectural and cultural aspects, but fail completely to imagine advances regarding the question of 'consciousness surviving death'? In the final scene the AI interrogator asks the heroine, "So, do you believe in an afterlife?" This serves as proof to a deep bias in our current cultural psyche. If our most

creative writers and moviemakers can't get past belief, who can? On the one hand is their complete acceptance and expectation of our abilities to supply unlimited technological advances, on the other a failure of imagination and expectation regarding advances in consciousness studies.

Science has made amazing strides studying the brain over the last 30 years, and the research is accepted with little controversy, primarily when the results fit nicely into the materialistic paradigm. However, there are two areas of concern regarding what is really going on in our heads. First is the question of altered states of consciousness: If we are in fact just a wet computer why would we want or *need* an altered state? Why in 2012 isn't there yet a legal, completely safe way to attain an altered state? Second is the question of 'consciousness surviving death', which I will argue, besides there being a deeply held premise that the question can only be explored by philosophy or religion, scientific studies investigating this question are vastly underfunded and therefore under researched - just for starters.

Excuse Me While I Kiss The Sky

The first concern, 'altered states of consciousness' deals with our human drive towards enhancing or altering the state of our common experience of living... that routine, humdrum, get up and do it again mode. We end the madness of sameness by tossing back a few to catch a buzz. Many catch that buzz through sports, music, dance, sex, volunteering or hobbies, but at some point even those activities lead to a beer or two. What is the buzz about and why do we want or even seem to require altered states at all? You might not be a drinker, but no one who is will deny that some of the best (and worse when overdone) times they had were under the influence. It's not just the fact that alcohol is a social lubricator; Charles Limb, a neuroscientist at Johns Hopkins, has discovered that our dorsolateral prefrontal cortex (DLPFC) is the control center for restraint. It's been reported that, "The conscious mind has its strengths, but free flowing creative expression isn't one of them. A lot of creativity is about relaxing your neurons so they can form new connections that deliberate thinking would otherwise block. It's about turning off the

analytical brain. Sometimes alcohol helps this process, for those of us who can't quiet the DLPFC.”⁸

If you reject the benefits of alcohol because of its drawbacks, take it up with Jesus, he's the one the got the party going by turning the water into wine and not the other way around. But here's the concern, Jesus reportedly did that smooth move over 2000 years ago and yet when it comes to needing a distraction from the small and big issues that get under our skin, we find ourselves still drinking wine, beer or a 5th of Jack, depending how altered we need our consciousness. Stop and really think about that...for at least 2000 years we have altered our state of consciousness quickly and legally via the exact same method, and although it works pretty well all agree it does contribute to some serious unintended consequences.

Now imagine if we were still communicating and transporting ourselves the same way over these last 2000 years. (If you are having trouble with this creative visualization assignment, shut off your DLPFC with a big margarita.) Let's face it, no travel outside of our village and

needing to be face-to-face for each and every conversation, means well, we'd just be drinking a lot more!

So, while we were hopeful in 1970 that Woody Allen had shown the world in the movie *Sleeper* that The ORB would provide a 'getting high upgrade', a simple, safe and controlled way to alter consciousness, not a single new and improved method came on the market. This leaves us dependent on wine and liquor, neither of which mix well with America's dominant form of transportation, the car. Without the proper attention and funding which honors our need for altered states of consciousness, we have back alley labs run by those that couldn't pass high school chemistry and hence a world filled with dangerous alternatives - all controlled by a seedy underworld who just love a raging drug war.

Meditation, the healthy, high road to relaxation, and if you hit the jackpot the OM altered state, was popularized in this country in the late 60's, and had been growing at a steady clip, but a recent article on Buddhist meditation points to the fact that stagnation has set in.⁹ It just might be that our culture of instant gratification doesn't jive with the years it

takes to shut down our monkey mind in order to gain the benefits of meditation. Achieving these benefits requires time and discipline, which is in short supply if you are working two jobs to try to keep your house and feed your kids. Frankly, it's much easier to open a bottle of wine. Also important to note, meditation hasn't made much of a dent in the liquor industries' sales.

So, based on the progress of our technology over the last 2000 years, sticks writing in the sand, calculating with an abacus, just to name the basics our iPad delivers, we can easily imagine what progress could have been made regarding a safe, legal way to alter our state of consciousness had time and resources been put to the task.

Most important and compelling is that consciousness survival, might possibly be directly linked to our need for altered states of consciousness. Is it possible that this desire for an altered state is our attempt to fill a hole...a hole created by our missing 'something' we had 'somewhere' during 'sometime' which we do not have in the here and now? Maybe our seeking is linked to

profoundly missing a connection to *beyond* and maybe *beyond* is our real Home. Which brings us back to our question of the day: *Does consciousness survive?*

The Big Question

In a recent article in *The Huffington Post*, titled “Scientists Discuss What Happens To The 'Soul' After Death” readers were invited to comment on the topic and over 7,000 people responded within days.¹⁰ The debate in this comment section was much less about science and readers primarily focused instead on their deeply held beliefs. I was not able to find one comment, although my guess is that it was mentioned somewhere in the thread, that questioned the concept of belief itself. While the question is ageless and is as important to us as our understanding of the cosmos, again it is simply a bad habit to abandon the question of consciousness survival to religion rather than to science.

CERN, near Geneva and home of The Large Hadron Collider is busy bashing billions of particles together

costing billions of dollars with the promise that “Our understanding about the universe is about to change.”¹¹ CERN’s discovery of the ‘god particle’ the summer of 2012, has you reflecting that you indeed do live in amazing times, but finding out that your mind is not your brain...well, on a personal level the impact is vastly superior. “Who am I?” informs how we live our lives and every decision we make, which one can argue is more important than knowing how the universe works. Although it wouldn’t be too surprising to find that who we are and the nature of the cosmos will merge nicely down the road a bit.

It’s important to note however, that if we were to answer the question of consciousness survival in the affirmative it does not necessarily follow that God exists. In another article with a title nearly identical to the one just cited, “Scientist Shows What Happens to ‘Soul’ after Death,”¹² is an outline of a hypothesis of Dr. Stuart Hameroff MD, director of the Center of Consciousness Studies at the University of Arizona, regarding where consciousness goes when we die. What should raise an eyebrow is that as part of the article an attached slide show is titled: “Top Scientists on God: Who Believes, Who Doesn’t.” God

wasn't mentioned in the article, yet the assumptive premise of the editor associated 'afterlife' with the acceptance or rejection of the traditional concept of God.

Our Drive For Answers

The fact is, many questions we have are beyond the scope of our current scientific methodology, but we expect that when the scientific boundary shifts, as new technology comes on line, the 'hard question' of consciousness survival would be reanalyzed. The good news is that this question may no longer be unknowable, but the bad news is that there's a bit of a problem getting status quo science to take a serious look at it.

Many once mystical questions have however been explained by our current materialistic methodology, and because of the grand success of this model, there's a big group of scientists riding high in a pimped out luxury bus, speeding down the Materialistic highway. Everyone, except for those highly invested in you buying into their perspective, is excited about getting postcards from the

edge. What is not okay is the neglect in paving what the materialists refer to as Wrong Way Road. Even though they have not travelled it, they claim it's a dead-end. It's a rocky road and used by a relatively few, brave scientific souls calling themselves 'dualists', for the most part. Instead of the fancy tour bus, they have instead a 60's Volkswagen van with bumper stickers stating "Some WooWoo does work!" and "We need a miracle just to be heard!" Predictably, they travel with only a few bucks in their pockets. Without the resources the trip is long and slow, even though deeply inspiring for these brave trippers. Is it any wonder that the CERN tour bus arrives at stunning locations of discovery? The fact is, by not paving the road of the dualist and not outfitting them with the research centers, collective talent, funding and respect they need, they have little chance of answering the questions that the materialists have decided are all just inside our brains.

Many Roads To Our Destination

We are wasting precious time in this current one-way approach and we hate wasting time even if we just miss an

exit, a mistake easily corrected in the next few miles. Because we so despise time wasted moving in the wrong direction shouldn't we consider that it might be necessary to pave both roads and have two fine buses packed with top scientists moving along different highways if they are not able to see eye to eye regarding how to proceed as they search to answer questions regarding consciousness? Why not honor both the materialist and dualist perspective as both are attempting to answer related questions. The one we'll focus on... is a Near Death Experience simply the experience caused by the chemical reactions of a dying brain, or is *DEATH* instead an acronym - **D**eparting **E**ssence **A**scending **T**o the **H**ereafter?

When it comes to the science of exploring where we came from (evolutionary biology, archeology, geology) most agree that the study should be scientific, well funded, and exhaustive. As enlightening as these studies have been they pale in comparison to where, if anywhere we might go, when we die.

Francis Crick, co-discoverer of the structure of DNA, jointly awarded the Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine in 1962,¹¹ “Was interested in two fundamental unsolved problems of biology: how molecules make the transition from the non-living to the living, and how the brain makes a conscious mind. For Crick, the mind is a product of physical brain activity and the brain had evolved by natural means over millions of years. Crick felt that it was important that evolution by natural selection be taught in schools and that it was regrettable that English schools had compulsory religious instruction.”¹³

Crick is in good company; he is one of thousands of scientists who hold a belief in a materialistic theory regarding consciousness. However, having this schema means he was as busy as all other scientists who hold this view, fitting evidence into their frame of reference. Materialists are a tough crowd and almost impossible to be swayed to consider a dualist perspective. Unless of course they themselves have their own NDE...stayed tuned, more on this later.

Why Discovery Matters

People who have lived a long life today speak of feeling a paradigm shift in the air. Some experience it as the coming of a fresh spring while others instead see dark smoke from a million-acre fire. Either way, we begin to understand what people living during a tipping point experienced, we sense we are about to fall off a cliff, into what...the Dark Ages or the Renaissance? As it stands, not *knowing* and relying on belief regarding consciousness survival has keep us in three camps, the believers, the non-believers and the fence-sitters. There's also a small group in the 'whatever!' camp but whatever. This divide could finally end if we could just get some answers and just for a moment let's imagine we have them.

Discovery Scenario A: Mind And Brain Are One And The Same.

If it is revealed that mind (consciousness) in fact equals only a brain function and nothing more, religions as we know them will be forced to close up shop. Eventually, they

will go the way of ancient myths and gods of Egypt and Greece, their holy books becoming fascinating museum relics of an earlier culture, or at least they should. But none of this will happen without a fight as such a discovery would put millions holding an afterlife worldview in crisis as the new facts will conflict with personal schemas and so will be rejected for as long as possible. If the truth is a “Materialist picture of human nature—humans are nothing more than proteins and electrical impulses, all machine and no ghost, to play off Descartes' formulation. This view will challenge not only views about the soul, but more widely held notions about what it means to be a person. That will further complicate age-old questions about the nature of individual responsibility and morality,” writes David Goldston in *Nature*.¹⁴ I'm not so sure I agree with Mr. Goldston, as there is way too much evidence indicating so-called religious and pious people lack both responsibility and morality, in line with the rest of the population.

Instead, like atheists throughout time, we will collectively deal with this reality, give up what we will now know to be fantasy thinking, and learn to appreciate people and life on the level we experience it. Will such a result mean that

people will suddenly lose all meaning and commit mass suicides without the hope of immortality? We are safe to say that countless millions more people have been killed in the name of God, vs. mass suicides in the name of no-God.

The British biophysicist, renowned for her work on X-ray diffraction Rosalind Franklin, wisely stated, "In my view, all that is necessary for faith is the belief that by doing our best we shall come nearer to success and that success in our aims...the improvement of the lot of mankind, present and future, is worth attaining. I maintain that faith in this world is perfectly possible without faith in another world."

So, although we can believe that faith will provide grand outcomes as she suggests, there is a nuanced but important difference between faith and belief. I put it this way in my book *Guru U*:

Faith is the awareness that we are part of a great, unknown unfolding. It is to recognize all that has come to pass once was viewed as impossible...flight, anesthesia, the simple match! Faith is trusting there is genius in us and

the universe, while belief restricts us by closing our hearts and minds to the vast possibilities beyond our knowing.

If you aren't convinced and trust that 'without religion as a moral compass we are lost', I would point you to astute authors who devote their lives to the study of secular Humanism who do an exhaustive job in negating this position.

Discovery Scenario B: The Mind And Brain Are Not The Same.

However, If it is found that mind and brain are separate and consciousness survives, then religions will have their "I told you so!" moment. Possibly, science will find glimmers of truths to confirm what wisdom traditions 'knew', as the amazing ancient calendars accurate calculations. Still, once science is on the case, the hope is that religions will drop into line and evolve to a higher and more unified message of Love.

Under this scenario, the countless thousands of NDE reports will now take on deeper significance and move to

front and center. The consistent patterns of the NDE currently widely researched are considered only anecdotal reports by materialist scientists and often dismissed. These will be reanalyzed with a more explorative light on the information, as 'illusions brought on by the dying process' is out of the mix.

Most interesting to note and what bears repeating before taking you farther into the world of the near-death experiencer, is that the most common and universal report from religious people and atheist NDEer alike, no matter the age or the culture: *It doesn't matter what religion you practice or if you practice, it...all of IT... reality, our essence, and the universe is Love.* This message allowed into our intellect and collective psyche will usher in a new world paradigm.

In Either Case...

The most important outcome of the study is that we will finally end up in the same book on the same page. If consciousness dies with us the energy and resources saved by replacing belief with scientific fact would be

immense. After a time of chaos the shift I predict would be ultimately positive for future generations.

If we discover consciousness survives, simply having a clear view of the entire picture and our ultimate reality would provide a superior perspective in structuring our lives and society. Our decisions would be framed with the long view and our ultimate mission in mind as we enjoy the peace of knowing that who we are and what we do matters and is never lost and those we love are never gone.

The Singularity Is Near

Yet another important consideration for prioritizing the question of an afterlife is what is known as ‘the singularity’, a coming technological singularity able to augment our bodies and minds with technology, or to augment computers with biology. Ray Kurzweil, is an inventor, futurist and author of the book, *The Singularity is Near*. The Singularity results from “A combination of three important technologies of the 21st century: genetics, nanotechnology, and robotics, including artificial intelligence.”¹⁵ Imagine our next level of evolution is the merging of our brains with computers, iPhone 20 is

released and is the size of a sunflower seed, which might be implanted into your brain.

As we note the artificial medical treatments we now enjoy, from pacemakers to tissue engineering, it's not a stretch to imagine that like plastic surgery today, there will be many who will enhance not just their breasts but also their brains. For those who can't afford these enhancements, they will be left behind. If the question of an afterlife is answered in the affirmative, it becomes key information regarding a perspective to embrace, "Do I stress about not having the brain power I can't afford", meaning it might be impossible to compete in the here and now...or should "I instead focus on my heart power which I can develop for an enhanced afterlife, which is reported to be the whole point of life?"

IV The Status Quo

“The status quo is made to be broken.”

Ray Davis

In the movie *HereAfter* a work of fiction, the main character Marie is a French journalist who has a NDE while caught in the 2004 tsunami, and comes back to a job she now finds herself unable to do. She has lost her edge and is more compassionate and understanding than she was before the accident. She is given a leave of absence and decides to write about her experience instead of a political book on Mitterrand. She titles her book *Hereafter: The Conspiracy of Silence*. Her boss is not interested in her new topic and she asks, “What are you afraid of? This is real. This work is based on scientific evidence...well known researches forced to work in private. A Nobel prize winner hounded by the religious lobby...that’s the story!” They refuse and she asks for her job back after feeling humiliated by the encounter. “That’s not so easy” says her boyfriend, who is now sleeping with her replacement, “You talked publicly about your experiences and you lost your credibility.”¹⁶

This is a good illustration of art reflecting our current reality regarding the status quo of the materialist vs. dualist war.

Two Camps...Us vs. Them

I'll be focusing on two camps as I analyze what might be holding up progress on survival of consciousness research. The US vs. them status quo camps are the materialist and the dualist. I'll use caps to refer to the materialist as 'US', as they have the upper hand and 'them' to refer to the dualist who do not. The materialists are also called 'skeptics' and the dualists are often referred to as 'believers'.

First, let's just take a quick look at US vs. them generally and how our tribal minds seem to be stuck in the stone age running a crashing software program, which says in effect, 'If we are right they must be wrong, so they deserve to die', metaphorically most often, but when it comes to our foreign policy, literally. (Take a look at Oliver Stone's new best selling book and/or ten-part documentary on Showtime *The Untold History of the United States*, if you have doubts about this last statement.) Our need to belong to one side

or another and to see the group we belong to as superior remains our ever present and tragic human predilection. US vs. them at play throughout our lives on both the micro and macro level, still dictates how our systems work, “I’m an introvert and you are an extrovert and doesn’t that create a great balance in perspective!” or how our systems don’t work, “I’m a democrat and you are a republican and aren’t you a rich, arrogant, one percenter!” - polarized positions creating yet another endless tug of war.

An unexpected US vs. them tension is even noted within a group with members who some might view as the most compassionate and understanding in the human race...meditating Buddhist practitioners. In an article by Lewis Richmond, he writes;

“There is another epicenter of Buddhist activity that is important, and that is the broadening field of Buddhist studies as an academic discipline. Some Buddhist academics argue that their rigorous scholarly approach is the one with the most robust long-term future. Scholarly translation and analysis in the last few decades has indeed provided an invaluable contribution

to a modern understanding of this ancient wisdom teaching. However, there is tension between the scholar [US] and meditator communities [them] and both sides contribute to the tension. I was at a conference a few years ago that brought together Buddhist scholars and meditation practitioners. The scholars presented their papers (which I found quite illuminating), but in the discussion that followed it was clear that some of the meditators felt that the scholars' views were abstract, intellectual and irrelevant to their meditation work. The scholars in turn suggested that the meditators' views might be a bit uninformed, even ignorant. Privately, one scholar complained to me, "These people don't know anything!"

