

'Is There an Afterlife? A Comprehensive Review of the Evidence'

by Professor David Fontana

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Reviewed by Dr. Andrew Powell

Working in the field of transpersonal therapies and healing as I do, the status of the information which has been given to us about the nature of the soul and its survival after death has always been of great interest to me. I have no doubt about the heuristic value of therapies such as spirit release therapy and past life regression. (My own experience of 'past lives' had exactly the verisimilitude that is widely described). I have got to know mediums whose sincerity I do not doubt, and been profoundly moved by the literature on the Near-Death Experience. I am left certain there is something that awaits us beyond death besides oblivion, and as with Pascal's wager theory, I am putting my money on the survival of individual consciousness. If I am wrong, I shan't know it and if I am right, what I am learning about it now is going to help me no end!

I have always been struck by the conviction with which everyone holds differing views about what happens on the other side, spiritualists no less than the established faith traditions. I have sat in a room where two mediums made entirely different pronouncements clairvoyantly on the same person. But I have also been amazed by the accuracy of some evidential mediums bringing through information that could not be accounted for even on the basis of Super-ESP.

One way of accommodating for all this variation is to take a quantum view of reality, which disallows the 'rightness' of any one view, since what we call reality is being continually co-created by consciousness. The inclusivity of this perspective I find reassuring, but of course I still wish I could be convinced of one super-ordinate reality.

This book by Professor David Fontana contains a mass of evidence, collated and set out with a cogency and clarity that I have not seen elsewhere. The scope of the book is formidable. Here are just some of the chapter contents: *evidence from parapsychology, evidence from apparitions, hauntings, detailed studies of outstanding mediums, physical Mediumship (ectoplasmic materializations and independent voice phenomena), instrumental transcommunication (such as tape recordings with no microphone, and direct radio and television transmission), NDEs, OBEs and evidence from reincarnation studies.*

Professor Fontana has a distinguished academic background. Among other things, he is a Fellow of the British Psychological Society and Founder Chair of its Transpersonal Psychology Section, has been Past President, and is current Vice President, of the Society for Psychical Research and holds the appointment of Professor of Transpersonal Psychology at Liverpool John Moores

University. So there is not much about contemporary scientific methodology that escapes him.

This makes Professor Fontana just the right person to write a book such as this. His approach is dispassionate, he is willing to explore the question of fraudulent Mediumship (which there undoubtedly has been), he understands the problem with applying conventional research criteria to the study of both parapsychology and Mediumship in particular and, where it is salient to do so, turns for detailed evidence to a raft of carefully documented individual case studies.

These days, science is so bent on the impersonal credibility of normothetic statistics that case studies are seriously out of fashion. Although many parapsychological experiments have now been shown to stand up to statistical scrutiny, the phenomena associated with Mediumship are more elusive and highly individual. Perhaps this is the quantum effect. I remember talking with a medical colleague whose wife had a tumour. They went to the Philippines to see a psychic surgeon and my friend described standing next to his wife and seeing the healer's hand disappear right into her abdomen, and re-emerge, without leaving a mark. (The therapeutic outcome was successful, I am glad to be able to add). Only one white crow is needed to disprove the theory that all crows are black.

This book is not light reading. The style is easy enough on the eye, but Professor Fontana has been punctilious throughout in articulating every reported detail, circumstantial finding and corroborative evidence. This is absolutely necessary if books like this one are going to carry any weight in the argument for or against the survival of death. He also includes his own first-hand experience of working with mediums, giving a detailed account of the work of the Scole group (see: www.esalenctr.org/display/confpage).

By the end of the book, it is clear that Professor Fontana has come up with evidence that simply cannot be talked away. To try to do so would be a childish defence against paradigm-challenging material which is found here in abundance.

But have I been fully convinced of a single other domain, or hierarchy of domains to which I, and you, shall be travelling in our continuing soul journeys? Yes, to the extent that I have learned more about, and feel better assured of, **a** way ahead, even if not **the** way ahead. Newtonian physics was thought to be absolute, then came along Quantum mechanics - but people can as easily fall in love with the quantum vision of reality and just like any infatuation, mistake it for the real thing. Mathematicians furiously argue about this - are mathematical principles absolute (Platonic idealism) or are the laws of mathematics in themselves no more than beautiful tools to comprehend and penetrate the nature of 'reality' the more deeply?

The real problem is that for all of us, the emotions that attach to the subject of death are so strong that we all seek for the evidence that we want to find. So I can't say what the confirmed atheist would make of this book. Now I think of it, I don't personally know any to ask, but I would like to think that at least a curious atheist would sit and ponder, 'maybe, maybe...'