

Gary E. Schwartz

*William James and the Search
for Scientific Evidence of Life
After Death*

Past, Present, and Possible Future

Abstract: *William James's historic fascination with psychic phenomena, including the possibility of life after death, has become more widely known with the publication of recent books and articles on this controversial aspect of his scientific legacy. However, little is known about the emerging evidence suggesting the possibility that James's scientific interest in these topics has not waned since he died. This paper reviews preliminary observations, including two exploratory double-blinded mediumship investigations, which are consistent with the hypothesis that James (with others) may be continuing his lifelong quest to address the question of the survival of consciousness after physical death 'from the other side'. These proof-of-concept investigations illustrate how future systematic laboratory research is possible. The limitations of current neuroscience methods are explicated in terms of investigating the hypothesis of the brain as a possible antenna-receiver for consciousness. If James's tentative conclusions about the nature of the relationship between consciousness and the brain turn out to be accurate, then it is logically plausible (if not essential) to posit the possibility that his efforts have persisted in the recent past and present, and may even continue in the future. Scientific integrity plus the pursuit of verity require our being open to this important theoretical and empirical possibility.*

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Journal of Consciousness Studies, 17, No. 11–12, 2010, pp. 121–52

Keywords: William James, consciousness, survival of consciousness, mediums, life after death, double-blinded experiments, mind–brain relationship, spirituality, beliefs, materialism

Either I or the scientist is of course a fool with our opposite views of probability here.... I may be dooming myself to the pit in the eyes of better-judging posterity; I may be raising myself to honor; I am willing to take the risk, for what I shall write is my truth, as I now see it.

— William James

These are the kind of data I wouldn't believe, even if they were true.

— Statement allegedly made by a sceptic to Margaret Mead

Do not bite my finger, look where I am pointing.

— Warren McCulloch

Introduction

As reviewed by Alvarado and Krippner (2010) in this issue, William James had a distinguished (and controversial) history of conducting research investigating the potential legitimacy of certain mediums and psychics of his day. Trained in both philosophy and medicine, and raised in an intellectual home where his family admired the spiritual writings of Emmanuel Swedenborg — one of Sweden's most renowned scientists and mystics — it is perhaps not surprising that James would endeavour to employ his substantial intellect, curiosity, and creativity toward integrating his overarching scientific and spiritual interests.

Blum (2006) has provided a comprehensive review of the history of this work. Blum's book is thoroughly researched with substantial notes and annotations. She chronicles the challenging and volatile nature of psychic research in this era — including the uncovering of fraud in certain purported mediums and psychics, as well as the recounting of frequent vicious attacks on the credibility and sanity of James and other psychic researchers by mainstream staunch sceptics of the time.

The reader interested in James's investigations of Mrs. Piper and other mediums will find Blum's (2006) book particularly useful. The purpose of the present paper is not to review this available history, but rather to present some little known exploratory investigations — including two double-blinded proof-of-concept experiments — concerning the possible continued presence of James since his passing. These controversial observations are reported here with the intent that

they not only honour James's history of research on the possibility of life after death, but more importantly that they honour James's deep commitment to verity and pragmatism.

If survival of consciousness after physical death is real — emphasizing the word *'if'* — the question arises: Is it possible that James has continued his devotion to exploring these areas 'from the other side', despite the limited 'resources' available to him at the present time (i.e. the minimal availability of present day scientists remotely open to such a possibility)?

Before describing in some detail two proof-of-concept double-blinded investigations that speak to this empirical possibility, the author shares some of the unanticipated and challenging academic history that ultimately inspired him to design and implement these investigations. Some of this information is provided in more detail in Schwartz (2010a,b). This personal and historical information is shared in the spirit of the opening three quotes of present article — describing the events as they factually occurred, and carefully considering their alternative interpretations.

A challenging question posed by an anonymous reviewer of this paper naturally presents itself: quoting the reviewer, 'was [Schwartz] "chosen" by James (or some other power) to be the researcher with which James worked from "the other side"?' This question will be addressed below.

Hopefully the reader will examine the preliminary observations presented in this paper with an open mind and consider their alternative interpretations in light of the totality of the empirical findings. Readers will differ widely in assessing the probability — recalling James's quote which begins this paper — of whether James was correct in his assessment of the possibility of life after death (ranging from delusion to reality).

The truth is that the current scientific probability estimates are based on individual scientists' beliefs, personal histories, and preferences for specific theories and world views, and not on empirical evidence. The intent of the present paper is to provide some initial observations and rationale to encourage the possibility of conducting future research. As the neuroscientist Warren McCulloch playfully suggested, 'Do not bite my finger; look where I am pointing.'

To assist the reader in evaluating this information, critical questions raised during the review process are included in the paper. Addressing these important questions in a forthright fashion can potentially help to reduce the inherent propensity of the controversial premise of this paper to engender unfounded hostile criticism.

We begin with a challenging thought experiment.

**Brief Historical Background:
From William James Hall to ‘The Book of James’**

Albert Einstein was well known for conducting imaginary ‘what if’ thought experiments in his head. Let us conduct a ‘what if’ thought experiment and imagine for the moment (1) that James’s essence — his consciousness and personality — did survive his physical death, and (2) that James wanted to have this important fact known to the scientific community.

Two questions immediately present themselves: How would James accomplish this goal, and who would James find to assist him in doing so?

A moment’s reflection reveals the obvious fact that the hypothesized surviving James would have exceedingly few opportunities and choices at his disposal. James would be seriously challenged in finding a living scientist:

- (1) who was open to the possibility of survival of consciousness in general, and the survival of James’s consciousness in particular,
- (2) who was conducting laboratory research on the possibility of life after death,
- (3) who had the human (e.g. medium) and financial resources to potentially verify whatever findings could occur, and
- (4) who ideally had some professional appreciation of James’s history and life goals.

The author of this paper suspects that if he was ‘chosen’ by James (the reviewer’s question), it was primarily because the pool of possible scientist candidates who fit these unique requirements was extraordinarily small.

It is also worth pondering the possibility that (1) if James’s consciousness did survive, and (2) if James was as thorough in the after life as he was in his physical life — remembering that we are conducting a ‘what if’ thought experiment — it would be reasonable to hypothesize that the surviving James would probably have performed due diligence and he would have learned key details of the author’s professional history and abilities.