Some scholars, of course, are also practitioners, though they may sometimes need to be discreet about it. There has been prejudice. One professor of Buddhist studies told me that when she was in graduate school she and her colleagues had to keep their meditation practice secret or their theses were likely not to be approved.”⁹

And here's an example of US vs. them ruining a great day at the ballpark. New research suggests that as some people lose both a family tribe and a religious tribe, they

begin to over identify with their sport tribe, as belonging to a tribe is our default setting. This in part has caused a dangerous and rising trend in fan on fan violence. “Approximately 7,000 people were ejected from NFL stadiums last season.”¹⁷ In a 2011 report in *Psychology Today*;

“This (fan on fan violence) behavior, and language, comes from someplace deeper, more instinctive, more ancient, more tribal...someplace that I would suggest is tied to nothing less than the deepest instinctive imperative of all, to survive. After all, we are social animals. We depend on the tribe for our safety and wellbeing. When the lion attacks, as a group we've got a shot. Alone, we're lion chow. When our tribe is doing well, economically, militarily, public health, whatever... our chances go up, when it's doing poorly, our chances go down. So it feels good to belong to a winning tribe, and not so good—threatening, in fact—to belong to a group that's losing.”¹⁸

This theory makes perfect sense but I'm going to guess that fans willing to violently attack others for wearing 'them' team colors are just assholes, and I think another study; “The Size Of The Asshole Gene In Assholes”, would

confirm a consistent trend in their behavior in and out of the ballpark...but I'm no scientist.

Still, the level of fan on fan violence deeply pales in comparison to religious 'fan on fan' violence throughout the ages. No matter the 'US vs. them' positions we stay locked into, over time they become the status quo... our minds so entrenched we fail to imagine another way. But actually, we are simply guilty of critical blocks and status quo thinking. We need instead to step up to a higher perspective by climbing outside of The Box.

Step Outside The Box Beyond The Status Quo

In 1971 Alan Watts did a series called "Conversations with Myself" and started off by looking at the differences of the design of nature and the designs of man. Nature, he reflected is all uneven and moving, while man designs and speaks in terms of geometry, "Let's get it straight, let's get it ironed out and squared away... and then somehow we think we understand things when we have translated them into terms of straight lines and squares... maybe that's why

we call rather rigid people ‘squares’.”¹⁹ At some point in the 70’s we stopped calling people squares as ironically it became a square thing to do. We began instead to invite people to ‘think outside the box’ which is to look at the situation from a new perspective by pushing past the walls of the square box. ‘Thinking outside the Box’ is the standard mantra to move brainstorming sessions forward. *Living* outside the Box is rarely if ever suggested. The reason of course is because of our need to belong to a tribe and follow the status quo. Mainly we stay in the compartment of the safe box of culture with everyone else we believe will love and accept us for doing so. All of this is not to say that the box is an inferior place, it’s just limiting. Important vertical thinking is the general rule here, building on a given position with logical, selective and sequential steps. This may be effective but not creative, and the sad result of a narrowly focused educational system.

If you haven’t seen an RSA Animate, you might want to start with this short eleven minute presentation which has been viewed almost 10 million times; *Changing the Education Paradigm*, by Sir Ken Robinson, world-renowned education and creativity expert and recipient of

the RSA's Benjamin Franklin award. He points out that in a longitudinal study of testing school children for divergent thinking, 98% of Kindergarten children tested at genius levels. However, there was a substantial drop as they aged and he attributes this to our mechanized educational system.²⁰ What he doesn't mention, but is also a key aspect in the drop in creativity in school children, relates to the level of belonging to peer groups children crave as they mature. When we are creative we are coming to different conclusions than the group and the group often turns on and ridicules the person with the unique perspective. A cultural shift to encourage, support and reward living outside the box is required to rewire our most basic need; to belong, necessary to maintain the little genius divergent thinkers in all of us.

Who You'll Meet Outside The Box

Even with an educational system that often acts as a creativity killer, we do still grow creative thinkers. They have distinct personality profiles, and one is not 'loves following rules', which is why they are able to break out

from the status quo box. Studies show, “Over 200 creative personality traits, reduced to 16 categories: Aware of own creativeness, original, high energy, curious, sense of humor, attraction to complexity and ambiguity, artistic, open–minded, thorough, needs alone time, perceptive, emotional, ethical, risk-taking, independent and capacity for fantasy.”⁷ (In my personal experience empathy is the #1 drive behind my creative thinking.) These rebellious personalities often up and leave the box behind. What they quickly find is that this new home is not a better or bigger box, it’s life in an expanding balloon, that people in the box just love to pop by the way...sometimes with others who understand that the more we allow ourselves to imagine, the larger the possibilities, and the more likely we are to discover higher truths beyond the status quo. Here lateral thinking is key, which is ‘solving problems by unorthodox or apparently illogical methods designed to force departures from habitual thinking and perceiving...to change our concepts and perceptions.’⁷

What I propose for your consideration is that the aspect of creativity that can be honed by anyone is ‘*suspended disbelief*’, maintaining an open and freethinking mind

allowing a flight of imagination for unorthodox solutions. Only after you have bought the concept, at least for a time, can it be examined critically. If you are one that struggles with opening your mind, you might ask yourself, 'What exactly I'm I afraid to let in?' It's actually an important question to ask, as it doesn't make sense to keep your mind open to *everything*. The pay off of living outside the box is the utopian perspective, daring to dream for the best beyond the status quo gatekeepers of the box.

Why Shoot For Utopia?

To move out of the box for solutions regarding consciousness survival doesn't suggest utopia is only outside of the box it's just where you are free to aim in unexpected directions. There's been a major push back against the concept of utopia by many claiming it is unachievable, but I invite you to think of utopia like the game of golf and you might agree it's worth pursuing.

The point of golf is achieving the hole-in-one. The percentage of people who make this utopian shot is

miniscule. This reality does not stop billions of people from spending trillions of dollars trying. Why? If you ask the golfer they'll tell you the quest for the perfect shot is frankly the kick, and so they spend their leisure life trying for the closest to the ultimate. Even if one isn't a golfer, we can still understand the importance of playing at the utopian game and whether we see the hole from the tee or not, we can still aim for the general direction trusting that diligent practice means our game improves. Sure we'll get frustrated and some will throw down their clubs and quit, but for the rest of us playing on is maintaining the will to work towards the nearly impossible and make headway, in a word: progress.

The Status Quo & Science

Recently, Richard Dawkins came to town for a lecture sponsored in part by the 'Boulder Atheists' and the 'Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science', which is on its own crusade to move society in a secular direction. He spoke at the University of Colorado to a sold

out crowd, which is a bit ironic in a town that one can argue was put on the map by new age hippies.

The first speaker was Sean Faircloth, the Director of Strategy and Policy at the foundation, speaking about his book, *Attack of the Theocrats! How the Religious Right Harms Us All -- and What We Can Do About It*. Sean is an attorney who served five terms in the Maine Legislature. The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science advocates for separation of church and state, and for greater acceptance of nontheistic viewpoints in American life. He pointed out that there are at least ten laws on the books currently that are in fact theocratic laws, such as land-use laws which favor tax exempt religious organizations over both for profit and non-profit organizations. He notes that a rise in theocratic power has never been seen in America on this level, "Never, since the constitution in 1787, have we seen such power among theocrats in this country...they were nowhere in the 1960's but since then after decades of efforts they worked their way up." ²¹

I agree with Faircloth in that there has been a significant power grab by the religious right, which is a very dangerous shift. But this might be due in large part to a backlash against the scientific status quo, which since the 50's and its mind blowing scientific successes like curing Polio and landing on the moon, has science exclusively locked-in on a materialistic paradigm. This doesn't mean that we should welcome or tolerate the backlash but we do need to reconsider if materialism with its own biases should be controlling the entire show. Fact is that religions offer people a legal place for seeking self-transcendence (as well as being an awesome business networking venue) and the materialistic paradigm frankly neglects this need, throwing the baby of transcendence out with what can be some pretty dirty bathwater of religion.

In 1993, C.R. Cloninger et al. noted in the *Journal of Affective Disorders*, "Neglect of transcendent phenomena in science is also likely to have a high cost, particularly in efforts to reduce consciousness to the zombie-like state of physical mechanisms alone in which subjectivity, self-directedness, and free will are regarded as illusory", and so

as predicted, over the last 20 years we have paid the price with religious fanaticism coming to the fore.

Back to the lecture. Richard Dawkins, the evolutionary biologist entered to a standing ovation and spoke about his book, *The Magic of Reality*. Geared towards the youth market, the book asks twelve questions about the nature of reality, although I was surprised that the book didn't include the big question, "What happens to people when they die?" Instead he outlined the global and cultural myths around other big questions such as 'How was the world created?' and then describes the actual science, which of course we all can agree is superior to believing in a story.

I left at the Q & A to stand in line to have my book signed, a line that eventually included the entire audience and wrapped out the building and down the street. I struck up a conversation with a young neuroscience student in front of me and during the course of our conversation he became more and more interested... "So, I know a little bit about dualism", he stated, "But what is a freethinker?" I asked him if he thought that the materialist paradigm was in fact

the status quo. “Yes, and I didn’t realize actually that there is much outside of it, but I see your point that a belief in it is no different that a belief in religion as there really should be no ‘belief’ in a single perspective in science at all...ah freethinker!” I noted that as materialist science has the stage, it treats the dualist perspective as the ugly stepsister, which speaks to a dangerous arrogance. He smiled, “Oh, yeah...there’s got to be, as students like myself are rarely exposed to any other perspective.”

You might be uncomfortable with this flippant categorizing we were doing, but know that I was trying to do it in the nicest way possible, which is when you are busy putting people neatly into categories, ‘nice’ means trying not to lose sight of another critical block. Noting that our brains learn and judge by categorizing things, we understand that we make quick judgments based on linking to what we know, ‘tiny bird - harmless, large toothed animal - danger’. Our minds evolved to look for patterns. However, like Hitler, when we try to categorize people by looking for patterns we pretty much get it wrong. We can look at a doctor or a stripper and know from the uniform that we can expect certain actions, but we can’t really *know* the person,

although we have a strong bias to believe we can. This confirmation bias again makes us more alert and responsive to evidence that confirms our beliefs in comparison to evidence that might challenge our beliefs.⁷ In the case of Hitler for instance, from what we generally understand to be true about him we can say he believed a 'Jewish problem' existed in Germany, and so he saw only evidence confirming and convincing him of the need for a 'final solution' strategy to end the 'Jewish problem'. When we scratch the surface regarding our lack of progress regarding survival of consciousness research, we see a tug of war that we can argue is fueled in large part by our confirmation biases.

In his book, *Thinking Fast and Slow*, Daniel Kahneman points out that these biases are generated by our fast thinking brain, which works automatically to help us make snap decisions about our surroundings, what he calls System 1 thinking. However, System 2, which must be consciously called on to think more deeply, is in fact required when we categorize people, otherwise we can easily make a cognitive error of overgeneralization. For instance the 'Representativeness Heuristic' (used

automatically by System 1) is the assumption that the categories we think about are relatively homogeneous. The assumption leaves us willing to believe that each member of a category is 'representative' of the category—that has all of the traits that we associate with that category. For example, I told you in *The Schema* that I was an interfaith minister. Before you thought deeply you might have quickly pulled up your minister category and deduced that I must believe in a personal God and that I might have a congregation, yet neither is accurate. Instead my view is more in line with pantheism, “Derived from the Greek roots *pan* (all) and *theos* (God). It is the belief that everything composes an all-encompassing, immanent God, or that the Universe (or Nature) is identical with divinity.”²² So, while you might be tempted to buy into my categories listed, let it be known that I'm using them generally to move the conversation forward, they in no way speak to the complex differences among members of these categories. This is pretty much the rule for any categorization of people. We spend an entire lifetime trying to know ourselves, so the claim that we know others by snap judgments and categorization is ignorant at best and

dangerous at worst and of course, is behind the US vs. them wars throughout time.

And The Categories Are...

But first, time out for a sidebar. A word we will be bantering about is 'atheist' and so it makes sense to note a definition. As we have already mentioned the preeminent scientist and author, arguably the world's most well known atheist, Richard Dawkins, let's go with his definition. He writes in his book, *The GOD Delusion*;

“Human thoughts and emotions *emerge* from exceedingly complex interconnections of physical entities within the brain. An atheist in this sense of philosophical naturalist is somebody who believes there is nothing beyond the natural, physical world, no *supernatural* creative intelligence lurking behind the observable universe, *no soul that outlasts the body* [my emphasis] and no miracles – except in the sense of natural phenomena that we don't yet understand. If there is something that appears to lie beyond the natural world as it is now imperfectly understood, we hope eventually to understand it and embrace it within the natural.”²³

A statistic that has been repeatedly quoted freely for decades now, (a rumor as far as I'm concerned as I have found no citation of it) states that 93% of the National Academy of Science members are either 'atheist or agnostics'. In fact, a Pew Research poll in 2009 states: "Just over half of scientists (51%) believe in some form of deity or higher power; specifically, 33% of scientists say they believe in God, while 18% believe in a universal spirit or higher power."²⁴ This of course means some portion of the 49% of scientists view themselves as atheists who reject a traditional view of a personal God as seen in the Bible for instance, as well as rejecting the concept of consciousness (soul) survival. The remainder of the 49% are agnostics, those who do not reject entirely the possibility of consciousness survival or some *other* power behind the workings of the universe.

Atheist, by Dawkins definition, fall into the *Materialists* category; *mind (or consciousness) = brain*, our 'US' category. Agnostics not entirely convinced by the materialist's belief that 'the jury is in' are *Freethinkers*. If however, one specifically believes that there is enough evidence to suggest that '*mind does not equal brain*' they

would be considered generally a believer or *Dualist*, our 'them' category. And finally, those who think reality is 'only *mind*' and the brain also a projection of the mind are referred to as *Idealists*.

With this understanding, the typical polls fail to tell us much about where people stand regarding the question of 'consciousness survival'. Instead, most tell us only about religious practices. The latest study from the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, notes that one in five Americans claims no religious identity. "The group referred to as 'Nones' people who said "None" when asked their religious identity, is the second-largest category only to Catholics and is viewed as a significant cultural, religious and even political change." ²⁵ Frankly, the question to ask in a poll is do people rather consider themselves materialists, freethinkers, dualists, idealists or other?

The US Camp: The Materialist

Schema: Mind = Brain. We are wet computers.

"The more you understand the significance of evolution, the more you are pushed away from the agnostic position and towards atheism. Complex, statistically improbable things are by their nature more difficult to explain than simple, statistically probable things."

Richard Dawkins

British Evolutionary Biologist

The origin of the word "materialism" goes back thousands of years to the Indo-European root *ma*. "Mother, money, matter, material, all of these words referring to that which has physical form or substance. The word 'materialism' from the Latin *materia*, the '-ism' coming along in the 18th century as part of the Enlightenment's quest to escape the ideological clutches of the Church."²⁶ The astrophysicist Bernard Haisch defines materialism as "The belief that reality consists solely of matter and energy, the things that can be measured in the laboratory or observed by a telescope. Everything else is illusion or imagination."²⁷ The earliest expression of materialism "may have come from a school of skeptics within Hinduism around 600 BCE, and maintained that what cannot be perceived by the senses

does not exist. In the West because of Platonic and Aristotelian systems and the rise of Christianity, materialism was at first an idea of little consequence.”²⁸

Materialists trust that we can unweave a rainbow, explain it in terms of physics and dismiss that a creator had anything to do with it. Some view this as a leap in logic as figuring out how something works, unweaving the rainbow, does not exclude a power in the universe beyond our knowing. What is important to note is that the materialist’s position is actually no different than the dualist’s position: facts + belief = truth, as the evidence is still inconclusive in both camps. "Emotionally, I am an atheist. I don't have the evidence to prove that God doesn't exist, but I so strongly suspect he doesn't that I don't want to waste my time", noted Issac Asimov the American biochemist and science fiction writer.

The scientists who hold a materialist view are often viewed by the opposition as practicing ‘scientism’; where science implies a way of knowing that is open ended, scientism is neither open-ended nor unbiased as it suggests a *belief* of the reality of the materialist universe. So, while both sides

tend to be confident in their perspective, in fact their 'belief' is mixed in with their evidence.

While there are many materialist scientists, an articulate, vocal, brilliant and outspoken materialist author and journalist, has done much to move their cause forward. Author of the book, '*god is not Great*', ('g' intentionally lower case) was the late Christopher Hitchens, who died in December of 2011. His books and views awarded him a grand master status in the 'New Atheism' movement. He also was made an Honorary Associate of the National Secular Society, and served on the advisory board of the Secular Coalition for America. He states in his book, "If the universe was found to be finite or infinite, either discovery would be equally stupefying and impenetrable to me." He also set the record straight regarding Einstein, who was and often is misquoted as believing in God, by including in his book correspondence of Einstein's to a colleague which stated, "It was, of course, a lie what you read about my religious convictions, a lie which is being systematically repeated. I do not believe in a personal God and I have never denied this but expressed it clearly...I do not believe in the immortality of the individual."²⁹ Note the first part of

the phrase makes Einstein an atheist while the second part of the phrase makes him a *believing* materialist.

Our DNA friend Francis Crick predicted that once the detailed workings of the brain were eventually revealed, Christian concepts about the nature of humans and the world would fall apart; traditional conceptions of the "soul" would be replaced by a new understanding of the physical basis of mind. And although he didn't believe consciousness survived, he did suggest that earth was "Deliberately seeded with life by intelligent aliens".¹³ This, says John Gribbin, a science writer, and astrophysicist, falls 'at the very fringe of scientific respectability' – or, put another way, a notion that would be considered wildly lunatic were it voiced by anyone other than a Nobel laureate."³⁰ Crick was skeptical of organized religion, referring to himself as an, 'agnostic with a strong inclination towards atheism'.¹³

Neither camp: Freethinkers Schema: The Jury Is Out.

