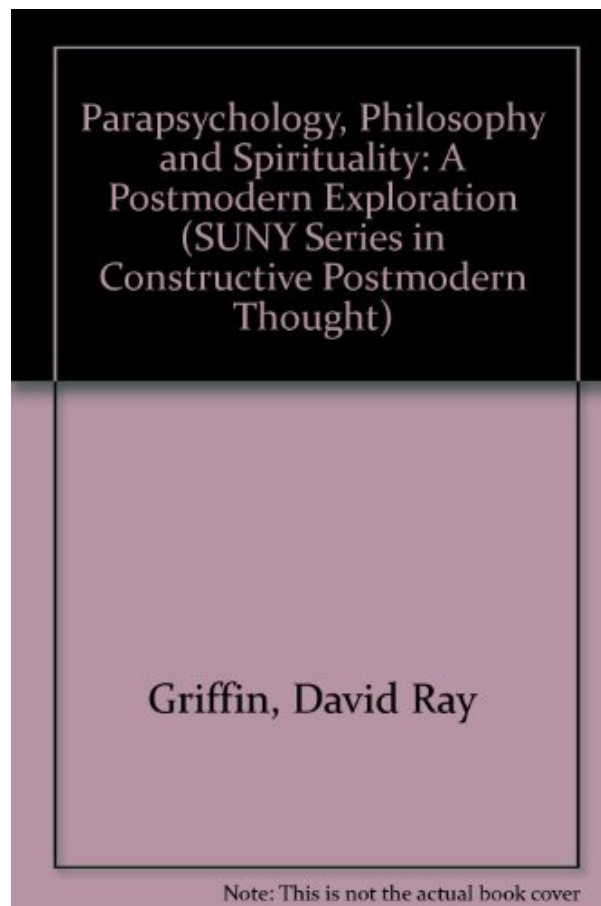


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## Review

This elegantly written book shows a greater command of the empirical data than any other work on the subject by a philosopher, and no other philosophical work on the survival of death deals with the conceptual issues with greater subtlety or thoroughness. Stephen E. Braude, author of *ESP and Psychokinesis: A Philosophical Examination* and *The Limits of Influence: Psychokinesis and the Philosophy of Science*

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Examines why parapsychology has been held in disdain by scientists, philosophers, and theologians, explores the evidence for ESP, psychokinesis, and life after death, and suggests that these phenomena provide support for a meaningful postmodern spirituality.

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In this book, David Ray Griffin, best known for his work on the problem of evil, turns his attention to the even more controversial topic of parapsychology. Griffin examines why scientists, philosophers, and theologians have held parapsychology in disdain and argues that neither a priori philosophical attacks nor wholesale rejection of the evidence can withstand scrutiny.

After articulating a constructive postmodern philosophy that allows the parapsychological evidence to be taken seriously, Griffin examines this evidence extensively. He identifies four types of repeatable phenomena that suggest the reality of extrasensory perception and psychokinesis. Then, on the basis of a nondualistic distinction between mind and brain, which makes the idea of life after death conceivable, he examines five types of evidence for the reality of life after death: messages from mediums; apparitions; cases of the possession type; cases of the reincarnation type; and out-of-body experiences. His philosophical and empirical examinations of these phenomena suggest that they provide support for a postmodern spirituality that overcomes the thinness of modern religion without returning to supernaturalism.

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3 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

by David Ray Griffin

By Kate J. Phillips

A very well-written and interesting book. Many differentiations made between

various psychological phenomenon. In the end, however, I wish the author had made some definitive statements of his own in terms of this subject. Again, very well-written, and open-minded; hope he'll write another--with his true feelings involved.

14 of 14 people found the following review helpful.