When the author was a graduate student in the clinical psychology program in the Department of Social Relations at Harvard in the late

1960s, the debate between behaviourism and cognitive psychology was still heated, and the word ‘consciousness’ was considered taboo in many academic quarters. The author’s early exposure to the writings of William James was limited, despite having completed his PhD in William James Hall (and subsequently having served as an Assistant Professor in the newly formed Department of Psychology and Social Relations; the words Social Relations were subsequently dropped from the name of the department). His early co-edited book series on *Consciousness and Self-Regulation* (e.g. Schwartz and Shapiro, 1976), was initially received with overt hostility from a minority of the Harvard faculty.

In those days the author’s theoretical leanings were toward systems thinking and emergent properties in the tradition of Nobel Prize winner Roger W. Sperry (e.g. Sperry, 1970). From this perspective, cognition, including consciousness, was presumed to be an emergent property of neural network and feedback processes, and Schwartz accepted this hypothesis. During the period of time that the author was a professor of psychology and psychiatry at Yale University (1976–1988), when both his parents died, his personal response to their passing was consistent with his reform Jewish as well as scientific upbringing — ashes to ashes, dust to dust, case closed.

It is potentially significant that the author had been approached by a major textbook publisher to write a contemporary introductory text following in the tradition of James (if for no other reason that this stimulated the author to re-examine James’s work in more depth). Though the time commitment was too great for him to attempt writing such a text, the author gave it careful consideration and spent dedicated time becoming more familiar with James’s writings in psychology.

Contemporary Physics, Systems Theory, and the Persistence of Information

As described in detail in his book integrating systems theory and quantum physics (Schwartz and Russek, 1999), while at Yale he also became open to the possibility that not only did information carried by photons persist in the ‘vacuum of space’ (a core assumption of quantum physics and astrophysics — without this assumption, there would be no justification for the development and application of precision optical as well as radio telescopes), but that this information retained its systemic / feedback structure, and therefore could continue to function as a dynamical ‘info-energy’ system. Feedback memory theory

theoretically applied to all systems at all levels which contained dynamical feedback loops.

In other words, just as the light from distant stars continues long after the star has ‘died’ — i.e. the photonic information of the history of the star continues in space (a fact which makes the science of astrophysics possible) — patterns of photonic information and energy comprising biological systems could conceivably continue in space after the organism had died (despite the low intensity of the energy — in quantum physics, intensity is defined as the number of photons per unit period of time).

This led to the novel prediction that learning and memory processes which required the existence of networks of feedback loops could conceivably continue in space (since their informational structure would persist in the vacuum as well). Simply stated, the integration of systems theory with contemporary quantum physics revealed a possible theoretical framework for predicting and explaining a variety of seeming anomalous experiences and phenomena, including the continuity of cognitive processes after physical death. Moreover, since animal brains contained billions of neurons with potentially a hundred or more feedback loop connections (on the average) *per neuron*, this raised the possibility that memories and consciousness associated with all living systems with functional nervous systems could, in principle, continue in some form after physical death.

However, because the systemic / feedback memory hypothesis was so controversial, and because it addressed so many seemingly anomalous phenomena, the author purposely did not attempt to have it published when it was first formulated.

It is one thing to become open to a controversial theoretical possibility (and even consider publishing a theoretical paper); it is another to conduct empirical research based on the theory. As described in two books (Schwartz and Russek, 1999; Schwartz, 2002), the author began research on the possibility of life after death reluctantly (and initially secretly) as a result of meeting a practising clinical psychologist (Dr. L. Russek) from Boca Raton, Florida. She was grieving the death of her distinguished scientist and cardiologist father (Dr. H. Russek). It was she who first inspired the author to use the quantum feedback / systemic memory theory he had formulated at Yale and experimentally apply it to the survival of consciousness hypothesis. At this point in time the author had yet to meet and investigate any purported mediums.

From Physics and Systems Science to Mediums and the Alleged Spirit of William James

It was as a result of subsequently meeting Susy Smith in Tucson, Arizona, and learning of her controversial claims, that the author was faced with a deep scientific challenge related to James. He had become aware of Smith through an article published in a local newspaper in the mid 1990s about her personal 'afterlife codes' experiment (the article was brought to his attention by Dr. Richard Lane, a professor of psychiatry and psychology at the University of Arizona).

Smith was already the well known author of two academic books (e.g. she produced an edited volume of F.W.H. Myers classic *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, with a Foreword by Aldous Huxley; Myers, 1961), followed by more than two dozen books for the general public on psychic phenomena including life after death.

The newspaper article stated not only that Smith, formerly a sceptical journalist herself, had subsequently become psychic after the death of her mother (she preferred not to use the term medium because she was purportedly only able to communicate with a small group of deceased people), but that one of Smith's primary 'guides' (besides her deceased mother) was the renowned Harvard Professor William James.

The author learned that Smith had published two books supposedly in collaboration with James since he had passed (Smith, 1974; 2000). The author discovered that Smith had created a small non-profit foundation (the Survival Research Foundation) to foster research. However, after meeting with Smith, the author learned that she was not only convinced that James was still in communication with her, but that he was claiming to be interested in participating in research!

The author was well aware of the obvious concerns: (1) was Smith a fraud, and / or (2) was she self-deceptive (if not deranged) about James (the same question posed by the reviewer about the author)? From a simple probability point of view, one might predict a 'yes' to one or both of these questions.

Would it be unproductive, if not foolish, to consider the possibility of investigating her claims about James empirically?

For the sake of historical accuracy, the author did wonder, what was the conditional probability of these five James-related events:

- (1) that his early academic career would begin in William James Hall,

- (2) that he would be recruited to write a textbook in the tradition of William James (a request he seriously considered),
- (3) that he would seemingly accidentally develop an integrative quantum systems theory that predicted the continuity of consciousness after death which was curiously consistent with James's receiver theory about the relationship between mind and brain,
- (4) that he would eventually meet a formerly well known author, lay scientist, and psychic in his current location who not only claimed to be in communication with James (and have written two books with him), but
- (5) that she claimed that James was eager to participate in contemporary afterlife research?

Was this collection of five events simply coincidental, or could it reflect something more, possibly a synchronicity (Combs and Holland, 2000)?

However, it was a sixth event — his unanticipated meeting with a second purported psychic medium (Laurie Campbell) who curiously also claimed to be in communication with distinguished deceased scientists (e.g. Sir James Clerk Maxwell), and following his unanticipated 'reading' with her — which ultimately inspired him and his colleagues to design and conduct two double-blinded proof-of-concept experiments purportedly involving James.