"What I have done is to show that it is possible for the way the universe began to be determined by the laws of science. In that case, it would not be necessary to appeal to God to decide how the universe began. This doesn't prove that there is no God, only that God is not necessary."

Stephen Hawkins

English Physicist and Cosmologist

A freethinking position holds, "We cannot know what we do not know." About four centuries ago, with science in its infancy, materialism was not the default position of scientists. From Leonardo da Vinci, Isaac Newton, Ben Franklin up to Max Planck, the German physicist, regarded as the founder of quantum theory, all were deists holding that reason and observation of the natural world were all they needed to confirm the existence of a creator.³¹ They stepped out of the confines of the church to look for God, and finding God in only nature at that time made them radical freethinkers. Still, it's possible that they had a deep-seated fear of the power of the status quo and only publically held to a belief in God reflected in nature just to

protect themselves, their work and their families from possible charges of blasphemy.

Others in pop-culture who have a large influence regarding grooming a generation of freethinkers are people like the comedian Bill Maher. In his movie *Religulous* Bill does a tour of the world talking to religious leaders and followers, and just by letting them have the floor has invited us to see the irrationality of much of religious doctrine. While Maher vehemently rejects religion, he states repeatedly throughout the movie, in a nutshell, “I don’t know...but I know it’s not these fairytales!”³²

Stanley Krippner, Ph.D., professor of psychology at Saybrook University, San Francisco, has written extensively on dreams, altered states of consciousness, hypnosis, shamanism, dissociation, and parapsychological subjects, in a word what materialist often call ‘pseudoscience’. However, Krippner is impossible to pin down and must be considered a freethinker. In a recent interview with Dr. Richard Grego at the American Psychological Association annual conference, Krippner

was noncommittal. When asked what he expects when he dies he responded, "I expect to be surprised." ³³

If you recall the profile of the creative personality you'll note that these people do not 'go along to get along'. They can withstand the rejection and humiliation (much more so if they are already protected by fame), of having their ideas laughed at. They are those willing to leave the box. From their broader perspective they are apt to rail against the status quo, all of them unconventional thinkers.

I consider myself a freethinker but admit my strong leanings towards dualism because of 'unexplained other worldly occurrences'. My goal in studying the world's religions as I noted was to uncover and then through a 'ministry' (consider this book your Sunday sermon) to educate and promote what was common to all. Instead of throwing up my hands as Bill Maher's cursory survey of religions led him to do, my hope was to dig through the dogma to find a common truth, the golden thread giving rise to all religions. "Clearly," I thought "they developed independently throughout cultures because of some common need and/or deep knowing." Although, it's clear

that in part religions arose because of fear of death and the need to explain one's existence, nor can we ignore the economic opportunity to exploit and control people around these same concerns, still I was sure a profound yearning for something 'more' drives people toward religion. I concluded that the same drives are in play when we look to achieve altered states of consciousness...it's not only about escape but just as importantly, attainment. First, both religions and altered states have a goal of serving our apparent need for transcendence while providing belonging and inclusion into a tribe of fellow seekers.

Them Camp: Dualists

Schema: Mind and Brain are not one and the same.

"I believe that consciousness, or its immediate precursor proto-consciousness, has been in the universe all along, perhaps from the Big Bang."

Dr. Stuart Hameroff, MD

Director of the Center of Consciousness Studies
University of Arizona

Dualism is often associated with the philosophy of René Descartes, an idea that the mind is a nonphysical substance. "Descartes clearly identified the mind with

consciousness and self-awareness and distinguished this from the brain as the seat of intelligence. Hence, he was the first to formulate the mind–body problem in the form in which it exists today. Descartes believed because the soul is unitary, and unlike many areas of the brain the pineal gland appeared to be unitary, it was ‘the seat of the soul’.”³⁴

Fast forward to November of 2011, and we read this headline: “Nickolas Coke Survived 3 Years After Being Born With Only A Brain Stem”. No, this is not a headline from the *National Enquirer*. This little boy was born with the condition known as anencephaly, “...resulting in the absence of a major portion of the brain, skull, and scalp. Strictly speaking it is accepted that children with this disorder are born without a forebrain, the largest part of the brain consisting mainly of the cerebral hemispheres, including the neo-cortex, which is responsible for higher-level cognition.”³⁵ The article points out, “Most children who are born with no brain, live only a few days”, yet Nickolas lived 3 years with only a brain stem and his mother reports that before he died he was “Laughing as he played among pumpkins.”³⁶ I’ll give you a moment to

Google this information as I know you won't believe me...I'm writing it and I don't believe me but think twice before you look at any images. The news story, which gave little details, seemed bizarre and contradictory on first glance (no brain but enjoying himself in a field of pumpkins!) but a quick fact check and we are reminded that many of our basic functions do take place in the brain stem "including heart rate, breathing, sleeping and eating... and it is pivotal in maintaining consciousness".³⁷ Interestingly regarding Descartes claim, the pineal gland is also in the brain stem. In any case, at the very least this information points to a picky but important clarification for both camps:

For the materialist: mind = brain now becomes mind=brainstem, as the bulk of brain can be absent entirely to live, for the dualist: mind does not= brainstem.

There are several types of dualism but to keep it simple when I use the term *dualism* it will refer to substance dualism, mind and matter are fundamentally two types of substance. A dualist that I come in contact with weekly is *Skeptiko* host Alex Tsakiris. His podcast is correctly billed as "a leading source for intelligent, hard-nosed skeptic vs.

believer debate on science and spirituality. Each episode features lively discussion with leading researchers, thinkers, and their critics.”³⁸ In just six years Alex has interviewed nearly 200, leading (predominately) dualist researchers in their respective fields, but includes materialists such as Richard Wiseman, and most recently Dr. Victor Stenger, when he can coax them into a debate. Alex is a believer. He provides a platform for the latest alternative research in the crushing world of reductive materialism. After talking in depth to all these researchers and reading their work, Alex does believe that the evidence is overwhelming regarding dualism and points to this fact in most of his interviews. There seems to me to be a general optimism among dualist researchers that we are close to the end of the materialist paradigm, (the book *The End of Materialism* is a good example) but without removing some of the major roadblocks, I’m not so sure.

In contrast to my own personal and Alex’s concept of ‘something Other’ dualism, the late Sir John Templeton was a dualist who believed in the traditional, religious idea of God and soul and has spent large sums of his money in search of the scientific research that might back up his

belief. The Templeton Foundation Prize for Progress in Religion was established in 1973 for people who 'are doing new and original thinking in religion.' This first prize went to Mother Teresa. The Templeton foundation plans to spend over \$30 million each year in the 21st Century encouraging progress in spiritual information and research. "God's children on earth have been given free will and creativity and purpose. It appears that God wants humans to participate in His ongoing creative purpose."³⁹ The foundation's current campaign is called *The Immortality Project*.

Them Camp: Idealists
Schema: Everything is Mind.

"I've lived alongside materialistic scientists and I used to think like that...But over time, working in that environment, one becomes slowly cognizant of the hidden assumptions of the scientific paradigm. The hidden subjective value system, the hidden assumptions about the nature of reality that we all make without knowing we are making them."

Bernardo Kastrup
Ph.D. in Computer Engineering

Bernardo Kastrup worked at CERN. He's one of the few who woke up to the fact that most scientists, as he did,

operate from a 'mind equals brain blueprint'. He doesn't however call himself a dualist because it too for him is too narrow a term. "(Dualism) implies that there is such a thing as mind stuff, which is unlimited and unbound, and there is matter, a completely different kind of stuff, which filters down mind stuff. I'm not necessarily completely opposed to dualism, although I do find it inflationary. It makes two fundamental assumptions as opposed to one, as Materialism would have it or Idealism would have it. Idealism is the philosophy that everything is only mind stuff." ⁴⁰

The philosophy of Idealism is as old as history. The earliest arguments that the world of experience is grounded only in our minds began in India and Greece. "The Hindu idealists in India and the Greek Neoplatonists gave pantheistic arguments for an all-pervading consciousness as the ground or true nature of reality." ⁴¹ I will however, ignore the nuanced difference between dualists and idealists, as they are both fundamentally 'them' and view consciousness as a reality beyond matter, and instead we'll focus on the two diametrically opposed camps...the materialists vs. the dualists.

The Materialists vs. The Dualists

US, aka materialist scientists again is the group that holds most of the power and much of the influence and therefore almost all of the funding. If you want 'cred' this is the group to belong to. *US* see *them* as naïve while they are the thoughtful, skeptical, scientific non-believers, while *them* think materialists are generally intellectually arrogant.

Both sides struggle with the notion that a single position held by a researcher corrupts the research findings and both sides are correct to worry, aware that confirmation biases are at play. Again, the error is that we only let information sink in that confirms what we already believe to be true and ignore or dismiss the rest. A remedy to this would be to take neither a materialist nor dualist position but remain a freethinker.

Case In Point...

Sam Harris is a brilliant guru of the New Atheism movement. He is a neuroscientist with a degree from UCLA, as well as the co-founder and CEO of Project

Reason. He is the author of *Letter to A Christian Nation* and *The End of Faith*, which was published in 2004 and appeared on *The New York Times* bestseller list for 33 weeks.⁴² While it is true that he rejects religion and its concept of God, I challenge his placement in the materialists category by materialist who want to claim him for their own just as some dualist would like to claim Einstein. Rather he is a 'freethinker'. In a debate at the American Jewish University entitled "Is there an Afterlife?" he stated, "The place of consciousness in the natural world is very much open to question, the truth is we simply do not know what happens after death."⁴³

I have deep respect for Harris's work and agree with the majority of his arguments regarding the dangerous and dark side of religious dictates and doctrine and how it influences science and believing scientists in subtle and unseen ways. What is of concern is that Mr. Harris is less quick to notice how the materialist's position can also morph into beliefs, which also affects their work. During an interview with Bill Maher he stated, "There's this idea that religious beliefs can be held separate, and they don't have to intrude into public policy, politics and science, and it's

just not true. So far as someone actually believes something, it inevitably shows up in the world. Beliefs are the means to organize behavior and emotion. Presidents that believe the book of Revelations and the end times can very well lead us into wars that conform to those bogus blueprints.”⁴⁴ Based on this very astute observation of believers, he would have gained even a bit more respect had he admitted that materialists are also subject to the same bias as any believer, unable to see past their, ‘Mind equals brain blueprint.’

Is Materialist Science Really Status Quo?

It’s important to note that while dualism under medieval religion was the paradigm for most of history, the Enlightenment philosophers writing 400 years ago, notably Francis Bacon in his book *The New Method*, along with the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, “who posited a world governed not by divine influence but by the law of cause and effect,”²⁸ helped launch modern science. Materialism regained respect lost under the rise of Christianity and the Holy Roman Empire and today sits firmly center stage. In

spite of the panicked tone shared regarding America's growing reliance on religion over science as I witnessed at the Richard Dawkins lecture, the fact is that in a 2006 poll conducted for a science organization, the participants were asked who they would be "interested in hearing from" about evolution, creationism and intelligent design. The two categories that ranked highest were scientists (77%) and science teachers (76%). Clergy ranked high, but 15 percentage points lower than scientists; and only half as many people were, "Very interested" in hearing from clergy compared with scientists."¹⁴ In another Pew poll, an overwhelming majority, 84% say that science has had a positive effect on society and that science has made life easier for most people. Most also say that government investments in science, as well as engineering and technology, pay off in the long run. And scientists are very highly rated compared with members of other professions."⁴⁵ And so justifiably and importantly the status quo today is: Science Rules.

Unfortunately, but understandably after centuries of dangerous beliefs in superstition, which in big part put the 'dark' in the Dark Ages, along with the rise in

fundamentalist churches and the recent report, "Freedom of Thought 2012" which highlights, "Policies in some European countries and the United States which favor the religious and their organizations and treat atheists and humanists as outsiders",⁵ status quo science now stands with a materialist bone in its mouth and won't let go. Any research that has been done that doesn't fit the materialistic paradigm, PSI (Paranormal research) or forty years of NDE research for instance, is sidelined. After centuries of struggling to get out of the grips of the church and dualism, it's easy to imagine why science is reluctant to give legitimacy to dualism. However, they not only are in danger of choking on their own bone but they aren't trusting the scientific method and the results it delivers, and appear to have more trust in their materialist beliefs and again and worth stressing, are as limiting as any beliefs.

Dr. Eben Alexander, the now famous neuroscientist who enjoyed a Near Death Experience and who is currently on tour after writing *Proof of Heaven* noted that prior to his NDE, "Quite simply, I'd never held myself open to the idea that there might be anything genuine to the idea that

something of us survives the death of the body. I was the quintessential, good-natured, albeit skeptical, doctor. And as such, I can tell you that most skeptics aren't really skeptics at all. To be truly skeptical, one must actually examine something, and take it seriously. And I, like many doctors, had never taken the time to explore NDEs. I had simply "known" they were impossible." ⁴⁶

Such a statement by a former staunch materialist gives credence to the view of Dr. Edgar Mitchell, the sixth man to walk on the moon, who summarize the situation this way:

"The hard question of consciousness, has to a large extent been neglected by mainstream science. Until recently these subjective areas of inquiry have been considered to be outside the scope of scientific study. Indeed, many established scientists still think these issues are strictly philosophical, psychological or theological and are not subject to the accepted scientific methods of inquiry. Another reason that many of the areas have been ignored is because those with a vested interest in the current paradigms and those who derive their livelihood from them have little incentive to question the very paradigms that support them or have made them successful. Consequently few scientists have expressed interest in studying these

issues until very recent times. Even those willing to address these anomalies fear being ostracized by their peers or are so indoctrinated by the current scientific paradigms that they ignore mounting evidence, contradictions, and anomalies that cannot be explained by current mainstream thinking.”⁴⁷

Frankly, many non-materialist researchers are sick and tired of this locked down status quo system. Daniel Sarewitz, writing in *Nature* states, “If we compare the amount of research conducted on matters relating to life after death to that on any other subject, we must conclude that something is very wrong. It doesn’t take a philosophical genius to discover a genuine scandal in the public neglect of the death issue”,⁴⁸ and while I’m glad to hear it put so bluntly to support my point, I am a bit miffed to know that I’m no genius for seeing it as more than an innocent oversight.

What's Wrong With The Scientific Status Quo Debate?

What's the problem with the status quo debate if it appears to be moving the conversation forward with thoughtful discussion? In the debate mentioned above on the topic of the 'Afterlife' held at the American Jewish University for instance, there's little note to the fact that the debate between two secularist and two rabbis, was older than dirt, except for the quip made at the start of the debate by Mr. Harris who said, "I've been worried that all of you have given up a perfectly serviceable Tuesday evening only to hear the four of us tell you every which way that we have no idea what happens after death."⁴³ While both sides impressed with compelling, intelligent, thoughtful arguments, the debate shifted into the problems with religion and defense of it, leading to little discussion of the afterlife, and instead it boiled down to; 'Is so!' 'Is not!' 'I believe yes!' and 'I believe no!' with neither side willing to step beyond their materialist or religious belief to say, "Let's face it, we are into the unknown...which doesn't mean it's unknowable, but philosophical debates have not

led us closer to the answer and can't we just agree that science will?"

Finally, the moderator insisted on the question of the afterlife, asking if the study of NDE's might just be the area that could provide the answer. This was met by a quick and total dismissal by Christopher Hitchens who pronounced the last thirty years of work, over forty peer reviewed studies and scientific research as "Just bullshit".⁴³ His arrogance in this moment trumped his usual articulate artistry.

The status quo debate, after thousands of years, has reached an end. Let's call a truce and let 21st century resuscitation science, a specialty that deals daily with those experiencing an NDE, to take it from here. It's simply not acceptable to continue the debate and divert energy and attention when the materialist is closed to the concept of an afterlife and religions insist on their version of it.

Meanwhile, because the goal is to ensure that religions are not influencing science, materialists often carelessly dump

dualists into the religious camp. As the materialist paradigm is the current and accepted 'US' status quo, "Modern neuroscience *dictates* (my emphasis) that the brain gives rise to consciousness",⁴⁶ says Dr. Alexander, illustrating that many a researcher attempting to step outside this paradigm to test a dualist hypothesis is labeled '*them*' and risks their good reputation. With careers and reputations on the line and our tribal mind's need for belonging to *US* so great, many a researcher who considers a dualist perspective decides it is safer to just remain in the box. Others rebel, some go undercover, and some just take it in stride and work quietly with relatively small funding. Few make it into the very top scientific circles. Or this happens...

PRINCETON'S PEAR LABORATORY TO CLOSE

The Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research (PEAR) program at Princeton University, internationally renowned for its extensive study of the influence of the mind on physical reality, will be completing its agenda of basic research and closing its physical facilities at the end of February.

The purpose of the program, established in 1979 by Robert G. Jahn, an aerospace scientist who was then Dean of the university's School of Engineering and Applied Science, was "to study the potential vulnerability of engineering devices and information processing systems to the anomalous influence of the consciousness of their human operators."

Jahn and his colleague, Brenda Dunne, a developmental psychologist from the University of Chicago who has served throughout as PEAR's laboratory manager, together with other members of their interdisciplinary research staff, have focused on two major areas of study: anomalous human/machine interactions, which addresses the effects of consciousness on random physical systems and processes; and remote perception, wherein people attempt to acquire information about distant locations and events. *The enormous databases produced by PEAR provide clear evidence that human thought and emotion can produce measurable influences on physical reality. The researchers have also developed several theoretical models that attempt to accommodate the empirical results, which cannot be explained by any currently recognized scientific model. (my emphasis)*

"We have accomplished what we originally set out to do 28 years ago, namely to determine whether these effects are real and to identify their major correlates. There are still many important questions to be addressed that will require a coordinated interdisciplinary approach to the topic, but it is time for the next generation of scholars to take over." Jahn and Dunne said.
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So, let's recall that CERN in the summer of 2012, confirmed "the god particle" theory aka Higgs boson. "The Higgs has been labeled the 'god particle' because it accounts for the existence of mass in the Universe."⁵⁰ You might have heard of it, but chances are you never heard of the PEAR study, which clearly threw a wrench in the materialist machine. Can you imagine reading an article like the one above regarding the next step after such a finding at CERN? "We have accomplished what we set out to do regarding the Higgs boson, so we will dismantle here at CERN and start a not-for-profit organization." Maybe the new research formally know as 'PEAR' and its facility is bigger and better than the Princeton lab, but it clearly was forced to leave a prestigious name behind.