Compelling Evidence of Life After Death

By Dennis P. McMahon

Being a spiritually minded person as well as a 9/11 Truth advocate familiar with David Ray Griffin's many excellent books on 9/11, and knowing that he was a professor of religion and theology, I became very



curious to learn what Professor Griffin's views might be on Spirituality. This curiosity led me to "Parapsychology, Philosophy, and Spirituality--A Postmodern Exploration," the publication of which predated 9/11 by four years. In this scholarly work, Professor Griffin pays serious attention to the controversial subject of parapsychology, and intensely focuses on non-mainstream topics such as messages from mediums, reincarnation, and out-of-body experiences (OBEs). With seeming inevitability, Professor Griffin concludes that "there is formidable evidence of life after death." However, it is not so much the conclusion but the analysis and presentation of the direct evidence leading to that conclusion which makes this book such an absolutely rewarding read.

Professor Griffin comes across as a bit of a rebel when identifying "the central task of philosophy: to criticize the prevailing worldview(s) and to suggest a better one," an assessment that endeared him to this reader. For the record, I am also in accord with Professor Griffin's own "fully naturalistic" worldview which "allows humans again to feel kinship with the rest of nature, and...encourages reverence for life in all of its forms."

In this book, Professor Griffin uses the term "parapsychology" as a synonym for "psychic research." He divides paranormal phenomena into three major types: (1) extrasensory perception (ESP), the two main forms of which are telepathy and clairvoyance; (2) psychokinesis (PK), and (3) experiences such as messages from mediums and near-death and out-of-body experiences, that are suggestive of the existence of psyches apart from their physical bodies. Having set the parameters, Professor Griffin thoroughly engages the reader with "the scientific study of events" involving these three types of psychic phenomena.

Early on in "Parapsychology, Philosophy, and Spirituality," Professor Griffin provides an expansive list of the well known people who have become convinced that "paranormal events do happen," including, I was surprised to learn, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Thomas Edison, and Mark Twain. The author points out that just as the mainstream is unaware of the famous and respectable people who took the study of parapsychology seriously, "The same ignorance exists about the fact that there are long-established psychical research organizations with reputable journals and rigorous standards," an ignorance which Professor Griffin confronts with effective summaries of the legitimate psychical research performed since the late nineteenth century.

Especially illuminating is Professor Griffin's description of the "factors involved in the formation of opinions about controversial matters, such as the paranormal." These factors are: one's worldview which subjectively determines what is possible and impossible; one's awareness of empirical data; and wishful or fearful thinking. Categorizing people's views in this way--including the views of members of the so-called scientific community--makes their positions and thought processes easier to understand.

To be sure, some of the topics covered won't be very easily comprehended by the average nonfiction reader, e.g., the concepts of "prehension" and "retrocausation," and the various technical philosophies. However, Professor Griffin has a way of getting back to basics that is most welcome, and at times even poetic (e.g., defining "God" as "The Soul of the Universe"), making this a fascinating read overall.

Professor Griffin reveals that "telepathy and clairvoyance, which have been reported throughout history and were verified by tests with mediums and other people in the early days of psychical research, [also] have been verified in strictly controlled experiments in laboratories." Previously, the only known scientific approach to the paranormal that I had been aware of was undertaken as part of "The Afterlife Experiments" (Pocket Books, 2002, and earlier an HBO Special) conducted by Gary E. Schwartz, PhD, at the University of Arizona. Those experiments featured a study of notable contemporary mediums, including Suzane Northrop and John Edward, and demonstrated that mediumship is real. Professor Griffin's revelations about the prior historical research into psychic phenomena lend additional credibility to "The Afterlife Experiments"

retroactively.

An entire chapter is devoted to the philosophical conceivability or possibility of life after death, and it is here that people's mindsets come into prominence. While people with "data-led minds" are able to consider the evidence of life after death objectively, Professor Griffin notes, data-led minds "seem to be few and far between." There follows an extended and persuasive discussion of ESP and PK which buttresses the case for the possibility of life after death. But it is not until the succeeding five chapters that Professor Griffin examines the actual evidence for life after death, in the contexts of: mediumistic messages, possession, reincarnation, apparitions, and OBEs.