The reader may be wondering (as did a reviewer) whether the author was at this point being like a 'naïve sitter at a reading making past events *fit* with the story being outlined by the psychic' (*fit* italicized by the reviewer)?

The answer in this instance is a definitive 'no'.

First, the author is not a naïve sitter, nor is he a naïve scientist. Quite the contrary, he is a well trained and experienced experimental and clinical psychologist who is knowledgeable and mindful of possible cognitive distortions, perceptual priming, self-deception, and illusory correlates. In fact, he and his colleagues have conducted extensive personality and psychophysiological research on self-deception funded in part by grants from the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Mental Health.

Second, the author has read secret books and manuals about how to be a fake medium (sometimes termed a mental magician), and he has even taken a formal course in how to be a fake medium (parenthetically he is quite adept at it).

And third, he collaborates with a group of senior researchers who continually raise such important critical questions. For example, as discussed in Schwartz (2002), the author consistently involves a group of sceptical scientists (sometimes referred to as his 'Friendly Devil's Advocates' or FDAs) to carefully critique the work and its alternative interpretations.

The factual historical professional information about the author is included in this paper not only because (1) it is conceivable, at least in theory, that it might have been relevant to James, but also because (2) the conditional probability of the totality of the six events is so low as to be interesting (if not anomalous, e.g. synchronistic).

For the sake of completeness, a brief description of his initial meeting and observations with Campbell is included here. The author will refer to Smith as Medium 1 and Campbell as Medium 2.

A Chance (and 'Trance') Encounter with Professor James?

As described in detail in Schwartz (2002), the author learned about Medium 2 from Dr. Donald Watson, a retired psychiatrist and neuroscientist who at that time was grieving the tragic death of his son. Watson had become aware of the author's budding interest in this area through reading a then just published paper about Smith and her afterlife codes research (Schwartz and Russek, 1997). Watson claimed that although Medium 2 was a housewife in California, with little more than a high school education, she was interested in science.

When the author was introduced to Medium 2, and without any provocation, she claimed to begin receiving information from both the author's deceased mother and father. For the record, the author had not requested a personal reading (his intent was to witness what Medium 2 did with Dr. Watson), and he attempted to discourage her from conducting one (but with minimal success). The information Medium 2 provided regarding his parents' physical appearances, causes of death, and personality traits was surprisingly specific and accurate.

As mentioned above, the author was well aware of cold reading techniques used by psychic entertainers; hence, he was not a naïve sitter. For example, he was careful not to offer any verbal information which the medium could then claim to interpret.

A reviewer asked the question, 'How can he be sure that no information was offered to the psychic?' Lacking video recordings of the author's verbal and non-verbal behaviour during the session, the reader is justified in being sceptical.

However, as future experiments reported below established, *this medium was equally successful when both she and the experimenters were blind to the information — hence, no unintentional cuing on the part of the experimenter was possible. Moreover, this medium (and others) participated in research where visual and auditory cues were physically eliminated, yet her (and their) performance remained high.* Hence, the most parsimonious interpretation of the totality of the data is that the medium did *not* get her accurate information simply via cold reading techniques.

Though this personal family information was not widely known (and the internet was then in its infancy), the facts which Medium 2 provided could have been obtained through fraudulent means. In addition, the author was well aware of alternative possible parapsychological explanations; for example, in theory Medium 2 could have been reading his mind telepathically. Hence, he remained intentionally sceptical during the meeting.

The author decided to ask Medium 2 if she could obtain any information concerning a person named Dr. Henry Russek; the information she provided proved to be accurate as well.

What was compelling about this portion of the unanticipated reading was the extreme level of intensity of the emotion with which the deceased person purportedly described his love for his daughter (which happened to fit the author's knowledge of their unusually close father-daughter relationship). It is true, as a reviewer noted, that experienced cold readers often assume that a father-daughter relationship is close (an assumption which is not always valid in specific cases). However, the extreme nature of the medium's communication was so dramatic as to appear melodramatic (and it appeared comparable to the unusually close personal and professional relationship involving Dr. Russek and his oldest daughter). *More importantly, Medium 2 obtained specific information known only to the Russek family and select medical professionals* (presented in Schwartz, 2002).

Though also not planned, the author decided to ask if Medium 2 could receive any information from someone named William James. For example, he wondered, would the medium spontaneously confirm Medium 1's claims about James allegedly being interested in research?

Though Medium 1 claimed not to know Medium 2, and the author never mentioned Medium 1 to Medium 2, he was aware that it was possible that both of them could have been lying. Also, it was conceivable that Dr. Watson could have mentioned the Schwartz and Russek

(1997) article to Medium 2. Hence, the author remained appropriately sceptical.

What transpired was completely unanticipated. First, Medium 2 looked obviously perplexed and asked who William James was. Was she feigning ignorance? The author responded with a purposely vague answer: 'He's a friend of a friend' (an informal rephrasing of Smith's purported relationship with James).

The medium went on to describe a man who lived at the turn of the 20th century, was dressed in a long dark robe, wore a beard, and was surrounded by books.

Then, the medium visibly changed her countenance and appeared to go into a 'trance'. She began speaking in a lower, more deliberate and educated voice. For the next ten minutes or so, s/he began pacing and giving a lecture on the nature of consciousness; and in the process the purported spirit allegedly voiced his strong enthusiasm for continuing research.

Having never witnessed a medium before, the author was frankly shocked. He later learned that rarely did this medium (or most mediums) spontaneously fall into a trance where alleged spirits 'speak through' them (most present day mental mediums resist losing conscious control in this fashion, especially when in public).

He wondered, was it possible that Medium 2 was being genuine? Could James have literally 'come through' Medium 2 and forcefully indicated his continued commitment to the work?

Was Medium 1 actually correct in her description of James's desire to participate in research?

Was James (with others) choosing to serve in the role of what the author and his colleagues at the time playfully described as being 'departed hypothesized co-investigators' (DHCIs)?

There was only one way to find out, and that was to design controlled research which tested the mediums' claims empirically. Given the clearly questionable (as well as controversial) nature of these claims, the author was not about to initiate formal IRB approved research protocols without first performing some initial proof-of-concept feasibility investigations. The two proof-of-concept exploratory investigations described herein illustrate the potential promise of conducting systematic research testing such claims.

It is noteworthy that in each instance, the designs of the specific investigations were based upon novel (and experimentally testable) claims made by Mediums 1 and 2.