This insists we critical examine the question: Why is it that there is nothing analogous to CERN in size, scope, funding, or support for a research facility supporting the dualist paradigm such as the PEAR study? We also might ask how the scientists trying to do consciousness research outside of the materialist paradigm are coping?

The Scientific Rebels

We all know Timothy Leary was the high priest of the 60's, a Harvard scientist who led the anti-establishment movement with his studies of consciousness and psychedelics. At one point along his long, strange trip he met up with Walter Pahnke, who had a medical license and was an advanced graduate student in the Ph.D. program of the Harvard Divinity School. Walter wanted to do thesis dissertation research on the psychedelic experience using students in the divinity school with Leary. Just as the experiment was about to take place, the study was shut down. "Well, if it's right, Walter, they can't stop it. You can do it if you really want to. This froze Walter in his tracks. Do (the study) anyway? Defy the director of the Health Department? Defy the Harvard officials? Walter didn't have a rebellious bone in his body. He was an

establishment man, a good boy, right down the line. The problem was, he was one of those hardheaded, grass-roots, orthodox idealists who really believed in what was right.”⁵¹ Leary, who lived outside the box, reached down and offered Walter a hand up, Walter took it and the study was done...underground.

Scientists Playing By The Rules

In a review by James Fadiman, Ph.D. on the book *DMT: The Spirit Molecule. A Doctor's Revolutionary Research into the Biology of Near-Death and Mystical Experiences*, by Rick Strassman, the author points out, “Strassman also takes us behind the curtains of conventional scientific reporting and freely describes the obstacles, the failures, and the personal difficulties that he encountered during the years it took to get permission for, and to conduct, his research. An ironic parallel is that the seniors in his own religious community became equally as unhappy with his continuing research as did the established scientific hierarchy...(the book) is a sober, even somber, tale of the difficulties met along the research path, even by one committed to playing by the rules.”⁵²

In Francis Crick's autobiographical book, *What Mad Pursuit*, he notes why he left molecular biology and switched to neuroscience. Crick was then struck by several things, not only did many isolated sub disciplines within neuroscience have little contact between them, many people who were interested in behavior *treated the brain as a black box and consciousness was viewed as a taboo subject by many neurobiologists.*⁵³

Scientist With One Foot Out And One Foot In

Dr. William Bengston, author of *The Energy Cure* is a professor of sociology at St. Josephs College in New York. He received his Ph.D. from Fordham University and his areas of specialization include research methods and statistics. In an interview he pointed out that he is a skeptic in the purest sense. That is, he sees atheist and believers aligned and closed in their position. Most importantly he spoke in detail about the extent dualist scientists moonlight outside the materialist box. His interview on *Skeptiko*:

“Our Society for Scientific Exploration was founded by the head of astrophysics at

Stanford, the Dean of Engineering at Princeton, the head of astronomy at the University of Virginia, and folks like that who came together and said there's too much scientific straitjacket activity going on. You're allowed to look at certain things; you're not allowed to look at other things. It turns out that a whole lot of scientists have almost like a closet life. In the public, in the peer-reviewed journals, in their conventional day job, you're only allowed to talk about certain things and there is a canon and you're supposed to buy into it. You've got to toe the party line and if you want to get grants you'd better be getting them for the things you're allowed to get grants for, etc., etc. And these very, very brave individuals who had already been extraordinarily successful in their day job careers recognized that there were other people like them who also had interests in things that you weren't supposed to talk about. So they talked about healing, they talked about UFOs, they talked about all sorts of stuff and said, "Let's get together and see if we can database, have a discussion about things which are off-limits." We have a little inside dictum there that says if you're an academic and you want to look at this stuff ...actually do research and gather data, *first get tenure!*"⁵⁴

Dr. Bengston's scientific research and astounding results in energy healing outlined in this interview is just another example of cutting edge research outside of the materialist paradigm that should be front-page news - except for two reasons; it challenges not only the materialist paradigm but also the billion-dollar cancer industry.

Scientists Living Outside The Box

Jacque Fresco is a Futurist, industrial Designer, Social Engineer and designer of The Venus Project. In a paper entitled '*Beyond Utopia*' he stated in part:

“Throughout the history of civilization few national leaders or politicians have ever proposed a comprehensive plan to improve the lives of all people under their jurisdiction. Although such individuals as Plato, Edward Bellamy, H.G. Wells, Karl Marx, and Howard Scott all made some attempts to present a new civilization, the established social order considered them impractical dreamers with Utopian designs that ran contrary to the innate elements of human nature. Arrayed against these social pioneers was a formidable status quo composed of vested interests that were comfortable with the way things were, and a

populace at large that, out of years of indoctrination and conditioning, wanted no radical changes. These were the millions of unappointed guardians of the status quo. The outlook and philosophy of the leaders were consistent with their positions of differential advantage.”⁵⁵

The Rhine Research Center is one of the foremost institutes dedicated to studying parapsychology. It publishes *The Journal of Parapsychology* four times each year and conducts a summer study program for college students and professionals interested in the field. John Palmer, senior research associate stated, "The public is usually pretty supportive; most scientists usually are not...the main reason is it doesn't seem to fit in well with the rest of what we know. I don't think [parapsychology] contradicts those theories. It just doesn't fit in well with them." Richard Broughton the director of the Rhine Institute goes on to say, "What motivates me is the same thing that motivates other scientists. We just have different subject matter. There is a huge need for basic research but it's so poorly funded. It's always been a small number of

intrepid scientists pursuing this through academic and funding hurdles." ⁵⁶ Where have we heard that before?

We believe our paradigms fully until anomalies appear that just don't fit, then we happily or reluctantly, or most often refuse as noted above, to adjust at all. Of course, the people fighting a shift are those that have spent a lifetime walking one path and suddenly find they are going in the wrong direction. For example, scientists concluded that animals such as chimps were not rational because they weren't able to grasp a means to end relationship, evidenced in the fact they didn't use tools. Then Jane Goodall conclusively refuted that on camera where the world observed the animals using the tools that they created. 'Humans had long distinguished ourselves from the rest of the animal kingdom as "Man the Toolmaker". In response to Goodall's revolutionary findings, Louis Leakey wrote, "We must now redefine man, redefine tool, or accept chimpanzees as human!" ⁵⁷

"This has happened again and again throughout history, as Thomas Kuhn has pointed out already in the 60s. Every time that a generation adopts a certain paradigm, it thinks

that it has figured it out, it's just a matter of fine-tuning—even though it knows that for hundreds of years before, every previous generation has been wrong. But we think finally now we've got it right, until the paradigm would change again”, writes Bernardo Kastrup.⁴⁰

The Status Quo And Religion

It would require an exhaustive review to uncover each block of the religious organizations' influences in this country, but we can quickly note that in 1958, President Dwight D. Eisenhower laid the cornerstone for the new headquarters of the National Council of Churches in New York City. Before a crowd of 30,000, Eisenhower quoted George Washington, who described religion as the firm foundation of the country's moral life. “That was the decade America put God on our paper money and in the Pledge of Allegiance. And though the churchly DNA often fostered racism, anti-Semitism, bigotry and Cold War dogmatism, many thought biblical religion, in its various incarnations, was the engine driving the American future.”⁵⁸ Is religion a force to be reckoned with as science attempts to research consciousness studies and the

question of an afterlife? We might quickly surmise that religious organizations are primed like any group to award grants to the researchers whose work might confirm what the grantee already believes to be true. It's not hard to imagine what happens to research findings, which contradict a funders mission and message. How repressed are findings that threaten an entire industry? What if, as the NDEers report, religious affiliation does not matter? The concern for any religious denomination from Catholics to snake handlers, is that people leave their churches en masse saying, 'Sorry, guess we don't need what you guys are selling.' For an organization with the power and money of the Catholic Church for instance, a simple truth of "be love" embraced, might crumble the millennium old party. So, we must ask, with so much to lose, if in fact there is a suppression of research for fear of the results.

In 1896, after 30 years of research, (much longer than I have to analyze my own question) Andrew Dickson White published the *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology in Christendom* after his difficulties of assisting Ezra Cornell in establishing a university without any official

religious affiliation. His work criticized what he saw as restrictive, dogmatic forms of Christianity. This book, as well as others contributed to the 'conflict thesis' which proposed that the church was guilty of deliberate suppression of scientific evidence. During the 20th century however, historians' acceptance of the conflict thesis declined until rejected in the 1970s.⁵⁹

Fast forward to 2011 when Richard H. Jones proposed in *For the Glory of God: The Role of Christianity in the Rise and Development of Modern Science*, a "control" model that incorporates elements of both the conflict thesis and also the idea that religion will support science. "Under the control model, religion will provide tacit or explicit support for scientific theories and research as long as scientific findings support religious doctrines. Religion can support science by making suggestions for research and by offering a cultural 'legitimation' for a theory or for science in general. But religious institutions will attempt to assert religious "control beliefs" over any scientific theories that appear to conflict with a core religious doctrine. The Galileo affair and the conflict over evolution are prime

examples.”⁶⁰ So, it looks like we assumed correctly and must adjust accordingly.

On the *Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science* website under the banner, *Exposing The Religious-Industrial Complex*, reads “Your clearing-house for exposing the financial misdeeds of religious organizations, particularly those religious misdeeds that are aided by the government and often permitted by unjust tax laws.” I’m glad some group is willing to take on the corruption within the religious industry, but it’s a big job. Meanwhile, we can continue to speculate on how deep for instance the Catholic church’s misdeeds and unwarranted influence over social policy actually goes, as we try to dig up evidence that shows they might be undermining science by sabotaging consciousness study efforts in covert ways, or we can just accept that the Catholic Church has a long and sordid history of corruption that indicates that their moneyed self interests has trumped their integrity time and time again over the centuries. By the way, just in case you doubt a serious money addiction, here’s a hot headline:

“The decades-old church tax, as it is known, earns the country’s Protestant and Catholic churches a total of some €9 billion (\$11.5 billion) a year. Germans can avoid paying the levy – up to 9 percent of their assessed income tax — if they formally leave the church. As of Monday, Germany’s Roman Catholic Bishops have decreed, those who leave the church may no longer qualify for religious ceremonies such as a Christian burial and may not partake in confession or communion; become a godfather at baptism or confirmation; or hold office within the church...Activist groups have protested loudly against the edict, saying it would deepen unease and anger within the ranks of Catholic churchgoers prompted by sexual abuse scandals and accusations of cover-ups.”⁶¹

Materialists, freethinkers, dualists and idealists should have a mind meld on this goal: Religious organizations do not fund scientific research or they do so completely anonymously and all findings are public property. (More on this in ‘Solutions’) With the overview of the status quo system complete, let’s take a look at NDE’s and Resuscitation science the field of study that could deliver the empirical evidence required for a Jane-Goodall-game-changing paradigm shift.

V The Science

“If one veridical controlled experiment is confirmed then it will falsify the statement that when we are dead we are dead matter and nothing more...”

Sir Karl Raymund Popper

Philosopher & Professor London School of Economics

(Generally regarded as one of the greatest philosophers of science of the 20th century.)

It would be impossible to outline all the advances in neuroscience over the last 30 years, so let's just leave it with a word, 'astoundinglyaweinspiring'. These advances, which tell us much more about the way the brain works, still are unable to provide the research that confirms that *mind equals brain*, although as noted, nearly half the scientists polled are convinced that the hypothesis is true. One finding that they hold as 'check' in this chess game with dualists is the people who have had serious brain damage. A famous case involves Phineas Gage who lived after having a railroad spike driven through his brain and had a complete personality change, "The equilibrium or balance, so to speak, between his intellectual faculties and animal propensities, seems to have been destroyed." ⁶² Holding to this as proof that we are equal to the chemicals

and mechanisms of our brain in essence says, “An arrow pierced my radio, it still works but I get a lot of static and AM stations come over FM bands.” In other words we also have to entertain the idea that the ‘ghost (consciousness) in the machine’ is limited by the condition of the machine. ‘Most likely the proof hasn’t been discovered because after all we are dealing with what is considered the ‘hard problem’, which asks; *How does our consciousness awareness emerge from the physics, chemistry, biology and anatomy, and physiology of the human brain?*”⁶³ Easy problems in contrast, are easy because all that is required to solve them is to identify a mechanism that can perform the function, entirely consistent with the modern materialistic conception of natural phenomena. David Chalmers, who coined the ‘hard problem’ term, claims that the problem of experience is distinct from this set, and he argues that the problem of experience will “persist even when the performance of all the relevant functions is explained”.⁶⁴

Dr. Eben Alexander, the neuroscientist who experienced an NDE during his coma stated, “What I can assure you, is that there’s not a soul on Earth who has a clue what the

first sentence in the chapter describing that emergence of consciousness from the physical brain; there's no one on Earth who knows how to start writing that chapter because it's a very, very deep mystery."⁶⁵

Meanwhile, a growing number of cardiologists on the front lines of resuscitation science, such as Pim van Lommel, are questioning the easy solution and taking a harder look at the hard problem. Rather than consciousness being wholly described in physical terms, as neural processes in the brain, his patients' experiences seem to transcend physical systems and require an explanation of the nonphysical.

Van Lommel is a world-renowned doctor who for over 25 years worked as a cardiologist at an eight-hundred-bed teaching hospital in the Netherlands. Early in his career one patient spoke to him of an experience after being resuscitated, to which he paid little attention, except to pick up a book called "Return from Tomorrow" by George Ritchie. Lommel notes, "Ritchie was a medical student in 1943 who had double pneumonia. Following an episode of very high fever and extreme tightness of the chest he died

and while he was covered with a sheet, a male nurse was so upset that he managed to persuade the attendant doctor to administer an adrenalin injection into the chest near the heart – a most unusual procedure in those days.”⁶⁶ Having been dead for more than 9 minutes, George Ritchie regained consciousness. He went on to write a book about his experience and to lecture to medical students about the phenomenon. One of these students was Raymond Moody, who was so enthralled by Ritchie’s story that he took on the research, coined the term ‘near-death experience’ and wrote the global best seller *Life After Life* in 1975. He remains one of the leaders in the NDE field today. ⁶⁶

Before We Talk About What An NDE Is, Here’s What It Isn’t

Back in 1978, I was on my way home in my VW Beetle at 2:30 in the morning after a night out dancing. I drove with two other girls, one celebrating her 21st birthday. Traveling northbound on Route 91 in Massachusetts at the Connecticut River there is a large bend in the highway

which lowers the speed to 55 mph. There is no visibility around this bend. As I approached it going about 65, I was in the middle lane and began to switch lanes into the passing lane when a voice in my head said, "There's no one to pass why are you getting in the passing lane?" "What difference does it make there's no one on the road!" I started to argue but something pulled me back into the middle lane. Not three seconds later a car sped by us in the passing lane going in the opposite direction, a head on crash averted by mere seconds, which certainly would have killed us all.

Some people call this a near death experience, in that they understand the phrase to mean a 'close call with death'. In fact, the term Near Death Experience speaks mainly to the event of dying and being resuscitated and what the person experienced during the time that they were dead, although an NDE can be experienced under other circumstances. If the person having the NDE happens to be an atheist or a materialist often they find their old worldview, their schema, no longer seems to make sense.

The Near Death Experience

It's important to note that a NDE does not just occur during a cardiac arrest, an event classified as a clinical death. Clinical death is the medical term for "cessation of blood circulation and breathing, the two necessary criteria to sustain life. At the onset of clinical death, consciousness is lost within several seconds. Measurable brain activity stops within 20 to 40 seconds" ⁶⁷... no heartbeat, no breathing, no brainwaves. NDE's can also however be triggered by severe circumstance; a coma, inevitable death, during a fall while mountain climbing, a car accident, during a deathbed vision, extreme isolation, near drowning or for those writing a book or term paper, a crashing computer!

Because of these various ways people can experience an NDE, nearly 25 million reports worldwide have been collected over the last 50 years. Other studies in the U.S. and Germany put the number at 4.2% of the population. ⁶⁶ These estimates are considered low as many people keep the experience private for fear of rejection, as some health care practitioners are not open to the possibility and so

don't encourage people to talk openly. Also, the closed nature of the materialist medical model and training can make it hard for doctors to accept NDE's even if they or a colleague experiences one.

If you are someone who hasn't heard first hand accounts of NDE's here are a few powerful examples that you will find by a general search on the web; Pam Reynolds, who underwent a standstill operation, meaning her body temperature was lowered to 60 °F, her breathing and heartbeat were stopped, and the blood drained from her head for nearly an hour. Dr. Mary Neal, orthopedic spine surgeon who drowned while kayaking on a South American river. David Bennet, who in 1983 was a chief engineer on a boat and was underwater for 12 minutes and Joe McMoneagle, who was involved in remote viewing experiments conducted by U.S. Army Intelligence and the Stanford Research Institute. He was one of the original officers recruited for the top-secret program now known as the Stargate Project and was interviewed on Skeptiko about his NDE.⁶⁸

All of these NDEers share a compelling story of slipping from their body and into a blissful state into a place that appeared more real...like waking after a dream, at the same time that they were able to view the events around their body, as they were being rescued and resuscitated. Anita Moorjani, author of the book “Dying to be Me”, had a miraculous healing from lymphoma (stage IVB) after her NDE upon waking from her coma. She, like those who died experienced the same elements of a classic NDE and became conflicted about leaving ‘Home’. The overwhelming and complete love and acceptance NDEers encounter is the reason most resist returning to their earthly bodies.