In the chapter on mediumistic messages, Professor Griffin states that "My purpose...is less to try and convince others of the reality of life after death than to show that there is evidence that is worthy of serious study." Indeed, there is a substantial amount of convincing evidence present in this chapter alone. Especially noteworthy are the actual case histories of readings by the medium "Mrs. Piper," and the so-called "cross correspondences" documented from 1901-1932 which involved "clever souls, who while living, had been involved in psychical research and wanted to provide evidence for their own survival [after their deaths] that could not be explained away in the usual manner."

On the subject of possession, Professor Griffin concludes that this type of evidence does not contain phenomena that are in themselves "strongly suggestive" of life after death.

However, convincing evidence of life after death does exist with regard to "cases of the reincarnation type." In the chapter on this topic, Professor Griffin relies primarily on the case studies of Ian Stevenson, MD, and does an excellent job of digesting Dr. Stevenson's extensive research--research that is most certainly indicative of reincarnation, and thus life after death. There are many general features in cases of the reincarnation type that make this evidence authentic--including the fact that the subjects are very young and innocent. Also intriguing is how often a child's current birthmarks or wounds are reflective of the manner in which the prior personality passed away. However, I did disagree with Professor Griffin on one point posited within this discussion. Specifically, he states that "persons who are 'reincarnated' tend to be persons of a particular type--those who are intensely materialistic and possessive, or intensely religious--or persons who have died in a particular manner: violently (or at least suddenly), while still young, or with strongly felt 'unfinished business.' The crucial factor, accordingly, seems to be the intensity with which that person lived, died, or wanted to continue living." Rather than limiting the experience of reincarnation to these "intense souls," I would argue that intense souls may simply be the type of souls most likely to demonstrate evidence of reincarnation in a subsequent life. (My two other main areas of disagreement did not, as here, involve an assessment of what the evidence indicates, but different beliefs. Specifically, Professor Griffin takes a linear approach to the concept of time, whereas I subscribe to the theory that time (as we know it) does not exist on the "Other Side." And contrary to Professor Griffin's and Dr. Stevenson's views, I still believe that the "so-called law of karma" (as Professor Griffin labels it) does exist.)

Highlights of the chapter on evidence from apparitions include an analysis of how alternate explanations (such as "super-ESP") don't really negate the possibility of life after death. For Professor Griffin, the two phenomena that "tip the scales in favor of an explanation in terms of postmortem agency [i.e., life after death]" are collective apparitions (where two or more people see the same apparition at the same time), and the similarity between apparitions of the living and those of the dead.

The discussion of apparitions segues nicely into the chapter on evidence from OBEs, defined within the book as "an experience of being out of one's body (whether one really was or was not)." Here, Professor Griffin examines the various features of OBEs and a number of case studies, and concludes that "OBEs do provide

direct experiential support of an affirmative answer to the chief question at issue, which is simply whether the person (the mind or the soul, with or without some kind of nonphysical [energetic?] body) can exist apart from the physical body."

While certain categories of the evidence are more convincing than others, it is the evidence taken collectively that is most compelling. This is so because, as the author says, "each of the kinds of evidence increases the antecedent probability of a survivalist interpretation of the others...and...some of them provide support for elements of the others." Further, "Whereas the nonsurvivalist interpreter must come up with a variety of [often strained] hypotheses to handle the various kinds of data...the survivalist can use one hypothesis--survival with (limited) agency--to explain the basic feature of all the phenomena." Thus, in sum, the conclusion that there is life after death is the most likely conclusion to be reached after a thorough and objective assessment of all of the evidence submitted.

When I began reading Professor Griffin's postmodern exploration, my strong belief--based on my own experiences and studies--was that the soul survives the body's passing. I did not expect to be persuaded otherwise upon completing this book. However, I also did not anticipate that my belief in the survival of the soul would be reinforced as a result this reading. Yet, that is exactly what happened, simply because the scientific evidence presented by Professor Griffin is substantial, compelling, and ultimately an extremely powerful indicator that there is indeed life after death.

