

Survival and the Empirical World:
A Philosophical Critique of Empirical Arguments for Life after Death
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Book Prospectus
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I. Book Abstract

Most broadly stated, *Survival and the Empirical World* is a philosophical exploration of the empirical approach to postmortem survival—the survival of consciousness or the self beyond physical death. More specifically, in this book I critically evaluate arguments offered in support of the contention, shared by many who believe in survival, that there is empirical evidence that justifies belief in survival. I argue that empirical arguments for survival, as traditionally formulated by prominent philosophers and survival researchers during the past century, are unsuccessful at providing a suitably robust justification for belief in survival.

My exploration of empirical arguments for survival focuses on empirical arguments in the tradition of philosophers such as William James, C.D. Broad, C.J. Ducasse and H.H. Price. These “classical” arguments for survival are based on a wide range of empirical data drawn from five kinds of ostensibly “paranormal” phenomena: out-of-body and near-death experiences, apparitional experiences, mediumship, and cases of the reincarnation type. Many empirical survivalists maintain that these phenomena (severally or jointly) provide good perhaps even compelling evidence for postmortem survival. I aim to critically explore the relation of “evidential support” purported to exist between the relevant data and the survival hypothesis. In this way, this book explores fundamental issues in the logic of empirical arguments for survival as a contribution to the philosophy of postmortem survival.

Since many empirical survivalists maintain that the relevant data evidentially support the survival hypothesis because the latter best fits, accounts for, or explains the data, the present book focuses on what might be designated the “explanatory axis” of empirical survival arguments. I propose that the central issues of debate concerning empirical survival arguments must be approached with a particular recalibration of the traditional explanatory axis of such arguments. Such a recalibration will constellate the central issues of the debate around a crucial element in confirmation theory—how likely the relevant phenomena or evidence are if the survival hypothesis is true. This approach stands in sharp contrast to the typical survivalist presentation that, while contending that the survival hypothesis is the best explanation of the data, focuses far too narrowly on the alleged failures of alternative explanations of the data, with little or no effort devoted to showing why the survival hypothesis itself should lead us to expect the data. My approach also stands in contrast to many traditional skeptical treatments that focus on the alleged antecedent improbability of survival, which skeptics argue defeats any justification the survival hypothesis might have by virtue of its explanatory power.

My proposed recalibration of explanatory axis of empirical survival arguments will produce three important results with respect to the critical evaluation of such arguments.

(1) The approach exposes a range of largely unacknowledged or unexplored auxiliary assumptions on which the explanatory power of the survival hypothesis crucially depends. The empirical survivalist's tendency to focus on the inadequacies of explanatory competitors has often masked these assumptions and hence masked weaknesses in survival arguments. I contend that once these assumptions are isolated and their implications traced out, it will be necessary to substantially rethink the three areas of traditional debate concerning empirical arguments for survival: (i) the content of the survival hypothesis, (ii) the assessment and relevance of the antecedent probability of the survival hypothesis, and (iii) how alternative explanations of the data pose their most potent challenges to the survival hypothesis.

(2) In the light of (1), I argue that we are not justified in concluding that a hypothesis of personal survival is the best explanation of the data traditionally adduced as empirical evidence for survival. The central consideration here is that the likelihood of the relevant data according to any hypothesis of personal survival—a crucial component of the alleged explanatory power of the survival hypothesis—will depend on the acceptance of a wide range of auxiliary assumptions. I argue that these assumptions are either not independently testable or otherwise fail to bear the appropriate epistemic credentials. Only the adoption of a liberal principle of permissibility would sanction such assumptions, but doing so would equally sanction different auxiliary statements in the interest of alternative non-survival hypotheses, which would as a result inevitably yield the same likelihoods of the relevant data. This undermines the empirical survivalist contention that the survival hypothesis is the best explanation of the data. Indeed, I argue that the considerations here also defeat the contention made by a number of prominent empirical survivalists that the survival hypothesis has a greater prior or antecedent probability than the closest explanatory competitors. Since assessments of prior probability are important in the assessment of the net plausibility of hypotheses, the ultimate goal of showing that the survival hypothesis has a favorable net positive epistemic status (e.g., is more probable than not) is not well-served by the classical empirical arguments.