Bruce Greyson, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Virginia, co-author *Irreducible Mind*, and co-editor of *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences* in 2009, created the Greyson Scale to measure the common aspects of near-death experiences. It has been widely used, being cited 95 times as of early 2010.⁶⁹ “The incidence of NDE’s tend to vary through studies but the mean is about 20%. The most reliable figures for incidence come from prospective studies of cardiac arrest, which suggest a figure of about

10%.⁴⁸ Prospective study (vs. a retrospective study) are studies that use research gained within days of an event such as a cardiac arrest or coma by asking the patient if they have had any memories of the period of unconsciousness. Interesting to note that even though different cultures will have culture-specific differences in content and their interpretation, these features remain; the NDE may start with an out-of-body experience (OBE) the point at which a person reports leaving their body where they witness their body as well as the activity taking place in the room as they are being resuscitated as below them. An OBE is reported in 37% of the NDE cases.⁶⁶ It is also common for a person to say that they had little to no attachment to their body, "Like taking off dirty clothes" then they report a bright light in the distance and a sensation of rapid movement toward the light as if moving through a tunnel. Often, the person is engulfed in feelings of complete love and acceptance in this bright light, and they are often met by dead relatives and spirit guides. They communicate telepathically and report 360-degree vision and experience enhanced colors, and very often have a complete life review, the aspect of the NDE that informs them about their behaviors during their life, especially in

the ways that that should interact with others upon return. The general feeling of “Home” is “more real than real” (hyper-reality) than the life they left behind.

People return often reluctantly to a body they don't wish to re-enter having been told they still have work to do. This experience is profoundly life changing and people rarely live their lives the same way again. First, because of the nature of the life review, they report that their life is downloaded during their NDE and they find themselves recalling all their good acts but also the not-so-good acts done to others. In fact, they report being on the receiving end of every single nasty thing ever done to others, things which they had gladly long forgotten. This aspect of the experience is reported as being profoundly painful.

Interesting to note that in life people actively try to forget things they have done to hurt others, feeling guilty or bad about their actions. Helping us forget is our ‘self-serving bias’, which provides us with a strong desire to see ourselves in a positive light. Yet, NDEers report during their NDE that these negative memories come back as clearly as the day they happened and there seems to be

no escape from this life review. Second, the message of 'love as the ultimate reality' is felt so powerfully that the NDEer rarely if ever looks at life the same way again.

One in five people resuscitated report an NDE, and ninety percent of those report a pleasurable NDE, while the other 10% regard the NDE as distressing⁷⁰ for various reasons, but it's never about judgment. No one has reported an angry God with a beard throwing them into the pit of hell, even if they believed this view of the afterlife at the time of death. The general features of a distressing NDE are often the same as a pleasant NDE, but people who have resistance to the experience, the control freaks do what they do best...freak. Often, once they let go, the experience magically transforms. However, there are reports of evil demons and spirits in rare cases. It may be that we experience a reflection of our exact state of consciousness when we die, which some research alludes to, which would explain my grade school nuns preaching that we would go to hell if we died with a mortal sin on our soul. In one account a person said his main goal in life was to be left alone and during his NDE he found himself in a void of nothingness, which he perceived as 'hell'. He then

finally understood what that being left alone actually meant and after his NDE he gave up his hermit goal and instead looked to form safe connections over no connections.⁷¹

The totality of the NDE experience that is so intriguing is that people registering dead are not having a mixed up crazy dream that jumps from flying monkeys to swimming cats...dreams which drift away as fast as we wake nor are they a confused drug experience which we might expect from chemicals flooding a dying brain, but rather are a cohesive, lucid experiences at a time when they are considered a corpse.

The Key to Discovery: The Veridical Report

As noted above, a percentage of people have out-of-body experiences and look back, usually from above at the scene of their death. This event is the outstanding measurable feature of the NDE. These verifiable accounts or veridical reports relate to what occurred in the physical world and around the person as they were being resuscitated. This is the key aspect of the NDE for

research purposes, as the experience seems to bridge two worlds. After resuscitation a person theoretically could bring back valuable information if a study were designed properly.

The Materialists Pushback

There is extensive reductionist research supporting various hypotheses linked to the process of a dying and/or extremely distressed brain. This research provides biological explanations such as REM intrusion, carbon dioxide, the Oprah factor (copy cat phenomenon) DMT release (a short-acting and powerful psychedelic that is produced naturally in our pineal gland) lucid dreaming, brainstorming (a surge of electrical energy released when a brain runs out of oxygen) and everything in-between. The current problem with all of the materialist explanations of the NDE, like oxygen deprivation for instance, is the fact that oxygen deprivation is not present in all the various situations that people experience NDE's, for instance someone in a coma or under anesthesia who may be receiving oxygen have reported NDE's.

As noted other situations other than death can trigger aspects of an NDE and so there is a hypothesis that the brain simply releases chemicals at a time when death appears inescapable. However, it appears that the vast majority of people like myself, who have had several close brushes with death, have not had a single NDE, nor a single aspect of the experience. Besides sitting in a crashing plane for over an hour, awaking to my best friend's brother with a knife over my head because I wouldn't date him (happened to be a star football player who said there was something wrong with his brain), careening off the highway on black ice and sailing into the median at about 50 mph, losing control of my car and doing no less than three complete 360's before coming to a stop, and having an ovarian cyst rupture (similar to dealing with a ruptured appendix) all this along with my son being carjacked when he was 17, pushed into his car and driven around Atlanta for over an hour with a gun to his head sure he would not survive it...not a single chemical other than the 'Ohhhh! SHIT!' chemical was released for either of us. If chemicals are released naturally when the brain is severely distressed then we

could expect that 20% (the average of NDE's after resuscitation) of people would report NDE's because of these close calls with death and as far as I have researched nothing regarding NDE's and knowledge of impending death supports these numbers. Finally, the biggest issue I see with all of these theories is the simple fact that they *all* claim to be correct.

Materialist research has yet to prove anything other than they are able to replicate and ignite some of the same elements that are present during an NDE. One method is using what is called the 'god helmet' developed by Dr. Michael Persinger. "The apparatus, placed on the head of an experimental subject, generates very weak fluctuating magnetic fields... stimulating the temporal lobes", ⁷² with results that, "For those who show a temporal lobe sensitivity *or creativity and who are very religious*, (my emphasis)...in that setting they will have a religious experience,"⁷² notes Dr. Persinger. However, being both 'creative and very religious' are not conditions for the NDE. Many atheists report the same common elements as believers having an NDE. (Again, many who are very religious often change their focus after an NDE to a deeper

spiritual perspective, reporting that membership in a particular religion is too exclusive.)

Another NDE like experience is from the use of the drug ketamine, which induces some features of an NDE. However, one only has to read the accounts of both an NDE and a Ketamine-induced experience to note the differences. Ketamine for instance, has more confusion associated with it than an NDE. Van Lommel notes, “There are no known reports of an encounter with deceased persons or of a life review, nor have there been reports of positive changes. Ketamine usually causes such frightful and bizarre images, which are recognized as hallucinations...”⁶⁶

The weakest claim in my opinion is from one often quoted skeptic, Dr. Susan Blackmore, writing on the topic 15 years ago with a hypothesis attributing the life review to a psychological defense mechanism at the time of a life-threatening event.⁷³ Again, there are very rare accounts of this from people having close calls vs. NDE's and her theory ignores the reports of the actual life review, which again can be extremely painful and a huge ego buster as

the NDE'er experiences the hurt and pain they inflicted on others. Not only does this experience of feeling another's pain have no equal in our life no matter the level of a person's empathic nature, we must consider the fact that the NDEer remembers events they had successfully and thankfully forgotten in life, all at a time when their brain is severely compromised...flat-lined. So, we need to ask: Assuming this is happening when the brain is going off line or coming back on-line as materialists often claim, still wouldn't a decent, working defense mechanism message instead be: 'You are just amazing!', which falls in line with our default self-serving bias setting rather than the exact opposite?

An NDE Account

One of the many anecdotal but unique NDE accounts was reported by May Eulitt in a retrospective report. In the fall of 1970, when May was 21 years old, she shared a near-death experience with her cousin James and his best friend, Rashad, who was from India. Both were on a break from school and were staying with May and her family on

their farm. One afternoon the three went to the cornfield and had to go through a metal gate to enter the field. By late afternoon a storm started brewing in the west, so they decided to quit for the day. James opened the gate, and as he did so, he reached up for May's arm to climb back up onto the wagon. May was losing her balance and Rashad grabbed her other arm to steady her, and they were in just this position, all linked by arms when lightning hit them. May saw the lightning sparkle along the top of the gate. The next thing she knew, she was, along with James and Rashad in a large hall made of dark stone. May reported:

"I felt just peaceful, floating along there in the gloom with my two friends in the great, dark hall...It was at that point, I realized the three of us were united in thought ...and as we all became conscious of each other's thoughts, I suddenly knew James and Rashad better than I have ever known anyone else. Then we saw the light...It was more than just light. It was a golden, embracing warmth. It gave off a feeling of peace and contentment more intense than anything we had ever felt. We were drawn toward it. We weren't talking, but we were communicating with each other on some other level, seeing through each other's eyes. As we came to the archway and passed through, we

entered a beautiful valley where everything glistened with golden sparks of light. To me, the valley appeared to be Heaven, but at the same time I knew James and Rashad were seeing it differently. James saw it as the Gulf of Souls. Rashad saw it as Nirvana, and somehow we knew all this without speaking. The light began gathering at the far end of the valley, and slowly, out of the mist, a pure white being began to materialize. I saw an angel with a strong, bright face, but not like you'd usually imagine. She was closer to a strong, Viking Valkyrie. I knew she was the special angel watching over the women of my family, and I perceived her name to be Hellena. James saw this same being as his late father a career Naval officer, in a white dress uniform. Rashad perceived the being to be the Enlightened One, or Buddha.”

May, James and Rashad were given a different message by the being. All three would be sent back but both James and Rashad were told they would be returning soon. This information was just some of what they were told during a period ‘which felt like forever’ (people report a sense of timelessness during an NDE) as they drifted slowly toward the archway. May stated, “The pull became stronger and we were literally thrown back into the world. We floated for a while there, hovering above our bodies. Some of my

cousins had been in the next field and had seen what happened. We saw them all come running to where we lay. James and Rashad's hands were still stuck to my arms. We saw my cousins pry their fingers loose so they could turn Rashad over to help him.” Returning to their bodies “we felt as if we were on fire, but it turned out we had only minor injuries. Rashad, it seemed, being on the end, had taken most of the charge. The doctors said the lightning had caused damage to his heart, lungs, and liver.” While in the hospital tests revealed James had a brain tumor that would eventually claim his life three years later. Rashad died one year later both returning ‘Home’, just as the messenger had told them. ⁷⁴

Personal NDE Accounts Are Not Proof

Pim van Lommel's first NDE study was published in the distinguished British medical journal *The Lancet* and his new book, *Consciousness Beyond Life, The Science of Near Death Experience*, is in my opinion one of the best books I've read on the topic. Lommel is part of group of researchers who have been risking their good names to examine NDE's. According to *The Handbook of Near-*

Death Experiences: Thirty Years of Investigation, researchers "...have analyzed over 3,500 near death experiencers regarding the experience and/or after affects, written over 700 peer review journal articles and conducted 65 research studies." ⁷¹

Although the studies are numerous and well researched from both camps, the bottom line is that they are to this date, inconclusive. Of course, both are quite sure they are however on the brink of proving the other side wrong. Again, this would be a fair and healthy competition if the dualists were working with the same resources, support and respect, as the materialists, but again, when it comes to NDE research the money for 'them' is just not materializing.

One would think that a well-credentialed materialist who has an epiphany regarding a dualist perspective might provide a bridge between the two camps. However, ranting's from the skeptic's camp in response to Dr. Alexander's recent and national published story about his experience proves that for now the bridge remains a dream.

A Materialistic Neurosurgeon Sees The Light

I heard an in-depth interview with Dr. Eben Alexander in the fall of 2011 on *Skeptiko* long before he made the national media spotlight. Having suffered an acute and rare case of bacterial meningitis, Dr. Alexander slipped into a coma. Dr. Alexander's curriculum vitae is quite impressive; an academic neurosurgeon for more than 25 years, including 15 years at Harvard Medical School in Boston, are just a few of his impressive credentials. During his interview Dr. Alexander stated:

“Coming from a neurosurgeon who, before my coma, thought I was quite certain how the brain and the mind interacted and it was clear to me that there were many things I could do or see done on my patients and it would eliminate consciousness. It was very clear in that realm that the brain gives you consciousness and everything else and when the brain dies there goes consciousness, soul, mind—it's all gone. And it was clear. Now, having been through my coma, I can tell you that's exactly wrong and

that in fact the mind and consciousness are independent of the brain. It's very hard to explain that, certainly if you're limiting yourself to that reductive materialist view.... One thing that we will have to let go of is this kind of addiction to simplistic, primitive reductive materialism because there's really no way that I can see a reductive materialist model coming remotely in the right ballpark to explain what we really know about consciousness now.”⁷⁵

So, of course we are tempted to completely trust Dr. Alexander, especially if you read his book, which is a convincing account and because he is a top brain with informed-neuroscience-materialistic-clout! And so we have to sit up and listen when a person of his caliber is willing to toss decades of a working materialistic worldview out the window after this single event. In fact, you'll notice the experience was so profound that he says, “There's really no way I can see a reductive materialist model coming remotely in the right ballpark to explain what **we** really know about consciousness now.” This experience was so convincing that he assumes that we *all* now accept his experience as the game changer. But of course we don't even though we may want to.

One of the first people to come out swinging after *Newsweek* published a story on Dr. Alexander's experience and book was Sam Harris. (You remember Mr. Harris is respected as an atheist, although he refers to himself as an agnostic which is why I put him into the Freethinker category.) Mr. Harris holds a degree in neuroscience from UCLA and blogged about this *Newsweek* article. In response my friend Alex Tsakiris the host of *Skeptiko*, suggested to Mr. Harris that he come on the show for an hour to debate Dr. Alexander. Mr. Harris responded by saying "There's nothing to debate ...he (Alexander) can't reasonably claim that the relevant parts of his brain (not just the cortex) were completely shut down. It's just not a factual statement...And even if I granted that his brain had been shut down — it's not shut down now. And there is absolutely no way for him to establish, or even to subjectively know that he didn't have his experience as his brain was coming back online. End of debate, as far as I'm concerned." ⁷⁵

Victory Stenger, a Ph.D. in physics reviewed the *Newsweek* article for *Huffington Post* regarding Dr.

Alexander's experience and subsequently stopped in for an interview on *Skeptiko*. In his review in the *Post* Stenger does a cursory bashing in his review of Dr. Alexander's book, for instance claiming an argument from ignorance, and never addressing the actual science review done by Dr. Alexander of what might have caused his experience, even though in his book, Dr. Alexander discussed nine hypotheses in an appendix that he derived based on conversations with colleagues, which Stenger makes no mention of at all. Stenger then moves into a territory that calls in his own credibility. First, he mentions that in all the NDE studies over the last 30 years none have anything more than anecdotal evidence, "...And anecdotal is not another name for data," he states.⁷⁶

Stenger then goes on to suggest an idea to actually verify the NDE, which he reports he wrote about in 2011/12. Maybe he was the first to come up with the idea, although the dates don't match up, but anyone who knows a bit about NDE research knows it is the exact concept behind the AWARE Study and the fact that he failed to mention this 'first of its kind global study', based on 'his idea', now just months away from releasing its findings is just not

kosher. Only on his point regarding anecdote not being equal to data do I firmly agree:

We must have verifiable results of consciousness surviving death.

In fact this statement is a key point that everyone in all camps of the NDE debate need to rally around, join hands and sing Kumbaya, especially those with deep experience of both the materialistic and dualist perspective like Dr. Alexander. However, the fact that we need verifiable research does not mean that anecdotal research should be dismissed in any way, which materialists often do. These subjective experiences are reported by NDEers as 'realer than real', a patterned experience, which suggests the NDE might be a doorway into our ultimate reality. Unlike a hallucination or drug experience, a visit to this realm changes one for life on return as evidenced in Dr. Alexander's case and it is common for the after-effects to last for the remainder of a NDEers life.

If an afterlife is verified through measurable NDE out-of-body research, then of course new questions will arise and

have to be addressed under the new paradigm. Just because the anecdotal reports currently don't answer these questions scientifically, doesn't mean they won't be extremely informative if a dualist universe is revealed.

Let's Get Aware About AWARE

"The Human Consciousness Project will conduct the world's first large-scale scientific study (AWARE) of what happens when we die and the relationship between mind and brain during clinical death. The mystery of what happens when we die and the nature of the human mind has fascinated humankind from antiquity to the present day."

www.nourfoundation.com

AWARE (AWAREness during REsuscitation) is a study led by Dr. Sam Parnia, a reportedly world-renowned expert on the study of the human mind and consciousness during clinical death, "The study is the first launched by the Human Consciousness Project. Dr. Sam Parnia heads up a team with Dr. Peter Fenwick and Professors Stephen Holgate and Robert Peveler of the University of Southampton. The team will be working in collaboration with more than 25 major medical centers throughout

Europe, Canada, and the United States, and is billed as “The World’s Largest Scientific Study on Mind-Brain May Finally Unravel Mystery Of What Happens When We Die.”⁷⁷

Although the topic of ‘beyond death’ has been considered a subject for theology or philosophy, and in spite of the materialist scientists resistance to consider the exploration, resuscitation science has at least pushed the question into the underfunded lab. “Contrary to popular perception,” Dr. Parnia explains, “Death is not a specific moment. It is actually a process that begins when the heart stops beating, the lungs stop working, and the brain ceases functioning – a medical condition termed cardiac arrest, which from a biological viewpoint is synonymous with clinical death. Subsequently, there is a period of time, ranging from a few seconds to an hour or longer, in which emergency medical efforts may succeed in restarting the heart and reversing the dying process (resuscitation). What people experience during this period of cardiac arrest provides a unique window of understanding into what we are all likely to experience during the dying process.”⁷⁸

Again, the studies show that 10-20 % of people who go through cardiac arrest and clinical death report lucid, cohesive and often detailed recall of events during their encounter with death with no measurable brain activity. These “Reported detailed perceptions indicate the contrary—namely, a high level of consciousness in the absence of detectable brain activity,” notes Dr. Parnia.