Medium 1 to Spirit to Medium 2 Communication?

Medium 1 made the following three claims:

Claim 1:

She was able to communicate with four deceased people who wished to participate in controlled laboratory investigations: the four were (1) her mother, (2) James, (3) Russek, and (4) the author's father.

Claim 2:

She could ask these individuals questions, and she could receive their answers.

Claim 3:

Being a skilled painter, she could draw a picture of an image which they provided.

Medium 2 made the following three claims:

Claim 1:

She was able to communicate with these same four deceased people, and that they wanted to participate in research.

Claim 2:

She could ask these individuals questions, and she could receive their answers.

Claim 3:

Though she was not a painter *per se*, she claimed to have good visualization skills and could verbally describe what they were showing her. [This claim was important because Medium 2 was expressly informed that this experiment involved her potentially seeing images purportedly provided by the deceased. Medium 2 claimed to have 'second sight' similar to the child in *The Sixth Sense* who uttered the famous words, 'I see dead people.']

Based on these six claims, the following experiment was designed:

Phase I: In the privacy of her home, Medium 1 was requested to contact the four hypothesized deceased persons and ask each of them to give her a specific image for her to paint or draw. Medium 1 was to place each painting or drawing in a separate, sealed envelope. As a control for the possibility of remote viewing, Medium 1 was requested to select a personal image to paint or draw and place in a sealed envelope. The investigators (Watson, L. Russek, and the author) as

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well as Medium 2 would be kept blind to all information concerning the five images and drawings.

Phase II: Medium 2 was invited to Tucson and participated in two separate communication sessions. In both sessions she was asked to contact each of the four DHCI's and request details about the specific images they had allegedly asked Medium 1 to paint or draw. Also in both sessions, Medium 2 was asked to attempt to get information about the image Medium 1 had painted or drawn for her self (i.e. the control image). The author took careful notes concerning the details purportedly ascribed to the images as reported by Medium 2. The investigators as well as Medium 2 remained blind to the specific images painted or drawn by Medium 1.

Phase III: Medium 1 and Medium 2 were introduced (supposedly for the first time). Medium 1 then opened the sealed envelopes and revealed the images (but not the identification of which images were allegedly proposed by which deceased persons). The three investigators, as well as Medium 2, independently rated each of the five images. The images were rated twice:

- (1) to determine if the raters' prior knowledge and impressions were sufficient to guess which DHCI was associated with a given image, and
- (2) to determine if the information obtained via the medium was required to determine which DHCI was associated with a given image.

The first set of five ratings was made using whatever prior (and idiosyncratic) knowledge and intuitions happened to be available to the investigators and medium. The second set of five ratings was made using the specific set of information that had been provided by Medium 2, and summarized by the author. Each of the four raters made their judgments independently.

Theoretically, if pure guessing was involved, the average accuracy would be 20% (1 out of 5 correct guesses per rater).

After the two sets of independent ratings were completed — and before the ratings were compared and tabulated — Medium 1 shared the alleged identification of each of the five images. The tabulated results were striking.

For the first set of ratings — based only on prior knowledge and rater impressions — the average accuracy turned out to be 20% (4 out of 20 correct; individual ratings of 2, 0, 1, and 1).

However, for the second set of ratings — using the specific information provided by Medium 2 — the average accuracy increased to 100% (20 out of 20 correct). A Fisher's exact test, one tailed, was $p < .00001$.

When these *quantitative* findings are combined with the *qualitative* data presented below, the results further suggest that something more than chance guessing was occurring with the inclusion of Medium 2's information (i.e. the second set of ratings). Moreover, the richness of the qualitative data suggest that mechanisms of receiving information other than (1) simple telepathy with the living, or (2) remote viewing, were involved in the totality of the evidence. The justification for reaching the challenging conclusions that simple telepathy and remote viewing were insufficient to explain the complete set of observations will become clear as the qualitative data are examined.

The complete set of qualitative analyses were published in Schwartz *et al.* (1999); a few exemplars are included here.

Surprisingly, when Medium 2 was requested to receive information about Medium 1's control image, *she claimed to have no difficulty in doing so*. She described the layout of Medium 1's apartment with sufficient detail and accuracy to imply that she was at least able to do remote viewing (presuming that fraud was not involved).

Moreover, when asked specifically about the control picture, she claimed to have no difficulty in doing so. She said she saw:

- a purple vase
- greens
- yellows
- many shapes
- a 'rainbow of colours'

There was only one image (out of the five) which fit the complex description of a purple vase with greens, yellows, many shapes, and a 'rainbow of colours'. The summary 100% percent accuracy scores do not convey the richness of these qualitative details. It turned out to be the image which Medium 1 had painted for her self (see Figure 1).

In light of this detailed qualitative information, the question arose, *what kind of evidence could suggest that anything other than remote viewing (again, presuming that fraud was not involved) was taking place in this proof-of-concept investigation?* In other words, what kind of evidence might suggest survival of consciousness above and beyond possible psychic abilities on the part of the medium?



Figure 1 (Colour version at back of book)

A surprising answer turned out to suggest itself in the process of more closely examining Medium 2's reports when she was purportedly communicating with the deceased.

For example, when she was asked to contact Russek, she again reported the profound love he had for his daughter and family. (As mentioned above, cold readers often speak about loving father-daughter relationships, but rarely to the degree emphasized by this medium for this specific father-daughter relationship.) Of course, since Medium 2 was no longer blind to the identity of the deceased, such information was obviously meaningless from a scientific point of view. What would be required was new information not readily known or accessible.

As it so happened, in the first session Medium 2 claimed that Russek was upset because his wife was secretly crying at night, in their bedroom, with the curtains drawn, and he beseeched his daughter to discuss this with her mother. After the session, L. Russek contacted her mother and discovered that she had indeed been closing the curtains to the bedroom at night and crying by herself. The mother claimed to have kept this secret so as not to disturb her daughters.

This specific information was not known to any of the investigators (nor to members of the deceased's family). Since the investigators were blind to this information, Medium 2 could not have received it telepathically from the minds of the investigators.

A reviewer made the comment ‘Of course a recently widowed spouse is likely to close the curtains at night and cry quietly — this is exactly the sort of information given by a psychic when they are cold reading.’ However, despite this reviewer’s definitive assertion about cold reading, it is a fact that none of the books on cold reading studied by the author recommended that a fake medium make such a specific statement. Moreover, this specific ploy was not mentioned in the formal course on cold reading which he took. Finally, in the many hundreds of research readings conducted by this author, on only one occasion did an alleged medium make such a statement — the reading discussed here. The reviewer’s comments are included here to illustrate that scientists sometimes make unjustified assumptions about what cold readers allegedly do. Responsible researchers working in this area are not naïve about the techniques of cold readers.