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

Prehending parapsychology

By Ashtar Command

David Ray Griffin is a relatively well-known theologian in the United States. Or at least *was* a theologian before he joined the Truth Movement and became a conspiracy theorist. The various books in the "SUNY Series in Constructive Postmodern Thought" were written before 9/11. It should be noted at the outset that Griffin uses the term "postmodern" in a somewhat idiosyncratic fashion. Essentially, he has appropriated the term and pinned it on his own variant of process theology. This brand of liberal Christianity is based on the philosophical works of Alfred North Whitehead, Charles Hartshorne and (arguably) Griffin himself. Real postmodern thinkers would most certainly regard Whitehead's all-knowing metaphysics as a parody of early, pre-Kantian modernity. Indeed, Whitehead's works seem to be taken more seriously by theologians than philosophers - but then, that might actually be a commendation, considering the pseudo-intellectual vandals philosophers *do* take seriously.

"Parapsychology, philosophy and spirituality" is an extended pitch, directed at scientists and philosophers, to take parapsychology seriously. Griffin argues that parapsychology is a bona fide science, and that its findings strongly suggest that paranormal phenomena are real. He discusses a broad range of such phenomena: telepathy, clairvoyance, out-of-body experiences, reincarnation, mediumistic messages, etc. CSICOP won't like this book!

Griffin then attempts to explain the phenomena from the viewpoint of process theology. Apparently, many process theologians reject the idea of an immortal soul or life after death. So did Griffin until he turned to parapsychology, at which point he changed his mind in favour of the idea of an immortal soul. The problem is that Griffin constantly attempts to pigeon-hole parapsychology into the somewhat restricted worldview of process theology. Thus, he doesn't see paranormal phenomena as proof for dualism. Instead, he attempts to reconcile them with panpsychism (or panexperientialism). He also attempts to square them with evolution, proposing that perhaps the immortal soul evolved at a certain point in human (or animal?) evolution. Griffin is also forced to reject precognition, ostensibly because it's incoherent. In my opinion, the real reason is its incompatibility with process theology, according to which the future doesn't exist - the God of process

theology is a God within time who co-evolves with the universe.

In fact, I suspect that sections of this book are actually veiled polemics against fellow process theologians who won't readily accept the idea of survival after death. Thus, Griffin discusses at ridiculous length the alternative hypothesis that parapsychological phenomena are the result of "super-PSI abilities" rather than the survival of bodily death. Under this scenario, all memories of the dead are somehow still floating out there, and a medium with developed telepathic abilities can "prehend" them and appropriate them, thereby creating the illusion of a deceased person speaking through the medium, when in reality the medium simply rehashes old memory patterns. This is a classical example of the explanation being stranger than the problem it's supposed to explain - in practice, the explanation accepts the occult notion of the Akashic records! It also strikes me as incoherent, since one of Griffin's arguments against materialism is that consciousness is a self-existing whole rather than a mere sum of small parts that could be reduced to matter. But if the memories "prehended" by the medium are so holistic that they can mimic the deceased person almost perfectly, wouldn't this be a strong presumption in favour of the memories \*actually being\* the dead person?

In the end, Griffin rejects super-PSI and settles for the "survivalist" hypothesis. He seems to regard out-of-body experiences, especially those reported in conjunction with near-death experiences, as the smoking gun evidence for life after death and the existence of an immortal soul that can leave the physical body. The book ends with a call to unite science, philosophy and spirituality, using the philosophy of Whitehead as a necessary starting point.

"Parapsychology, philosophy and spirituality" does raise a lot of interesting points. Griffin writes in an easily accessible and pedagogic manner, although at times he becomes a bit too pedantic and boring. (He's a theology professor, after all!) This is not a bad book, not by any means. My problem with it is that Griffin somehow rejects one set of dogma - those of materialist science - in favour of another set of dogma, this time process theology. I admit a certain fascination with Whitehead, but the all-knowing, all-prehending traits of his philosophy do strike me as somewhat odd. Did he have a revelation on the road to Damascus, or what? Griffin should be commended for changing his mind on a central issue for his own theology, but it still feels as if he is attempting to squeeze the paranormal into a rigid, dogmatic framework anyway.

The truth is out there, agent Griffin. But is the truth to be prehendend through the lens of process theology? That still remains to be seen...

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