The AWARE study claims to be the first comprehensive study systematically examining the mind, brain, and consciousness during cardiac arrest. Researchers will use sophisticated technology in hospitals to study the dying process using “physiological tests such as measurement of changes in oxygen levels that provide an indication of brain oxygen levels and circulation of blood to the brain, as well as cerebral monitoring techniques in cardiac arrest patients during a cardiac arrest.”⁷⁸ We can agree this level of monitoring is important to understand the dying process, but the key part of the study is that doctors will also be testing the validity of out-of-body experiences and the patient’s claim of being able to see and hear during cardiac arrest by using hidden images that can only be seen from specific vantage points in the hospital rooms. This is the

aspect of the study, the important veridical report, which could reveal if consciousness survives death.

Let's Back Up A Bit Before We Go Forward...

You might want to stop here for a video break to watch Pam Reynolds being interviewed here for the BBC to hear her own account of her out-of-body experience during her reported-NDE:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNbdUEqDB-k>

Pam Reynolds case is extremely powerful because of the details she recounted during the extended time she was clinically dead. These reports as mentioned are considered veridical perception because observations are made by a patient that is totally without a functioning body or brain, yet is later able to verify what went on around them during their operation or resuscitation. In Pam's case for instance, with eyes taped shut and during the stand still operation, she reported that they were unable to locate a vein in her leg and she wondered, "What are they doing down there, this is brain surgery!" She was also able to describe the drill they used during the surgery although she couldn't understand why it looked like an electric toothbrush.⁷⁹

A few years back, these out-of-body reports got the attention of Dr. Parnia. In his pilot study Dr. Parnia used hidden images he had drawn on cardboard plaques which he hung about a foot from and facing the ceiling. These images would only be seen from specific vantage points, from the upper corner of a hospital room. (The exact idea Stenger claimed to be his own.) In the pilot study Dr. Parnia was left underfunded when a large organization pulled his grant money with no explanation, and he stated, "I decided to conduct the (study) on a small scale... Dr. Fenwick had about \$5,300-8,800 in his research budget that wasn't being used, and that was all we had for the entire study."⁸⁰ Dr. Parnia worked very hard to prevent the medical staff from discovering the pictures, which would contaminate the research. However, the hospital staff was too curious and did climb on chairs to look at the pictures. Needless to say this poorly funded, hence poorly designed pilot study was not successful, and had results been generated of course they would have been challenged. However... and this is the kicker, from all reports this is the exact study; 'pictures hanging from ceilings' which is currently being replicated for the global AWARE study! But beyond the replication of the failed pilot study, is the bias

of Dr. Parnia himself. He stated in at least one interview that he expects the results of the AWARE study will show that NDE might be just an illusion saying, "If, on the other hand, it's just an illusion, it's a trick of the mind, which it may well be and *I suspect it will turn out to be* (emphasis mine), then we would expect no one to be able to see those pictures." Although it's important to note that the plasticity of our brains *do* in fact create many illusions. (*Is Seeing Believing?* along with any of the Derren Brown videos are 'must sees' if you have any doubts.) Still, there is no confirmed research regarding 'illusion' regarding an NDE as of now to support Dr. Parnia's belief.

In my view Dr. Parnia's illusion expectation has restricted both his critical and creative thinking. In a weak defense of the design of the study he stated simply, "When people claim to have out-of-body experiences, all we have to do is put a picture up there and wait for them to either see or not see it."⁸¹ So, even though AWARE attempts to measure the one key aspect of an NDE - the OBE - Dr. Parnia's bias to illusion seems to be a factor in his resistance to designing a more sophisticated study, which clearly puts

the findings of the AWARE study into question before the results are even released.

It might seem paranoid to suggest that there is a deliberate attempt by some nefarious group using scientists to sabotage the AWARE study, as we know such a scenario could never happen, except when it does, like 'tobacco is safe, just ask your doctor' and the so-called scientists (on BP's payroll) insisting there is no impact on the climate by humans adding CO₂ into the atmosphere leading to climate change. But we should at least, without getting into conspiracy theories ask this and insist on an answer; "Where's the research center and funding to provide cutting edge scientific studies?" It's important to note that many M.D.'s conducting NDE research often pay for research themselves as noted above, while trying to keep a busy practice going and enlist volunteers and even family members as Dr. Parnia did for his first study.⁸⁰ Also, his hasty random picture hanging suffered a complete lack of adequate funding in his first trial, leaves one to wonder about unseen objectives regarding the AWARE study but most importantly, the NDE field in general. Why, when the numbers of people having an NDE escalates daily with the

improvements in resuscitation science, is this critical research shoved into the pseudoscience junk drawer?

Follow The Money! What Money?

Dr. Janice Holden is the editor of IANDS (International Association of Near Death Studies) *Journal of Near-Death Studies* who recently presented a two-hour lecture on *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty years of Investigation*, of which she is a co-editor. You might imagine that she has connections and clout regarding funding, but again don't forget these are scientists in a VW van asking for spare change along the way. On a website not affiliated with IANDS, is posted: "Dr. Holden's desire is to conduct further research to determine whether near-death experience veridical perception is possible. However, funding for this kind of research is difficult to obtain. You can help by supporting her research. One source of funding has already told Dr. Holden that if the fund reaches \$3,000, they know a way to obtain the remaining \$1,000 for Phase I. Your generous contribution to this research could lead to the discovery of veridical

perception in NDE's. Such a discovery would be nothing short of scientific evidence of out-of-body consciousness."⁸² Four thousand dollars to conduct a study to prove the afterlife? I just paid that to get my truck fixed! Let's take a moment to contrast the loose change available to dualist researchers who have the goal of discovering the nature of reality and our relationship to it vs. the funding of CERN and NASA, only two of the major players in discovering the working of the cosmos.

CERN's budget, paid for by member countries, is a reported 1.25 Billion a year. Meanwhile closer to home, NASA is funded only with U.S. dollars. According to the Office of Management and Budget and the Air Force Almanac, when measured in real terms (adjusted for inflation) on average - \$15.818 billion dollars per year was spent over its fifty-year history! Even a small percentage could build a state-of-the-art research facility for the study of NDE research, which is now primarily funded by private organizations with only one governmental related subsidized program which I was able to uncover. But are we mixing apples and oranges? We can easily argue that NASA's focus is on the exploration of outer space while

NDE research focuses on the exploration of inner space. Both are in fact related to the quest to reveal a deeper understanding of our existence and essence.

As NDE research is not funded directly by government, no public budget of NDE research exists. Private funding is an impossible piecemeal number to put together because of the various organizations that are taking their journey in separate VW vans. The AWARE study provides no data regarding their budget except to note a few sponsors; The Nour Foundation, The NGO Section of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, and The Université de Montréal.

As there is no single research facility for NDE research, well...there's simply no budget for what doesn't exist. "CERN alone employs about 2,400 people. The Laboratory's scientific and technical staff designs and builds the particle accelerators and ensures their smooth operation. They also help prepare, run, analyze and interpret the data from complex scientific experiments. Add to this some 10,000 visiting scientists, half of the world's particle physicists come to CERN for their research. They

represent 608 universities and 113 nationalities.”⁸³ What is NASA’s workforce? “As of August 2011, NASA employed more than 18,500 on-duty civil servants, at nine centers, headquarters and the NASA Shared Services Center.”⁸⁴ CERN and NASA are the golden apples, while NDE research is left comparatively speaking ‘to rot’.

So, let that sink in for a moment, NDE research works with tiny crumbs of funding, staff, researchers, support and respect and this is research that could answer the most pressing question of your existence; “Who am I? Is my consciousness all inside my head, or am I an immortal consciousness spirit?” Of course, if we had the money for the research, and we found that the above is in fact true, then we can expect we might see the impact of the new paradigm causing a collective awakening revolution! This of course would start with a serious reconsideration of the universal message brought back by the NDEers from the other side: our focus should be on ‘love’. And if our focus is on love rather than seeking and attaining the materialistic gains pressed on us by our capitalistic culture, which is required for that system to grow...well, we might consider

that such an awakening is not in a capitalistic system's best interest.

VI The Solutions

“The goal should be to fully integrate the reductionist materialistic view...with the holistic view emerging out of promising scientific disciplines such as quantum mechanics in a manner that also addresses consciousness and transcendent states of awareness.”

Dr. Edgar Mitchell
Astronaut

“We are getting in on the ground floor of how mind and consciousness work, and it’s a long way from what the presumptions of the so called ‘exact’ sciences are.”

Robert Jahn
Professor of Aerospace Science and Dean Emeritus
Princeton

“We don’t have to presuppose anything on insufficient evidence to explore this higher terrain of well being, we don’t have to take anything on faith. Given that people have had remarkable (transcendent) experiences in every context, while worshiping one god, while worshiping a hundred or worshiping none ... proves that a deeper principle is at work.”

Sam Harris
The Reason Project

If we acknowledge that something unknown and deeper seems to be going on, while admitting after a critical examination that we have failed to give the time, attention and resources to actually explore the topic fully, we are now obligated to come up with creative solutions to solve the problem. I'll start by tossing in my 2 cents worth of ideas and I'll throw in my Big Idea for free.

First, Leave The Box

And stay out!..at least until you finish reading this chapter. Then once you put this read down consider staying outside the box and be part of a movement like the Society for Scientific Explorations (SSE), whose members are serious about studying 'fringe' science, and who have trumped the status quo by securing tenure within the system before leaving so they don't risk their livelihood.

If the system doesn't respond or give you the answers you need, or the life you know you could be living, then consider that the more of us who step out and create a new alternative system the less we are victims of arrogant,

restrictive and/or corrupt system in place. If you have doubts that revolutions are taking place all over the world against corruption and for seeking the truth through transparency throughout our culture, think of *WikiLeaks* or the work of *Anonymous* and take a look at a few new documentaries. One is called, *The Thrive Movement*, which is ongoing and worldwide. Another, *We Are Legion: The Story of the Hacktivists*. These hacktivists number in the tens of thousands maybe millions all over the world with no leaders pointing their way. Another approach towards changing the status quo is outlined in the 2010 documentary, *Time for Change*, promoting a 'if you can't change the system, the walk away and do-it-yourself' approach. In places like Barcelona and Jakarta people are pro-active about rejecting the corruption of capitalism. They have decided waiting for political parties or institutions to change their world is futile, so they simply have decided to step out of the broken system to create their own alternative by creating new local currencies and working in social networks for starters.⁸⁵ You might also want to check out *Let Your Life Be A Friction To Stop The Machine* on TopDocumentaryFilms.com. To step up, look for a hand up from current groups and organizations

already established outside the box like the SSE or Occupy for instance. If you manage to leave the establishment behind entirely, lend a hand and sponsor someone to pull up and pull away from the old institutions of power and control. While showing up is touted as big part of being a success, not showing up means the old systems die. If for instance we would like the Catholic Church to reform, then quitting is the best way to voice dissent. Continuing to support an organization with its many levels of corruption (even though it's clear many of its members are not corrupt) by your presence or your money gives tacit approval, just as staying with an abusive man because "he does good things too" is not insistence on change.

And speaking of outdated systems that need to die...

Let's look at the political system (backed by unfettered capitalism) that currently dictates the direction of national policy but also the scope of much of scientific research dollars. Jacque Fresco, Futurist & Social Engineer writes in *Beyond Utopia*, "With the advent of future developments in

science and technology, we will assign more and more decision making to machines. At present this is evident in military systems in which electronic sensors maintain the ideal flight characteristics in advanced aircraft...Eventually the management of social systems will require electronic sensors interconnected with all phases of the social sequences thus eliminating the need for politics.”⁵⁵

Remember we are shooting for utopia and improving our game requires a hard look at what we are doing wrong. We wonder why so many politicians lie, cheat and steal but don't consider that it's simply that the people who lie, cheat and steal have no qualms about lying and cheating their way to the top. Expecting politicians who are beholden to the special interests that backed their campaign to solve complex problems that they are not trained to solve is a pipe dream we need to give up. Complex problems require input of the many vs. the easily corruptible few and they also require computers and scientists for fair allocation and management of shrinking resources. This is the future... if we want a future at all.

Second, End Status Quo Thinking

I rarely travel by plane, having been in one that was unable to land one bright and sunny morning. I was on my way to Spain where my product for the Olympics was being manufactured. We attempted to land four times and then we flew in circles until we ran out of fuel and they had time to foam the runway and teach us all about crash landings. This whole process took about one hour and forty-five minutes. You make promises to yourself at a time like this, "I'll be a better person. I'll value every day. I'll never get on a F#!%ing plane again!" My point is people's consistent question when I tell the story is "So, now are you afraid of flying?" "No, the flying part I'm totally fine with...it's the falling out of the sky at 30,000 ft. with 300 other screaming people that I'm avoiding." I'm being a stickler for accuracy here as we understand that 'afraid of flying' does include a fear of crashing, but 9 out of 10 critical thinkers agree, the phrase should be: "I'm afraid of crashing" not "I'm afraid of flying."

An example that is not benign and has wreaked havoc on society is this status quo phrase; “Don’t be a tattletale.” This single sound bite has led to over 50 years of bullies getting away with their dangerous deeds. If we take a single second to actually think about what we are saying, “Don’t be a tattletale”, we will note that this is not instructing kids to protect the bully that abuses them by keeping their dirty little acts secret it speaks instead to not telling a *TALE*: ‘an intentionally untrue report’, which is cruel and ruins a person’s reputation. The phrase is not, “Don’t be a tattletale”, which would in fact instruct us to protect bullies, but would be a sick dictate and most likely a concept generated by bullies to protect themselves.

The fact is we need to critically question our status quo common mantras and long-standing factoids by questioning the premise. For over ten years we stood at store checkouts scratching our heads when we were asked, ‘Paper or Plastic?’ The reason we were confused was because neither was the correct choice. If the question had been, “Paper, Plastic or Cloth” we could have easily solved the environmentally friendly riddle, just as we

finally figured out that there was no 'away' in the term 'throwaway', a phase that went unquestioned for decades.

The fact is that language informs our perspectives and by repeating, "The afterlife is unknowable and can only be grounded in belief", we are trapped by status quo thinking which means that even the most creative among us, like the screen writers of *Cloud Atlas*, couldn't get past it even as they imagined a future with colonization on another planet in another solar system.

Third, Come Together Right Now

According to the NDE reports, it looks like The Beatles might have gotten it right singing, 'All you need is Love', and so let's heed their advice to 'Come together right now!' The idea would be for all groups currently doing NDE research to work together, having one large central facility such as CERN and NASA with satellite facilities, allowing scientists from all over the world to share resources. There's one mission: 'Is there an afterlife and if so, what is its nature?' Let's just assume for now that the umbrella

organization is Eternea.org recently co-founded by Dr. Alexander after his NDE. Or maybe it's as simple as joining long established organizations such as Dr. Jeffery Long's NDERF (Near Death Experience Research Foundation), billed as "The largest NDE website in the world in 23 languages", IONS (The Institute of Noetic Science), which "For almost 40 years has explored the fundamental powers and potentials of consciousness using the tools of basic science", and IANDS (International Association for Near Death Studies), to new groups like Eternea, but clearly there should be a central campus to consolidate all efforts, funds, studies and scientific expertise working on this single key question.

Fourth, Collective Cash Creation

It's time to consider research funding is a bit of a rigged game. According to OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) around "Two-thirds of research and development in scientific and technical fields is carried out by industries, and 20% and 10% respectively by universities and government...an advantage to

government sponsored research is that the results are publicly shared, whereas with privately funded research the ideas are controlled by a single group. Funding of research by private companies is mainly motivated by profit, and are much less likely than governments to fund research projects solely for the sake of knowledge. The profit incentive causes researchers to concentrate their energies on projects which are perceived as likely to generate profits.”⁸⁶ Then there is the issue of special interest money using science to move their agenda forward... the problem here of course is only that we allow this to continue and so for starters we can simply stop this practice.

The out-of-the-box solution regarding funding to move our ‘Afterlife?’ research project forward is that it is completely anonymous. ‘Opting in’ is not an investment opportunity but instead it is strictly a donation. Special interests, like the Catholic Church or any religious organization with an agenda, could no longer control scientists. Instead they would work freely and not under the pressure of getting funding pulled if their results don’t match the desired outcome of any special interest’s agenda. Pressure could

be put on the government to allocate NASA funds to the 'exploration of inner space' and not exclusively outer space, as now is the case. Failing that, or possibly rejecting that option, all funds solicited would be an open request and not a request to individual organizations.

The research proposals for the latest study would simply be posted and transparent on the new umbrella website with a crowd-funding capital model with the twist that not a single person or group is identified who contributes to the fund. This actually is a big twist on the crowd-funding model, as 30% of the first investment for any product, or concept in the crowd-funding model normally comes from the initiating person's social capital (their network) and the next phase of funding from friends of friends. It's a monkey see/monkey do structure capitalizing on our tribal mind and 'belonging' to work. People only contribute if they see others they respect with skin in the game. Only 20% of the funding to the goal is from what is called 'stranger dollars'... those who get on-board not because they know someone who knows someone, but rather because the support in the number of people and the dollars involved look attractive enough to want in on the action.⁸⁷ However,

here's the proof that my twisted crowd-funding idea can and does work.