More importantly, and surprisingly, was that Medium 2 reported *significant difficulty in getting information about the image from the deceased (whereas as mentioned previously she had no trouble getting information about Medium 1’s personal image)*. Medium 2 claimed that she was distracted by other more personal and emotional information coming from the deceased. In fact, the author had to press Medium 2 repeatedly to try and focus on receiving the requested image.

For Russek’s image she reported:

- red
- pink
- vibrant
- ‘heart in hands’ (she saw the deceased holding the flower in his hands)
- a single ‘rose long stem?’ (Medium 2 was not sure about the type of flower)

There was only one image out of five that turned out to be mostly red and pink, vibrant, of a single long stem flower, which might be associated with a ‘heart in hands’, and it was the image supposedly drawn for Russek. The painting is shown below (Figure 2).

This painting of a single-stemmed red flower was not of a rose; it was of a poinsettia. Curiously, according to Medium 1, Russek had actually asked her to draw a rose (the image Medium 2 thought she saw). Medium 1 claimed not to be skilled at painting roses, and purportedly asked Russek if it was acceptable to him for her to paint a



Figure 2 (Colour version at back of book)

poinsettia. Depending upon one's theoretical leanings and estimates of probabilities, one can consider various possible interpretations of this statement ranging from simple lying to genuine medium-to-spirit communication.

It is noteworthy that Medium 2 repeatedly claimed it was difficult for her to get information about the specific images from the deceased. She claimed that the reason was that personal thoughts and feelings of the deceased were stronger than their alleged transmission of the details in the image. A telling example involves the image purportedly suggested by James.

When requested to contact James, Medium 2 continued with her claims about his continued devotion to this area of research. Again, since she was no longer blind to the identity of James, such information was now scientifically meaningless.

When asked about the picture, she again expressed her difficulty and offered the following details:

- black pencil
- stencil
- maybe a 'picture of himself?' (Medium 2 was not sure of the face; she also made the editorial comment, 'Boy, is he arrogant!')

There was only one picture out of five that was not coloured, drawn with a black pencil, a stencil; however, it was clearly not a picture of a human. It was of a dog; more precisely, a puppy which had been purchased for Medium 1 named Sammy. At the request of the author, Medium 1 subsequently signed the drawing on the front of the image (Figure 3).



Figure 3

Since the author found it difficult to imagine why the alleged James would have requested that Medium 1 draw an image of this puppy, he gently asked Medium 1 if this was James's actual selection. Medium 1 confessed that James had allegedly requested that she draw a picture of her deceased dachshund Junior. Upon reflection, this request was potentially plausible.

According to Medium 1, at the time she was writing 'The Book of James' allegedly with James, Junior would spend time sleeping on her lap. After Junior died, he supposedly spent some of his time with James 'on the other side', and some of his time visiting with Medium 1. Medium 1 explained that she did not have a photo available of Junior, but she did have one of her new puppy. She claimed that she asked James if she could draw Sammy instead, and he supposedly agreed.

One reviewer wrote, 'You say that you "gently" questioned the medium about this, but surely the whole business deserved a more robust interrogation? Can't the woman remember what her loved deceased dog looked like?'

The author agrees that more thorough discussion with Medium 1 would have been valuable. However, given her age and relative frailty (she was in the mid 80s when this experiment was conducted), the author was careful to be gentle so as to not to make her defensive about her ability to paint, nor to ‘interrogate’ her regarding what her standards were for painting a beloved living creature from memory.

This reviewer also wondered, ‘And if the whole purpose of the exercise is to convey the deceased’s psychic attachment to the dog at the time, why is the image not conveyed psychically,’ and ‘This raises a question about the value of the drawing and painting exercise altogether. What exactly is it meant to achieve?’ Hopefully it is clear that the ‘whole purpose of the exercise’ was not to convey Medium’s 1 attachment to her dog *per se*, but to explore the experimental feasibility of investigating whether visual information could be conveyed from one medium to another via the mediation of allegedly creative, motivated and collaborating spirits. The use of images and visual imagery provided a novel possibility of exploring both quantitative and qualitative descriptions which could be compared with known information (i.e. actual drawings).

A reviewer made the following comment: ‘the author seems to be claiming that animals have a soul and pass to the “other-side” to be with humans. This is an exceptionally controversial claim that will undoubtedly be met with great hostility by many readers. The author should make an attempt to clarify this point’. Another reviewer commented that the assumption that animal consciousness survives physical death is a contentious one ‘because researchers can barely agree that animals actually are conscious in a similar way to humans in the first place, let alone capable of retaining a dog-shaped psyche on the “other side”’.

The reviewer was correct in that Medium 1 was making this claim. Moreover, every research medium the author has worked with has claimed that animal consciousness is no different from human consciousness in its essence; i.e. it continues to survive after physical death. Space does not permit providing the theoretical or empirical justification for the hypothesis that consciousness, *regardless of its level or complexity*, continues in some form after physical death (e.g. see Schwartz and Russek, 1999, mentioned above). Hence, a reader’s response of ‘great hostility’ would be more indicative of an emotional reaction to — rather than an informed conceptual analysis of — this hypothesis.

Obviously it was not possible to verify the accuracy of such information; it was reported here because it happened. Various questions

arise: (1) was Medium 1 lying, (2) did she have a creative imagination, or (3) was this an accurate account of her alleged communication with James?

A reviewer raised an interesting question: ‘Why would a deceased person, who is actively trying to assist with research, project information to a psychic about something they were going to ask to be painted, but change their mind to something else? Why wouldn’t they just project the image that was actually painted? It doesn’t make sense....’ To make sense of such seeming oddities, the reviewer suggested that ‘It points toward telepathy (if you are looking for parapsychological explanation) or fraud rather than communication with the dead.’

The author appreciates the fact that some of the observations made do not make obvious sense (though potentially plausible explanations can be formulated — see below), and that telepathy or fraud might be preferred explanations to communication with the dead.

