

make love to an elephant which he believed to be a reincarnation of his wife, having recognised her “by the naughty glint in her eye” (p. 172). However, in the same part we also find a discussion about the nature of consciousness, memory and the human brain, as well as an examination of alternative explanations for reincarnation claims, from fraud and cryptomnesia, through Akashic records and super-psi, to spirit possession and multiple universes. In the fourth part, the Implications, the author rounds up the cases which may be regarded as providing the best evidence for rebirth from all over the world and looks again at the evidence of birthmarks.

There is no satisfactory explanation or theoretical framework for the range of evidence that goes under the label of reincarnation, and, naturally, there is no attempt to provide one here. The concepts of karma and destiny can be used to rationalise almost any event, but the fundamental question that these stories highlight always returns to the problem of the nature of consciousness. In the final chapter we look briefly both at the role of consciousness in the universe, and the specific ideas which seek a mechanism to integrate the evidence of reincarnation cases into the larger picture. These include Ian Stevenson’s psychophore (what might be regarded as a reduced astral body, a vehicle carrying some of the memories and characteristics of the previous person to the new one), and some thoughts on the idea of cloud consciousness analogous to cloud computing.

Clearly, a volume this size cannot cover the subject in depth, but it does contain pointers in all the relevant directions. Informative but not tedious, humorous without condescension, it is a worthwhile tribute to Ian Stevenson, to whose memory it is dedicated.

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THE SCIENCE OF GHOSTS: SEARCHING FOR SPIRITS OF THE DEAD by Joe Nickell. Prometheus Books, 2012. 412 pp £16.99 (paperback). ISBN 978 1 61614 585 9

The front cover describes Joe Nickell as “the world’s only professional paranormal investigator”; the back cover amends this to “the world’s only full-time, professional, science-based paranormal investigator”. Either way, I think a number of people would disagree. Since 1995, Nickell has been Senior Research Fellow for the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), subsequently renamed the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry (CSI). This research has been a continuation of work he started in 1969 when he first sat in on a séance for a radio show. Since then, Nickell has travelled the world lecturing on and investigating claims of the paranormal. This book is a compilation of some of the cases that have come his way.

Divided into four sections (“The Haunting Impulse”, “Spirited Travels”, “Communication with the Dead” and “Ghost Hunting”), the book covers a remarkable number of cases, as has Nickell during his forty-odd years in the field, but as a consequence each case is dealt with very briefly, with none requiring more than three pages. That is a significantly negative aspect of the

book, because when Nickell talks about a case, there is very little opportunity for him to discuss what he has seen, what others claim to have experienced, and what methods he has employed in his investigation. Some of the accounts involve cases that Nickell had no direct involvement in, but for the majority he was an active participant, so it is all the more frustrating when they are dismissed in just a few pages. Fewer cases and more analysis would have made for a stronger book.

Having said that, the majority of cases will be new (unless you are a subscriber to the *Skeptical Inquirer*), and with many citations in the text there is the opportunity to find other written material on them—or there would be if all the citations were represented in the references list, but they are not. Another way in which more space could have been given to case details would have been to cut out repetition, for example the frequent repeating of the definition of simulacra. The chapters tend to read as if they are a collection of articles brought together with little care in the editing process.

Two claims that Nickell repeatedly makes quickly become annoying: all visual reports of ghosts are merely waking dreams, and all mediums and psychics are fantasy-prone. Nickell has proof that mediums are fantasy-prone because he has decided that anyone showing six or more particular indicators is exhibiting fantasy-proneness. These indicators include having imaginary friends in childhood; fantasising frequently in childhood; experiencing imagined sensations as real; experiencing hypnagogic or hypnopompic hallucinations; receiving special messages from spirits, higher intelligences or the like; or having out-of-body experiences. Some of these are integral to the job description of being a medium; but, as Nickell is of the opinion that as no one can communicate with the dead, anyone who claims to do so is a fantasist. And the proof that they are a fantasist is that they claim to be able to communicate with the dead (amongst other things). And yet on several occasions in the text he takes others to task for such circular reasoning!

He has complete faith in his opinions. For example, on page 238 he states (when talking about a medium's claimed ability to communicate with the dead), "but does she not know what neurological science has established, that once the brain has been destroyed, brain function ceases? With that cessation ends the ability to think and move". But there is an alternative hypothesis, and as a self-professed scientific investigator (with no scientific qualifications—his PhD is in folklore studies) should he not assess the evidence? Nickell would no doubt argue that he has done so and found it wanting, but he does not present that careful evaluation of such evidence in this book, and prefers simply to dismiss contrary evidence as instances of waking dreams, fantasy proneness, misidentification and outright hoaxing (even in cases he has only read about). This is not scientific investigation; rather, it is the knee-jerk reaction of a naysayer, the diametrically opposite position of the true believer. Neither is a scientific approach.

An investigator such as Nickell has a lot to offer. He has worked on a number of interesting cases, as a former magician he has first-hand knowledge of the ways in which people can be mistaken, and he has detective skills through having been a private investigator. But going into cases with the belief that ghosts do not—and indeed can not—exist is not scientific, just as going in

believing that every noise and every dust speck picked up by the camera's flash is evidence of a ghost is not. An openness to explanations and an assessment of each individual case on its evidential merits is required. After that, if appropriate, dismiss them, but not without proper investigation.

In all fairness, Nickell makes some very valid contributions, for example when investigating the ghost of the pirate Captain Flint and his comrade in arms Billy Bones (p.123), Nickell quite sensibly points out that both are characters from Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. So, overall some aspects of the book are frustrating, but as a starting point for finding out about a large number of relatively unknown cases, this is a useful book.

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THE LABRYINTH OF TIME: THE ILLUSION OF PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE by Anthony Peake. Arcturus, London, 2012. 335 pp. References. Index. £9.99. ISBN 978 1 84837 868 1

At the moment of brain death there are three possible outcomes for our mental self. They are:—

1. Personal extinction. As the brain is said to generate all mental activity, including conscious awareness, you are, in effect, your brain, so when the brain dies so do you. This is the consensus view of neuroscience and neurophilosophy.
2. Personal survival as an independent mental being that separates from the brain at death. This is the viewpoint of dualism with endless theories as to what happens thereafter, from ghosts, crisis apparitions and revenants to post-mortem communication through mediums, ascending astral levels of being, heaven and hell, or repeated reincarnations into various new brains in new circumstances.
3. Endless rebirths in a series of new brains in different personal universes in accordance with—in Anthony Peake's interpretation—the Many Worlds Interpretation of physicist Hugh Everett, where all possible alternatives must be realised somewhere. In each rebirth your life unfolds along the same sequence as before but, as you don't know that, it feels like the first time on each occasion.

The third possible outcome was presented by Peake in his 2006 book, *Is There Life After Death?* and explored as to its implications in the sequel *The Daemon: A guide to your Extraordinary Self* and subsequent books. He proposes that we are composed of two mental entities: a 'lower self' (the Eidolon) that deals with the everyday world, and a 'higher self', the Daemon. According to this theory, just before each brain death your mental time slows down to a momentary stop as you 'fall out of' this universe and the Daemon transfers your whole life experience into a new-born brain for a replay in another personal universe. The Daemon knows what happened in a different universe the last time round unless, of course, this is your first time. Peake's belief that minds