Many of us saw the video this past summer of Karen Klein, the poor woman being tormented by middle school children on the bus she was monitoring. "A guy named Max decided to launch a campaign to get Karen a vacation. As of July 1st, the campaign had raised over \$650,000 from more than 30,000 people, (all stranger dollars), far surpassing its goal of \$5,000." ⁸⁸ Which means that with a compelling enough story and video that goes viral it doesn't matter who you know, if people feel it's the right thing to do they will donate.

We only need to step back and look at Wikipedia, a simple straightforward website, but one that provides amazing information through crowd-sourcing. Jimmy Wales reported on The Colbert Show on Jan 7th, 2013 that there are 85,000 writers and editors who volunteer their time and over 29 million dollars was donated in 2012...hundreds of thousands of dollars of stranger dollars in days! So it's Important to note that in the end it is simply a compelling idea that moves people to act. This model plays out in the

latest Occupy action. “Rolling Jubilee is a StrikeDebt.org project that buys debt for pennies on the dollar, but instead of collecting it, abolishes it.” Their mission, “Together we can liberate debtors at random through a campaign of mutual support, good will, and collective refusal. Debt resistance is just the beginning. Join us as we imagine and create a new world based on the common good, not Wall Street profits.” As of 12:33PM, Nov. 13, 2012 they had raised \$166,613 to abolish \$3,337,094 of debt.⁸⁹ These numbers doubled only 6 days later. By Jan 14, 2013 \$543,177 was raised abolishing 10,868,373 of debt. It may not be a sustainable solution to the U.S. debt crisis but on a micro scale for those families who will start with a clean slate, keep their home and be debt free it’s a miracle...all brought to you by people you’ve never met!

Simply starting a social media ‘crowd-funding with a twist’ campaign, ‘Who The Hell Do We Think We Are? I’ll throw in 5 Bucks to Find Out!’, could also raise millions of dollars from all over the world for funding consciousness survival research. Please show me the person who wouldn’t donate the cost of a cup of coffee and a muffin to have the ‘Who am I?’ question answered! This would provide the

cash flow that has been so sorely lacking for research regarding consciousness survival.

Still, what about traditionally structured grants such as the currently active *Immortality Project* to fund dualist research?

Headline Summer 2012: The John Templeton Foundation has awarded a three-year \$5 million grant to University of California Riverside philosopher John Fischer to research aspects of immortality, including near-death experiences and the impact of belief in an afterlife on human behavior, according to a UCR report. The Immortality Project will solicit research proposals from scientists, philosophers and theologians whose work will be reviewed by respected leaders in their fields and published in academic and popular journals. “We have a deep human need to figure out what happens to us after death, “ said Fischer, principal investigator of the Immortality Project. “Anecdotal reports of near-death experiences, out-of-body experiences and past lives are plentiful, but it is important to subject these reports to careful analysis,” Fischer said.⁹⁰

It’s not that it couldn’t be pursued, but the stipulation would be that any award would be donated anonymously

and all research findings would be public and posted on the umbrella website and submitted to any and all journals with no ownership rights by any organization. The key point is that any funding organization or person donating has only this in common: they are interested in '*finding* the truth' not '*funding* their truth'. The main consideration is that NDE research, unlike CERN and NASA research, has been cut out of the main stream funding game and so it's time to move on. This fact requires a do-it-ourselves/out of the box solution and requires we ignore the system that may not be breached, as we struggle for the elusive hole-in-one.

Fifth, Rework AWARE

As outlined, currently AWARE study is being conducted at various hospitals around the world. Unfortunately, the fact that many hospitals are involved, which might lead some to believe that a solid methodological study is taking place, is simply not the case if the same random picture hanging approach, which was poorly designed in the pilot study, is replicated.

As a conceptual designer it was very easy for me to understand what went wrong with AWARE early on, simply imagining what the out-of-body experience might be like. My thoughts: So, a person has just died, and they find themselves outside their body and they are watching people scrambling around the table to revive them and they are being pulled by a white light...and in the midst of this confusion and shock they are going to make it a point to find a random, meaningless picture facing the ceiling somewhere in the room? Fat chance! My thoughts were confirmed recently when I heard an interview with Bruce Grayson, author, co-editor of *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences*, who conceived of the Greyson scale to measure the aspects of near-death experiences and was the Editor-in-Chief of *The Journal of Near Death Studies* from 1982 through 2007. He was being questioned about the AWARE study, where he confirmed it to be the same design as the pilot study. He stated:

“There are hidden visual targets being placed in the hospital rooms of cardiac patients, up near the ceilings facing upwards so you can only see the targets if you are up near the ceilings looking down. These are being placed in almost all the rooms of

the hospitals... Now, when I mention this study to people having had an NDE, their reaction is incredulous as their impression is this: 'Why would someone who is just out of their body for the first time and is having this incredible experience think to look for a target that you have hidden in the corner of the room?' It's totally irrelevant to the experience...why would they look at it and why would they remember it? There's no motivation and it's not relevant to them. So, I'm not sure if it will be a successful study or not in that regard." ⁹¹

Note... '*In that regard*' is the important and exact aspect of the study that can prove a veridical experience and confirm consciousness outside of the body at death. It's more than frustrating to have this first extensive study so blatantly ill designed, so I'm taking over.

My Re-Design of AWARE

Let's say we have funded a new NDE research facility, which also is a cardiac hospital, or we simply modify operating rooms in cardiac hospitals. In the operating rooms computer monitors replace cardboard static pictures, which are elevated and facing away from prying eyes. Instead of one picture that can be easily viewed by

curious staff by standing on a chair and then likely discussing and contaminating the research, the computer is set to display simple random images changing every 10 seconds. Now, when a patient flat-lines the protocol to follow would be to speak to the patient since NDEers report that they hear conversations clearly while they are out of their bodies. So, let's simply respect that this might be true and speak to patients saying for instance, "Mr. Smith, you have just had a cardiac arrest and may be out of your body at this time. As we are attempting to revive you please go to the monitor in the corner of the room and remember a simple image displayed. In the event that you wish to return to your body this report will confirm your out-of-body awareness during resuscitation." The picture now becomes a meaningful target for the patient and they can take note of the simple image and if revived the computer will have recorded the time linked to each image. This method will provide accurate and valuable information regarding the point at which the patient saw the image.

This method would eliminate the push-back from materialists regarding for instance Dr. Alexander's NDE, which Sam Harris rightly noted provides no way of knowing

that the entire experience didn't happen when his brain was shutting down or coming back on line. If Pam Reynolds had been in a room with a computer monitor and given these instructions then an image could have been linked to a time when her brain was flat-lined and we would now have the proof we seek.

What is of great concern is that the AWARE study is due to release its findings any day and as the mass media has latched onto this particular study and without a careful and complete analysis regarding the shortcomings of the design, the reports may just be simply that 'no patient saw a target during a reported OBE'. This could generate the exact report that materialistic status-quo science is happy to support and widely circulate..."See, we were right!"

Sixth, Move Forward With A Big Idea.

I started out by mentioning that I'm a bit of a creative thinker, and maybe it's about time I prove it. (Just a reminder, creativity does not require agreement nor approval...think Lady Gaga.) For many creative thinkers

the time that we are most actively coming up with ideas is not while we are busy writing but rather during hypnogogic or hypnopompic sleep. Both are 'half-asleep' states, the former falling to sleep and the latter awakening. Thomas Edison was known to value his hypnogogic sleep to the extent that he did a good part of his research this way - sitting in a comfortable chair in his lab with BB's in his clenched fists he would use the arm rests to extend his hands. Below were metal pie pans on the floor. As he began to drift off his fists would relax and the balls falling into the pans would jolt him from his sleep and he would quickly jot down his revelations. My prime creative time is early morning. In my hypnopompic sleep state I seem to answer questions that have been bouncing around in my head, sometimes questions that have been in the back of my mind for years. In 2000, this was an idea I had that seemed to hit two birds with one stone. I believe it's an idea that deserves a fair shake.

The Life and Death of an Idea

Before I lay out my idea it's important to note the stages an idea should go through to give it a proper hearing. I developed a process that combined many of the creative

processes and theories that have been around for the last hundred years by consolidating, refining and enhancing to develop a design method called, *Creative Space for Innovation*. Here it is in a nutshell: First, an idea is born in the 'Dream Room', which is a physical space or a virtual area if space does not allow. *Anything is possible* in the Dream Room, and everything in this room, as in all the following rooms, is designed to support this end. Next, the idea moves in the 'Reality Room' where all the aspects of *how this idea can work* are explored. Next the idea moves into the 'Critic Room' where *the list of concerns of what may not work*, are generated. Finally, the idea moves into the 'Delivery Room' where *the idea is launched* as a product such as the amazing iPhone, or as a concept such as Goggle Earth.

Now for my 'Dream' idea and then I'll note the benefits revealed in the Reality Room and then only generally speak to the concerns of what would be flushed out in the Critic Room. If you find yourself noting what 'won't work' the minute you hear this idea consider yourself a critic. The biggest problem with presenting a new idea is making sure that critics are not able to cut them down before they have

a chance to sprout. Critics fail to understand that every mighty oak was once only a nut!

Step into the Dream Room...

As we looked at NDE's, I noted that there is the issue of verifying an out-of-body experience, which requires that a person must be in a controlled setting while dying, which is why a cardiac hospital is being used for the AWARE study. But even in the AWARE study, the hospitals are not specifically designed for the event. The staff's primary concern is the procedure of the cardiac arrest as it should be, which means they are attending to instructing the patient in case of an NDE or OBE in their 'spare' time during this procedure.

What is required is a smaller facility specifically designed to study the OBE phenomenon with two teams, doctors to resuscitate a dying person, and scientists to focus on the OBE and NDE reports. The trick to having such a facility work is not to rely on randomness, but rather to do a planned stand-still operation as Pam Reynolds underwent for her tumor. This state-of-the-art operating room would be equipped for doctors to perform this Deep Hypothermic

Circulatory Arrest (DHCA) operation only. “This is a surgical technique that involves cooling the body of the patient and stopping blood circulation, which puts the patient in a state of hibernation at 12 – 18 degrees Celsius. In this state the person has no breathing, heartbeat, or brain activity for up to one hour. Blood is drained from the body to eliminate blood pressure. The patient is considered clinically dead during the operation. Although normally used in cardiac surgery to allow operation on the aortic arch and in neurosurgery to repair brain aneurysms”⁹² it could just as importantly, be used to study the NDE/OBE^b phenomenon. In order to do such a study however participants are required. So, who exactly would these participants be...willing to endure a ‘death’

^b This research center could also be a testing facility to those people who are able to navigate at will an out-of-body experience. In an interview on Skeptiko, the author of the book, *Navigating the Out-Of-Body Experience*, Graham Nicholls stated, “There’s so little out-of-body experience research that’s actually been done. I think there’s still so much potential here to look into all of those kinds of questions...(and)I think it’s crazy there’s so little that’s been done and unfortunately I haven’t really even come across many scientists who are open to doing research in this area. I’ve spoken to a whole range of scientists since our last interview, in fact, about doing some veridical research and doing some research in this area. Most or all of them have either been too busy with other things or not had the resources or whatever. So it’s a real area that’s just under-explored.”⁹³ Of course we now know why scientists are reluctant to get involved with these studies.

operation? The demographics are more numerous than we would like to imagine.

Elderly people who are ready to die but our current inhumane system forces them to hang around and suffer until the government, insurance companies, and religious organizations like the Catholic church tell them they can go, could produce more volunteers than required. Lynn Weitzel, a retired career hospice nurse summarized the situation after noting that most people want a 'good death', which is defined as 'dying on your own terms'. "While 90% of people want to die in their homes, 80% instead die in hospitals or other organizations such as re-hab or assisted living, 40% of those in hospitals spend ten days or more in ICU's, with bright lights, and little privacy, where loved ones are disempowered and distant...a dehumanizing and demeaning death. 50% of conscious patients are in moderate to severe pain almost constantly and 25% die with arms lashed down to their sides to prevent them from pulling out tubes."⁹⁴ Our current system regarding death with few rights and little mercy for the dying means that it is a demographic we could help by reducing pain and fear by

providing a DHCA. But this push back to the system might be a fight too big to take on.

People who are suicidal might also be interested in checking out their decision before making it final, another tragically likely group of volunteers. For instance, “So far in 2012, the number of suicides among active-duty military personnel in all branches is up 22 percent compared with the same time last year. In 2011, a total of 301 troops took their lives. This year’s total may reach as many as one death per day from suicide. “That is an epidemic,” Mr. Panetta told the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) last month. “Something is wrong.”⁹⁵ Yes, something is terribly wrong, but instead of addressing the underlying issue, which is illegal wars fought for natural resources rather than the justifiable reason to attack other countries for the self-defense of our nation, the military’s plan of action is to “take firearms out of the hands of ‘at risk’ soldiers.”⁹⁶ If I were part of the team creating policy to address this growing epidemic, I would start with a campaign to make good on the promises made to Vets (one in three homeless are Vets), and I would promote an NDE educational workshop for those who are seriously

suicidal. When completed they would have an option to sign up for a DHCA which could provide an NDE. But if the military isn't willing to deliver to Vets the college education promised to them... only 3% of Vets finish college, so we know that a program entitled: "Checking out your death decision before you make it final" well...when dealing with the military clearly it's an idea that would be DOA.

There are people however who are already scheduled to die, and so focusing on them as participants for a DHCA actually makes sense. I speak of death row inmates. Instead of facing the 'Death Penalty' we could consider the less controversial, "Near Death Penalty".

The Big Idea...The DHCA Near Death Penalty

The United States has the highest documented incarceration rate in the world—"742 adults per 100,000. There are some 2.2 million adults incarcerated in federal and state prisons and local jails. About 5 million are on probation or parole."⁹⁷ From 2007-2011 the number of people sentenced to die for their crimes was 504 with 220 people ultimately being executed.⁹⁸ Following through on

the death penalty means that people are put to death...permanently. It's the permanency of the execution that has a lot of people up in arms. According to the Death Penalty Information Center, fewer than thirty-four states have the death penalty, which means some of that arm waving has had an affect. Still, the debate rages between those who think the death penalty delivers justice and those who see it as barbaric. It's time to consider an alternative solution that could put an end to this ongoing, costly, divisive debate - yet another dividing this country.

Consider "The Near Death Penalty" as a way to reach a compromise.

People are on death row because of a horrendous crime that people and the courts have judged is deserving of death. By inducing death through a Deep Hypothermic Circulatory Arrest operation, we are insuring that their requirement for justice and the law is being met as the inmate is put to death. For those people who hold a position that it is counterintuitive to kill those who kill, this solution also meets their position because a DHCA is

reversible... the sentenced-to-death inmate does die, but is brought back to life. Both sides of the debate have met their goal.

The key aspect and the big win for society is that during the DHCA there's a chance of them having an NDE and/or an OBE. In the case of an OBE, they would be instructed as outlined above, "Go to the target image on the computer screen", with the instructions to report back after their resuscitation to provide the crucial research required to determine if consciousness exists beyond death.

Another point of controversy and debate regarding the death penalty is the method of administering death. What is the most humane way to kill a person? The fact is that being in a controlled operating room with skilled doctors and being gently put under by anesthesia is identical to the painless way any patient is put under for DHCA in order to remove a tumor. If however the death penalty supporters want inmates to endure at least some pain while dying (after all most of these people did gruesome acts), they only have to be educated regarding the pain associated with the life review. The NDE is a quick and profound

'rehabilitation program' that currently has no match for positive and lasting after-effects in a person's life. Here's a summary of what an efficient (under an hour is the length of the DHCA) and effective life review can do in light of an NDE. Dr. Jan Holden provides an overview in a lecture regarding her 30-year study of NDE research. Again, if the person goes into the light they very often report a life review, "I experienced every moment of my life but was not judged instead was on the receiving end of my actions." The common after-effects include:

- ❖ People lose their fear of death but not necessarily the dying process.
- ❖ Become less materialistic and more altruistic.
- ❖ Enhanced sense of self-esteem as they understand that their life has meaning and that the universe is aware and cares about their well-being.
- ❖ Become more humble as they understand the vastness of the universe.
- ❖ Return with a sense of meaning and purpose.
- ❖ Move away from organized religion because it actually represents a barrier in their sense of connectedness to something that is higher.
- ❖ Become more psychic and empathic and research confirms electromagnetic disturbance, the malfunctioning of electrical devices by their presence.
- ❖ Difficult to be around a lot of people as they are picking up too much of the emotional energy of the crowd.
- ❖ Report that the purpose of life is to love one another and acquire knowledge.
- ❖ Difficult to speak of experience in language difficult to translate into words.

- ❖ Social stress on relationships because the NDEer has changed and that might create a non-common view of life.
- ❖ Shift towards service careers.
- ❖ Experience integration takes an average of 7 years.⁷¹

In a prospective research study in *The Lancet* by Van Lommel he noted:

“An NDE was linked to high scores in spiritual items such as interest in the meaning of one’s own life, and social items such as showing love and accepting others. The 13 patients who had superficial NDE underwent the same specific transformational changes as those who had a core experience. The 8-year follow-up included 23 patients with an NDE that had been affirmed at 2-year follow-up. 11 patients had died and one could not be interviewed. Patients could still recall their NDE almost exactly.”⁹⁹

A billionaire having an NDE walked away from it all to work with youth at risk while a mafia bagman who was shot in the chest and left to die, “Had a beautiful experience, in which he felt the presence of God and unconditional

love...he quit the Mafia and now counsels delinquent boys. His girlfriend complains, 'Rocky just doesn't care about money, about things of substance anymore.'"¹⁰⁰

Important side note: Even if research were to prove that consciousness does not survive, one has to ask what would be the responsible thing to do with a 'treatment' that has such a highly positive result? "Skeptics and believers all agree that death provokes great anxiety, often detracting from the quality of the life we live. If this 'cure' for death anxiety is purely the product of brain function—in a materialist sense, the secretion and absorption of various chemicals—then pinning down the exact mechanism that makes this (positive NDE) possible seems the most humane thing we could do for ourselves and each other", wisely notes the journalist and author of *Fringe-ology*, Steve Volk.¹⁰¹ Why provide this positive experience for the most violent among us? Clearly, the after-effects of an NDE are ones that the most violent need the most.