One of the more interesting and important questions for future research is to better understand the nature of the kinds of errors that skilled psychics and mediums make. For example, though the quantitative data indicate that blinded judges had no difficulty picking the image associated with James — since it was the only black and white penciled sketch — it was obvious that the qualitative content was not accurate. One reviewer wondered why the James image was ‘the least well described.’ There are various possible explanations for Medium 2’s difficulty in seeing the image of the picture, including:

1. Her personal experience and image of James himself was in shades of black and white, and James’s grey scale image might have conflicted with the soft penciled picture drawn by Medium 1.
2. The medium experienced James as ‘arrogant’ and she might have been distracted by her emotional reactions to her perceptions of James.
3. The other images were drawn in colour, and colour adds brightness and clarity to description.

These explanations could equally apply to causing errors in telepathy and remote viewing as they would to causing errors in getting details related to survival of consciousness. Hence, the presence of this error of perception on the part of Medium 2 does not justify therefore choosing more preferred explanations such as telepathy or fraud.

Just because a few observations cannot be readily accounted for by a given hypothesis (e.g. survival of consciousness) this does not justify

resorting to less controversial explanations (e.g. telepathy or fraud) which turn out to account for even less of the findings (including findings for which no clear explanation is currently available). The fact remains that the totality of the evidence does not support either (1) simple telepathy or (2) fraud as viable explanations.

As Blum (2006) points out in her book about James and the early history of mediumship research, in some cases (1) specific mediums occasionally resorted to fraud, (2) these same mediums also showed genuine psychic abilities from time to time which could be explained as telepathy, *and* (3) they also provided certain kinds of compelling evidence which pointed strongly to the conclusion that they were somehow communicating with the deceased.

Though it is relatively easy to rule out fraud in controlled scientific experiments, as mentioned previously, the deep theoretical challenge is to discern whether parapsychological explanations are sufficient to account for all the observations, or whether actual communication with the deceased is occurring.

It is important to appreciate that the author and his colleagues conducted a large number of subsequent experiments with Medium 2 (as well as other mediums; this research is summarized in Schwartz, 2002; 2005). The totality of this evidence in the context of the various experimental designs convincingly rules out fraud and cold reading as being plausible explanations of the findings. In sum, Medium 2 demonstrated striking evidence of being psychic replicated over multiple experiments.

The question arises, do the findings from (1) this original ‘medium-to-spirit-to-medium’ *double-blind* experiment (which happened to have been conducted before some more naturalistic, *single-blinded* experiments were performed in the late 1990s), combined with (2) the most recent *triple-blinded* experiments (e.g. Beischel and Schwartz, 2007), provide convincing evidence for life after death? The answer is clearly no; the experiments do not rule out more speculative, ‘super-psi’ explanations (Braude, 2003; Fontana, 2005).

However, the totality of the evidence suggests that mechanisms other than (1) simple telepathy with the physically living, or (2) remote viewing, are involved. Moreover, *the precise manner in which the information is received appears to have qualities that closely resemble the ‘look and feel’ of consciousness.* This possibility will be returned to at the conclusion of this paper.

Can the Deceased Choose to Show Up (or Not) in an Experiment?

A fundamental assumption of the above proof-of-concept double-blind investigation was that the deceased could ‘choose’ to participate in research, and therefore by extension, could choose to ‘show up’ (or not) for a given session. When Medium 2, for example, was requested to attempt to receive information from a given deceased person, did this mean that she would automatically be able to do so? Is it possible that mediums are not simply ‘retrieving’ information but are ‘receiving’ (i.e. being given) it?

Using a current communication metaphor, the question arises, can alleged spirits, so to speak, intentionally ‘screen their calls?’ The following proof-of-concept investigation was designed to explore this theoretical possibility.

Medium 1 made the following two claims:

Claim 1:

The set of four deceased persons who allegedly participated in the previous proof-of-concept experiment wished to continue to participate in research. This included James.

Claim 2:

They could choose to ‘show up’ in California and be read by Medium 2, or not.

Medium 2 made the following two claims:

Claim 1:

She could contact each of the four individuals and receive information from them without having to come to Tucson to do so.

Claim 2:

She believed that the nature of the information she received would vary depending upon whether the deceased chose to be present (or not).

Based on these four claims, the following exploratory double-blind investigation was designed:

Phase I: Medium 1 contacted each of the four deceased persons, she explained the purpose and proposed design of the experiment, and asked if they were interested in participating. According to Medium 1, their answers were allegedly (and enthusiastically) affirmative.

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Phase II: The author prepared six sealed envelopes, each containing an index card indicating the names of two DHCI's who would be requested in a given session to 'show up' for a reading with Medium 2; the other two DHCI's would be requested for that session to 'be somewhere else' (or at least *not* communicate with Medium 2). Six envelopes were required to cover all six possible combinations of the two present and two absent. The six envelopes were shuffled; consequently the author became blind to the order of their subsequent opening. In addition, Medium 1 was requested to shuffle them as well.

Phase III: On a designated night (which the author confirmed fit Medium 2's schedule the following morning), Medium 1 (in Tucson) would open a given envelope in the privacy of her home. She would then contact each of the four deceased persons and explain who of the two would be requested to visit with Medium 2 the next morning (and who would not). She recorded the date on the index card for later scoring of the data. The next morning, Medium 2 (in California), in the privacy of her home, would attempt to contact each of the four deceased persons and receive whatever information she could. Following the morning session, and using her notes, she selected who of the two she estimated had been invited the previous night to visit with her. Presumably Medium 2 did the readings and ratings blindly (with no collusion between mediums 1 and 2). The pattern of findings turned out to be consistent with the conclusion that collusion was not involved.

Phase IV: Upon completing the six sessions, and before breaking the code and analysing the data, the author requested that the medium contact each of the deceased people and describe what they were purportedly doing during their respective 'no show' sessions. At this point both Medium 2 and the author were blind to the potential accuracy of her readings and estimates.

Phase V: Medium 2's accuracy scores for estimating the presence (and absence) of each of the four deceased persons were calculated.

The average findings were in the predicted direction; 75% accuracy (50% would be chance). A Fisher's exact test, one tailed, was $p < .07$; a non-significant trend in the expected direction. However, careful examination of the individual scores revealed that for two of the deceased persons, Medium 2's percent accuracy scores happened to be 100% (6 of 6, per deceased person); for the other two deceased persons, the percent accuracy scores were at chance, 50% (3 of 6, per deceased person). As explained below, the justification for reporting these preliminary observations was their surprisingly close

relationship to Medium 2's accounts of *what the deceased were allegedly doing when they were not present for a session*.

According to Medium 1, for 'no show' sessions:

- Russek was spending time *away* with his cardiology colleagues
- The author's father was spending time *away* with the author's deceased mother
- James was personally curious about what was happening in the experiment and he was '*watching* what was going on with Medium 2'
- Medium 1's mother was also curious and *watched* Medium 2 as well.

As it so happened, Medium 2's performance turned out to be 100% accurate for both Russek and for the author's father, the two deceased persons who claimed to have been '*away*' doing other things (Fisher's exact test, one tailed, $p < .007$).

Medium 2's performance was 50% (chance) for James and Medium 1's mother, the two deceased people who were purportedly 'curious' and '*watching*' and were supposedly present (but not communicative) at the sessions (Fisher's exact test, $p < .7$ NS).

If fraud was not involved here, and the results are not dismissed as chance, the *pattern* of the findings suggests that mechanisms other than (1) simple telepathy of the living, or (2) remote viewing, were involved. Again, *the totality of the findings appears to have the 'look and feel' of consciousness and intention*.

Why Formal Programmatic Research with James was Not Initiated

Though Medium 1 and 2 were both enthusiastic about conducting future systematic research allegedly with James and his apparent team, untoward circumstances intervened. On Feb 11, 2001, Smith suffered a fatal heart attack, and the author's research attention shifted from James to Smith.

A reviewer requested more details about why the author 'abandoned the possibility of communicating with a great Victorian scientist, in favour of communicating with a purported ex-psychic?' There were four primary reasons:

First, at that point in the research, the author had not reached any firm conclusions about the source(s) of the accurate information obtained by successful psychics. He was not prepared to conclude that

the information received by research mediums reflected actual ‘communication’ with anyone — be he a great scientist or otherwise.

Second, he was inspired to conduct research related to James significantly because of Smith’s claims. When she died, the author’s inspiration shifted from verifying Smith’s claims about James to verifying Smith’s predictions about her own continued consciousness.

Third, Smith was not simply a ‘purported ex-psychic’. She was a scholarly lay researcher who critically examined the available scientific literature and made it comprehensible for the general public. Smith was more knowledgeable about the totality of research related to the survival of consciousness hypothesis than the majority of professional scientists in psychology and neuroscience. It is not inconceivable that the hypothesized surviving James may have ‘chosen’ Smith to work with him because of her journalistic sceptical yet open mind, combined with her devotion to this area of research and her excellent writing skills.

And finally, the author was cognizant of the fact that hostility toward positive findings would likely be less severe if they involved a relatively unknown former psychic compared to a famous scientist like James.

As described in Schwartz (2005), within twenty-four hours of Smith’s passing, he initiated blinded readings with multiple mediums; this was the first time he served in the role of a research sitter rather than experimenter. The first reading happened to involve Medium 2; the actual reading was conducted by another experimenter, the author served as a secret sitter who listened as the reading was being conducted long distance over the telephone.

The reading included three pieces of information which were known only to the author (and not the experimenter). Smith had privately told him that she had three wishes upon her death. These three wishes will sound incredulous to those who believe that the probability of survival of consciousness is minimal or nil:

- That she would spend the next year of her life, ‘on the other side’, dancing with William James. Smith had been confined to a wheel chair for the last twenty years of her life, and she loved to dance.
- That she would raise an infant who had died. Smith had never had children, and she spent the predominance of her life single.
- That she would participate in future laboratory research on life after death, just as James had done before her.

The medium made three observations about the person she was presumably observing in spirit. For the record, at no time during the reading did Medium 2 identify the deceased person as Smith; moreover, it was not yet public knowledge that Smith had died.

- Medium 2 claimed that she saw the deceased person dancing with a distinguished gentleman, and that this would be meaningful and important to the secret sitter (in a later reading with a different medium, she claimed that she saw the deceased woman with someone who looked like William James).
- Medium 2 said that the deceased was showing her holding a young child, and
- Though confused about this, Medium 2 stated that the deceased was claiming that she was going to continue to participate in future research in the laboratory (something no previous deceased person had ever purportedly said regarding the author and the research).

Given the increasingly unanticipated (and controversial) direction which the research was taking, as explained above, the author was reluctant to pursue systematic research concerning highly visible deceased persons (academic or otherwise). However, as described in Schwartz (2010b), aspects of the research were increasingly appearing to take on a ‘life of their own’; the emerging spontaneous evidence appeared to be consistent with the thesis that the survival of consciousness hypothesis — including memory, choice, intention, and self-determination — was potentially viable.

James’s Question: Does Consciousness Require a Brain?

Let us assume, just for the moment, that the above observations can be replicated in future research. The critical question arises, how could such findings be reconciled with mainstream cognitive neuroscience?

Materialistically-oriented scientists typically view such findings as being confusing if not inconceivable. However, a close examination of the methods of contemporary cognitive neuroscience suggests a compelling (and parsimonious) solution.

As described in Schwartz (2002; 2005; 2010a,b), there are three types of experimental evidence that together ‘seem’ to point to the conclusion that consciousness is created by the brain. The word ‘seem’ is emphasized here because careful examination of the totality of evidence, when viewed from the perspective of electronics and electrical engineering, reveals how the evidence is actually *as*

consistent with the explanation that the mind is separate from brain as it is with the explanation that the mind is created by brain. Unfortunately it is not widely appreciated by mainstream scientists that the three experimental approaches used to investigate mind–brain relationships do *not*, by themselves, require a materialistic conclusion — and they are wholly consistent with a non-materialistic explanation.

The three kinds of evidence are:

- 1. Evidence from Recordings** — Neuroscientists record brain waves (EEGs) using sensitive electronic devices. For example, it is well known that occipital alpha waves decrease when people see visual objects or imagine them.
- 2. Evidence from Stimulation** — Various areas of the brain can be stimulated using electrodes placed inside the head or magnetic coils placed outside the head. For example, stimulation of the occipital cortex is typically associated with people experiencing visual sensations and images.
- 3. Evidence from Ablation** — Various areas of the brain can be removed with surgical techniques (or areas can be damaged through injury or disease). For example, when areas of the occipital cortex are removed, people and lower animals lose aspects of vision.

The generally accepted — and seemingly common sense — neuroscience interpretation of this set of findings is that visual experience is created by the brain.

However, the critical question is whether this *creation of consciousness* explanation is the *only* possible interpretation of this set of findings? The answer is actually no. The three kinds of evidence are *also consistent with* the brain as being a *receiver of external consciousness information* (Schwartz, 2002; 2005; 2010a,b).