So, there it is...an idea that can provide a compromise regarding the death penalty debate where both positions are honored. Meanwhile, at least one in five of the patients

can be expected to *remember* an NDE, and through the experience of the OBE possibly provide the paradigm shifting, game changing research through the veridical reports. Finally, another huge benefit to society as well as the individual is that an NDE will provide a cost effective rehabilitation that could give inmates a chance to truly repent their crimes as well as provide valuable peer-to-peer mentoring to other inmates.

No matter the results, the important issue is that the debate about the death penalty could die and the question of consciousness survival would be more fully explored and maybe answered, leading us away from speculation and our reliance on belief and much closer to the truth.

Now that I've laid out the concept and why it could work, I'll take a moment to calm the critics down to address some of the issues popping into their heads. The main ethical point I stand on is this: Killing someone temporarily is substantially morally superior than killing someone permanently. (If you are questioning this just ask anyone who has had a DHCA procedure, which saved his or her life.) Will all people who undergo a DHCA be able to be

resuscitated? No, just as in any medical major or minor procedure, which requires the patient be anesthetized, there are no guarantees - we lose people in operating rooms by the thousands every day. But the angst we have over losing an innocent is by far more tragic than losing a person who is guilty of kidnapping and killing a young child for instance and is on death row after having been found guilty and is in fact already scheduled to die. What of the proponents of the death penalty who aren't satisfied that a person is only killed temporarily? Here I'm just going to revert to being a 10 year-old and say, "We did kill them...you never said they had to stay dead!" (A loop hole in the law used to stop the criticism in it's tracks.)

But that's not what's bugging the critics - this is what's bugging them... "Hey wait one minute, you write about experimenting on captive and vulnerable populations!" My suggestion is that they tighten their thinking caps. First, the DHCA is a procedure used on the general patient population. It is not experimental medicine except to the extent that all of our medicine is 'experimental' until the new & improved method is developed. In fact, it is the patient population in need of an advanced operation that

makes them technically the 'guinea pigs'. So the argument of experimenting on the prison population with a DHCA is not at all accurate, anymore than giving them a newly developed root canal is 'experimenting' on them.

There was a report completed by historian Jon Harkness who did his Ph.D. on the topic of abuses in using the prison population as research subjects, and his conclusion was this; "The authoritarian prison structure made meaningful consent to participate in research all but impossible." However, it doesn't follow that research must end, it indicates instead that the authoritarian prison system must be overhauled to insure that inmates are not suffering by the authoritarian prison structure's failings on any and/or all levels.

Still, the critics might add, "What choice do these death row inmates *really* have if this is offered over the option of death?" Patients with a tumor don't consider the choice given by their doctor "If you don't do this you will certainly die" as being coerced by the use of fear rather they understand that the option to risk death is superior to the option of sure death. So the offer and option for inmates to

have a DHCA is no different when they are facing execution on death row. Also, by giving inmates a choice when they currently have none, is clearly more not less ethical. If inmates (who have lost their freedoms not their minds) were educated about NDE's, the operation, and its risks (the same as they were for Pam Reynolds in the case noted earlier), then they would have the option of picking death for an hour vs. irreversible death.

So, most important and what bears repeating is that the research aspect is *not about regarding the DHCA operation or using the inmates as the testing population*. As mentioned above this is a procedure that is not in the experimental phase. The only aspect of the process can be considered 'research' is request and the following up process: the inmate is asked during the hour that they are clinically 'dead' to go to a computer screen and memorize any image that they see there during their possible OBE, and report what they saw after their resuscitation. Such a process is not experimentation on the prison population anymore than asking a patient having an eye exam, "Which is better one or two?"

If you are a critic who thinks that to offer a humane option to those either wishing, as in the case of the elderly and/or chronically ill or those scheduled to die is unethical, then I suspect you have empathy issues. No citizen of a democracy is truly free until we provide individuals a non-violent and peaceful way to leave the planet if they wish to go, rather than the current system which insists and supports suffering for often years on end. This is torture... and torture of course is arguably the absolute worst thing in life is deeply unethical. I'm tempted to suggest that if you are confused about this then you need to be tortured to clear up your confusion, but clarity is not one of the benefits of torture, so just trust me.

The fact remains, supporters of the death penalty will get their way, sort of...and 'sort of' for them is the better than no death penalty at all. There are states on their way to abolishing the death penalty completely, so for these hard core death penalty advocates, some death is better than no death, right? States like California, who currently voted on Prop 34 on the ballot to repeal the death penalty, which did not pass, may logically see the Near Death Penalty as a compromise step. "Ironically, California's death row

inmates did not support Prop 34 because it would eliminate the funding for lawyers and investigators who could prove their innocence”, the San Francisco Chronicle reports. Opponents of Prop 34 say that people on death row have earned their sentence due to their horrific crimes. They also say that the death penalty system needs to be reformed, not repealed.” The Near Death Penalty could be an acceptable reform to what they see as a currently “broken system”. Another concern of those who supported Prop 34 is the fact that “Over 140 innocent men and women on death row have been exonerated and freed since 1973”,⁶³ a justifiable claim and one that would be eliminated with the Near Death Penalty in place.

Isn't the DHCA operation too costly? Much less than if an actual procedure like the removal of a brain tumor were to be done. Meanwhile not requiring an actual procedure means that the entire event is the DHCA portion only, which reduces cost and risks and allows the team to concentrate on studying the dying process and the OBE aspect of the study. While the research center will be funded as noted above in the funding section, the cost to the state for participation in the study would be minimal.

In the end, it is a radical new concept but it is the saner approach that could end the death penalty debate which rages on in this county costing millions of dollars and hours of wo/manpower year after year, a staggering number which insists we move on past status quo policy and status quo thinking and change our tactics.

Now For The *Very* Un-stereotyped Application Of The Idea

Will Durant, my grandmother Durant's cousin, wrote with his wife Ariel the exhaustive *Story of Civilization*, "An eleven-volume set of books covering Western history written over a span of more than four decades. It totals four million words across nearly 10,000 pages." As Will and Ariel aged they took time out to write the book, *The Lessons of History*. In it they stated, "New situations do arise requiring novel, un-stereotyped responses; hence development, in the higher organisms, requires a capacity for experiment and innovation – the social correlates of variation and mutation. Social evolution is an interplay of custom with origination."¹⁰²

So, let's consider a bit of sorely needed social evolution through experimentation and innovation. In analyzing the prison system for instance we often focus on the inmates, but the prison population technically also includes those who run the prisons, and they are not immune to crime. Vertical power means a few on the top, and those with absolute power are often easily and absolutely corrupted. Any person controlling a system, which holds others in such dehumanizing conditions should, as part of the job qualification, be willing to undergo a DHCA. The hope would be that they have a full-blown NDE, which could provide the deeper understanding of the justice of the policies in place. Pam Reynolds and others endured a DHCA to extract a tumor to save a single life, it seems only fair that any person who is responsible for locking-up thousands of people (over 80,000 in this country currently are kept in what is universally understood as torture: solitary confinement) should get a glimpse of the pain and agony others feel by such sweeping and inhumane practices. Meanwhile, many of these well-connected power players are often the relatively privileged and connected who are protected from ever suffering the fate they assign to others. This is a poorly designed system and can be

changed, but the mistake is looking to those in power to change it.

Undergoing a DHCA could be a base qualification for those in *any* important and far reaching power position because until they see beyond power, fame & fortune, they are often captured by it and millions suffer because of their tragic and sometimes morally misplaced focus. We only have to look back at history to see the advantages such a policy could provide if required for any country's leaders.

Historically, rites of passage were designed for those in line to hold power. Willingness to endure those rites was the morally responsible position as it acknowledges the care and rights of the many over the possible abuses of the one. As the tribe's health and well being is in the trust of one person's judgment and integrity, an exploration to a deeper reality would anchor leadership to that deeper reality. Using the DHCA as a modern rite of passage would be considered Phase II of the application of my concept. At the very least those who have had an NDE and manifest a deep sense of compassion and understanding, should be those supported and encouraged to hold power positions.

VII Conclusion

*“Imagine there’s no heaven,
it’s easy if you try.
No hell below us,
above us only sky...
Imagine all the people living for today.
You may say I’m a dreamer,
but I’m not the only one.
I hope some day you’ll join us
and the world will live as one.”*
John Lennon

*There is no political solution
To our troubled evolution
Have no faith in constitution
There is no bloody revolution
We are spirits in the material world
Our so-called leaders speak
With words they try to jail you
The subjugate the meek
But it's the rhetoric of failure
We are spirits in the material world
Are spirits in the material world*
Sting

Summed up poetically are our two likely scenarios regarding the question of the Afterlife; our consciousness

dies with our bodies, no heaven or hell below us ...or we are spirits having a human experience. John Lennon sang about a materialistic world view suggesting that if we all embrace this truth the big pay off is that it will finally put us on the same page creating a one world perspective regarding our ultimate reality. He is correct, but he failed to imagine that the second scenario could also do the same. When and if we have stronger empirical evidence that consciousness in fact does survive, this reality also means the world may 'live as one'...with the possible added bonus of knowing that love just might be the essence and engine of the universe.

In the 1960's there was an explosion that rocked the box that had become very strong and rigid. A generation heard the call of Timothy Leary and his high hippies, who invited them to look past the status quo and its political and religious structures and explore the nature of their own consciousness. Threats began to echo off the walls of the box as millions left it behind for greener pastures. That long, strange trip provided insights to a generation about an alternative view of life and death even after it was forced back underground. If there's any doubt that the old

system remained in place, I submit one single piece of conclusive evidence from a headline (10/30/12) in *Denver Westword*: “Marijuana: One pot bust every 42 seconds, FBI statistics show”. In the late 60’s, we were heading ‘up up and away in our beautiful balloon’ soon to see the age of Aquarius dawn. Never for a moment did we fathom a future where ‘the man’ still ruled over our right to a safer option (compared to alcohol) to an altered state of consciousness, while at the same time reducing scientists attempting to answer the question of ‘consciousness surviving death’ to little more than crazies wandering around in a world called ‘woowoo’.

In spite of these pressures, over these last 30 years of PSI and NDE research, what can we report about death and the continuation of consciousness? Putting aside the efforts of many individuals and their life’s work collectively, we are not moving fast enough nor far enough. I might have convinced you that there is an orchestrated attempt to continue a policy of underfunding and suppression of studies dealing with the afterlife, or you might not yet be convinced, but one has to look no further than to the

world-renowned website TED to note a single piece of clear evidence.

TED: *A World of Ideas* covers the latest, best research in Technology, Entertainment and Design, and it has quickly become the world's innovative marketplace 'magazine'. Its format is for leading researchers to present their topic in less than twenty minutes, summarizing and captivating their audience with the easy to digest version of their findings. Yet, one quick search shows that there has never been a single NDE talk featured on TED. None of the leading NDE researchers, Pim van Lommel, Bruce Greyson, Raymond Moody, Kenneth Ring, Penny Sartori, Jan Holden, Jeffery Long to name only a few, have stepped onto TED's main stage. It will be interesting to note if Eben Alexander, our NDE neurosurgeon from Harvard, with his meteoric leap into the mainstream press manages to break the TED lockout. And speaking of the mainstream media, it's very important to note that the media conglomerates in the U.S. have consolidated down from 50 in 1983, to just five as of 2004,¹⁰³ making '*This Message Is Not Approved*' lock-out much easier.

We are left with a few choices, fight the system for another 40 years or do-it-ourselves. The latter is what I am advocating because we can and must do better. DIY means becoming the transformative force willing to address this as a major problem, being relentless in the pursuit of the vision, becoming social entrepreneurs backed by the power of a compelling idea. In the past operating outside the box was tough, but today thanks to the internet we bypass many of the political constraints by using networks, open source programs for information and crowd-sourcing for funding and ideas.

How do we get from here to there? Drive! Beyond the metaphors of a practiced golf drive seeking the utopian hole-in-one, and the dualist driving a VW Van looking for a paved road, is the need to find the will...the *drive* to break out of the status quo. Who's got the time, the energy, and the motivation that radical solutions require?

“As the year 2011 began on Jan. 1, the oldest members of the Baby Boom generation celebrated their 65th birthday. In fact, on that day, today, and for every day for the next 19 years, 10,000 baby boomers will reach age 65. The

aging of this huge cohort of Americans (26% of the total U.S. population are Baby Boomers) will dramatically change the composition of the country.”¹⁰⁴ As this generation was the first to leave the box en masse in the 60’s, many collapsing back into the system when they hit parenthood, we can again rise up to the original goal of ‘discovering the true nature of consciousness’. Let’s face it... we’ll have plenty of time on our collective hands as the typical golfing and bridge retirement semi-retired with our parents. We are seeking what is sometimes referred to as ‘encore careers’, crafting jobs that may offer a continued income but which emphasize meaning, significance, and contribution to the world. As it is human nature to find purpose and meaning, clearly Boomers recognize that everything hinges on our *knowing* of who we *really* are, and what better legacy could we leave behind than focusing on and finally delivering the answer?

With all the work we see to be done in a world on the brink of disaster on many fronts, the first order of business is to answer ‘Who am I?’ so each day we can begin rooted in that knowledge which is key in answering each question we confront. It is a lack of a cohesive world-view regarding

our ultimate nature that is a major contributor to our personal, societal and global chaos. To move forward, all organizations currently sidelined by the reductionist materialist status quo system should join forces. As rejected splinter groups they have little to no resources to fight the good fight. Coming together to fund a centralized research center for more analysis of NDE anecdotal reports, but most importantly attaining solid empirical scientific research of the OBE/NDE must be the mission.

Meanwhile accepting science for what it is...not a god, but rather the best tool we have, while accepting that this tool like any tool can't deliver 100%, 100% of the time. We didn't wait for the study of the orphaned infants in WWII to confirm that children who were not touched died. Since the beginning of time we knew touch, cuddling, and loving our babies was required for them to thrive. We acted without the benefit of the research findings telling us this was indeed key to an infant's survival. Sometimes the best that science can do is to confirm what we already know to be true.

What if it's all about Love?

“The guides taught us that doctrine and creed and race meant nothing. No matter what we believed, we were all children joined under one God, and the only rule was God's true law - do unto others as you would have them do unto you. We should treat all people as if they were a part of our soul because they were. All living things in the universe were connected to one another. They said soon *humanity would mature enough* to assume a higher place in the universal scheme of things, but until then we must learn acceptance and tolerance and love for each other.”

May Eulitt's

NDE account

“At any rate, the idea remains that for this place to start feeling and looking like heaven is to create the love felt there... here. I would like to see that on this planet and I know it can be done. If I need to, I will come back here all over again to make it happen.”

David Oakford

NDE account

“My understanding of love was forever changed. The majesty and glory of that vision was an ineffable moment defining forever more, the direction of my new truth.”

Linda Stewart

NDE account

As we move into the hard science surrounding the NDE, we don't want to ignore the messages given by those who have had an NDE. If consciousness is shown to indeed survive the NDE reports will serve as the best evidence about the possible nature of the afterlife. The consistent theme throughout NDE accounts that *love* is the ultimate essence of the universe, means we could start promoting this reality as if it is true, as Stanford University's CCARE (Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education) now does in part because there's a good chance it is and because there is absolutely no downside to this strategy.

Even if there is 'no hell below us and above us only sky' on a planet of 7 billion, a deeper understanding of love is possibly the single resource that can save the species from extinction. What is loving about attacking other countries to rape resources for your own gain? What is loving about dropping bombs on frightened people because you are frightened? What is loving about imagining that your family deserves more piece of mind, safety, clean water or comfort than a family on the other side of the world? What is loving (or smart) about voting for your own self-interests

when your fate is so closely tied to the fate of the entire planet? All these are examples of an egocentric system where only one's own sufferings or benefits matter. We only have to turn on *Fox News*, a religious right mouthpiece, to get a glimpse of the degree of egocentricity in analysis of the U.S. status quo foreign policy, which goes unquestioned...at least by many Fox watchers. Meanwhile, morality requires a 'tit for tat' plural view, a scientifically researched and confirmed working social exchange that is responsible for our evolutionary success.

Chris Hedges, the brilliant American Pulitzer-Prize winning war correspondent writes in his essay *Acts of Love*; "The false covenants of race, nationalism, the glorious cause, class and gender compete, with great seduction, (are) against the covenant of love. These sham covenants—and we see them dangled before us daily—are based on exclusion and hatred rather than universality. These sham covenants do not call us to humility and compassion, to an acknowledgement of our own imperfections, but to a form of self-exaltation disguised as love. Those most able to defy these sham covenants are those who are grounded in love, those who find their meaning and worth in intimate

relationships that cut through the loneliness and isolation of the human condition.”

As NDEers come back from what they call ‘Home’ focused on waging Love, then shouldn’t we consider that it may be the best path for both our physical survival and our spiritual evolution? It’s time we heed the message and face the challenge or suffer the outcome! In the book *A General Theory of Love* the warning is clear “In a culture whose members are ravenous for love and ignorant of its working, too many will invest their love in a barren corporate lot, and will reap a harvest of dust.”

An invitation

BeliefIsSoLastCentury.org

“Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They're not fond of rules. And they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can't do is ignore them. Because they change things. They push the human race forward. And while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do.”

Apple Inc.

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