The reasoning is straightforward and is illustrated in electronics and electrical engineering. Though it is rare to discuss an electronics example in the context of a psychology article, it turns out to be productive and prudent to do so here.

Consider the television (be it analogue or digital). It is well known — and generally accepted — that televisions work as *receivers* for processing information carried by *external* electromagnetic fields oscillating in specific frequency bands. Television receivers do *not* create the visual information (i.e. they are *not the source* of the information) — they *detect* the information, *amplify* it, *process* it, and *display* it.

Apparently it is not generally appreciated by neuroscientists that electrical engineers conduct the same three kinds of experiments as they do. The parallel between the investigation of the brain and the television is virtually perfect.

1. **Evidence from Recordings** — Electrical engineers can monitor signals inside the television set using sensitive electronic devices. For example, electrodes can be placed on particular components in circuits that correlate with the visual images seen on the screen.
2. **Evidence from Stimulation** — Electrical engineers can stimulate various components of the television using electrodes placed inside the television set or magnetic coils placed outside the set. For example, particular circuits can be stimulated with specific patterns of information, and replicable patterns can be observed on the TV screen.
3. **Evidence from Ablation** — Electrical engineers can remove various components from the television (or areas can be damaged or wear out). For example, key components can be removed and the visual images on the screen will disappear.

However, do these three kinds of evidence imply that the *source* or *origin* of the TV signals is *inside* the television — i.e. that the television *created* the signals? The answer is obviously no.

It should be clear how the basic logic — as applied to television receivers — can be equally applied to neural network (brain) receivers. The three kinds of evidence (correlation, stimulation, and ablation) only allow us to conclude that television sets — as well as brains — play some sort of *role* in visual experience. The truth is that these three kinds of evidence, by themselves as well as in combination, do not allow us to conclude whether television sets, or brains:

- (1) ‘self-create’ the information internally — the materialist assumption, or
- (2) function as complex receivers of external information — which allows for the possible existence of survival of consciousness after death and a larger spiritual reality.

In other words, the three kinds of evidence, by themselves as well as in combination, do not speak to (and do not enable us to determine) whether the signals — i.e. the information fields — are:

- (1) coming from *inside* the system (the materialistic interpretation applied to brains), or
- (2) coming from *outside* the system (the interpretation routinely applied to televisions).

It follows that *additional kinds of experiments are required to distinguish between the 'self-creation' versus 'receiver' hypotheses.*

Experiments on the survival of consciousness hypothesis with skilled research mediums provide an important fourth kind of evidence that can neither be predicted nor explained by the self-creation (i.e. materialism) hypothesis, but it can be predicted and explained by the receiver hypothesis (Schwartz; 2002; 2005; 2010a,b).

It should be noted that in physics, external electromagnetic fields are not labeled as being 'material' *per se*. They do not have mass (e.g. they do not have weight) and are invisible; they are described by a set of equations which characterize an as yet unexplained property of the 'vacuum' of space.

Conclusions — Looking Toward the Future

There are special moments in the history of science when major conceptual breakthroughs occur. They are sometimes called paradigm shifts or changes (Kuhn, 1996).

Classic examples of paradigm changes include the following shifts in understanding (1) believing that the earth was *flat*, to discovering that the earth was *spherical*, (2) believing that the sun revolved around the earth, to discovering that the earth revolved around the sun, (3) believing that matter was *solid and fixed* (how we conventionally experience it), to discovering that matter was mostly '*empty space*' and *dynamically probabilistic* (quantum physics), and (4) believing that the vacuum was '*empty*', to discovering that space was *filled with invisible energy and fields of information* (e.g. the zero-point field).

Major advances linking quantum physics (and other more innovative and visionary physics) with consciousness and spirituality is capturing the imagination of contemporary researchers (Radin 2006; Goswami, 2001), and some of the core underpinnings of the materialistic world view is being seriously challenged if not disproved (Tart, 2009; Kelly *et al.*, 2009).

As the author illustrates (Schwartz, 2010b), new advances in technology (including the recording of patterns of cosmic rays as well as individual photons of light) are making it possible to address the presence and effects of a greater spiritual reality. A recent paper

documents how a super-sensitive silicon photomultiplier system can be used to monitor the presence of spirit and potentially serve as a communication device (Schwartz, 2010c).

Though the idea of technology advancing to the point of creating a reliable spirit-communication device — what the author has playfully termed the evolution of the cell phone to the ‘soul phone’ — might sound to some readers like wistful (and misguided) science fiction, the history of science reminds us of countless instances where what was once assumed to be science fiction eventually became science fact.

If there is a greater spiritual reality, and *if* consciousness is the key to it — again, emphasizing *if* — then psychology will need to revise and expand its vision of (1) what is mind, (2) how does mind operate, (3) what are its limitations and potentials.

Just as a television set is required for receiving and converting the external EMF signals into viewable information and energy which can be processed by human beings, a receiving brain may be needed for human beings to function effectively in the physical world.

Interestingly, the hypothesis that the brain might serve as a receiver (as well as a transmitter) of information and energy for consciousness has an illustrious history. The brain-receiver hypothesis was seriously entertained not only by James, but also by Wilder Penfield, the distinguished Canadian neurosurgeon who mapped consciousness and the brain, and Sir John Eccles, the British neurophysiologist who won the Nobel Prize in Medicine for discoveries involving the neuron. These luminaries may have had the correct thesis (Kelly *et al.*, 2009; Van Lommel, 2010).

Will future research reveal that James’s view about the relationship between mind and brain was correct?

Moreover, will future research further reveal that James and others like him are continuing to contribute to our understanding of consciousness and the brain?

As James asked the question, was he ‘dooming’ himself to ‘the pit in the eyes of better-judging posterity’?

Or, was he raising himself to future ‘honour’ in the history of science?

James explicitly stated he was ‘willing to take the risk’ for what he would write was his ‘truth’ as he saw it then. Inspired by James’s visionary words, and encouraged by the available evidence, the present author is taking the risk as well.

The answer will come with future research.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Leslie Combs, Anthony Freeman, and anonymous reviewers of this manuscript for their scientific openness as well as their thoughtful criticalness. The preparation of this paper was supported in part from private foundation funds gifted to the Voyager Program in the Laboratory for Advances in Consciousness and Health at the University of Arizona.

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Paper received August 2010.