(3) Although classical empirical arguments for survival do not provide a suitably robust justification of belief in survival, they *can* nonetheless make a modest contribution to the epistemic justification of belief in survival. I argue that the arguments may add to or increase the justification of belief in survival on other grounds, experiential and philosophical. Moreover, when developed in religious context, the empirical evidence may aid in the development of an empirically informed religious eschatology. The latter suggests an important recontextualizing of the classical empirical arguments for survival.

II. Table of Contents

Introduction

Chapter 1: The Concept of Postmortem Survival

Chapter 2: Empirical Evidence for Survival
Chapter 3: Classical Empirical Arguments for Survival
Chapter 4: Recalibrating the Survival Debate
Chapter 5: The Predictive Power of the Survival Hypothesis
Chapter 6: The Psychological Dimensions of Survival Evidence
Chapter 7: The Veridical Dimensions of Survival Evidence
Chapter 8: Assessing the Weight of the Evidence
Chapter 9: The Justification of Belief in Survival
Conclusion

III. Analytical Summary of Chapters

A. Chapters 1–4 present and discuss the relevant data and structure of empirical arguments for survival, along with an analysis of crucial issues in the debate concerning the cogency of such arguments. The discussion culminates with a proposal to recalibrate the explanatory axis of the survival debate, making the predictive power of the survival hypothesis the core or central issue.

1. After exploring a variety of possible survival hypotheses in chapter 1, in chapter 2 I outline and illustrate five kinds of allegedly paranormal phenomena: out-of-body and near-death experiences, apparitional experiences, mediumistic communications, and cases of the reincarnation type. I highlight the evidentially salient features of these phenomena, that is, those features that are *prima facie* suggestive of some kind of postmortem survival.
2. Chapter 3 focuses on how empirical survivalists (as well as skeptics) have structured the argument for survival from the evidence, typically taking it that the evidence renders the survival hypothesis probable (to some significant degree) by virtue of the latter's ability to provide a *superior explanation* of the former. I focus on a particular version of this argument—the standard empirical argument (SEA)—that purports to infer the probable truth of survival from premises that affirm that the survival hypothesis is the best explanation of the data and is not an antecedently improbable hypothesis. SEA stands in contrast to a more modest empirical survival argument that relies on a Likelihoodist approach to confirmation theory to explicate how empirical evidence favors the survival hypothesis over various competitors.
3. Chapter 4 explores the core issues involved in the arguments of chapter 3, especially the contention that the survival hypothesis is a superior explanation of the relevant data. Three core issues are discussed: (i) the content of the survival hypothesis (and its competitors), (ii) the role and assessment of antecedent probabilities (for the survival hypothesis and its competitors), and (iii) the explanatory power of alternative non-survival hypotheses.
4. I conclude chapter 4 by arguing for a recalibration of the survival debate with the central issue being the predictive power of the survival hypothesis—specifically how likely the evidence (of chapter 2) is if the survival hypothesis is true. This issue, often marginalized by the survivalist focus on how explanatory competitors do not lead us to expect the data, forces a careful consideration of the actual content of the survival hypothesis and its implications for features of the empirical world.

B. Chapters 5–7 critically explore the explanatory axis of the “standard empirical argument” (SEA), specifically the contention that the survival hypothesis is the best explanation of the data. Chapter 5 considers the extent to which the survival hypothesis leads us to expect the relevant data. Chapters 6 and 7 consider the extent to which alternative non-survival hypotheses lead us to expect the data.

1. Chapter 5 provides a critique of the contention that the survival hypothesis leads us to expect the relevant data. I argue that prominent defenders of this claim have not successfully argued it, and—more strongly—there are good reasons for supposing that the survival hypothesis (in its various forms) does not lead us to expect the relevant data, at least not without the introduction of a large number of auxiliary hypotheses that not independently testable or otherwise lack the appropriate epistemic credentials. Hence, the predictive power of the survival hypothesis can only be purchased at the cost of an epistemic blowback that diminishes the net plausibility of the survival hypothesis and thereby undercuts the ability of empirical survival arguments to provide a justification for belief in survival.
2. Chapters 6 and 7 provide reasons for supposing that we are not justified in believing that the data, even collectively considered, are very unlikely but for the survival hypothesis, for we cannot adequately rule out a fairly recalcitrant exotic counter-explanation in terms of *motivated living-agent psi*. Chapter 6 looks specifically at how psychological explanations can account for psychological and behavioral features of the evidence for survival, whereas chapter 7 focuses on how psychic functioning in living persons, together with psychological explanations, can account for veridical features of the evidence. I argue that a motivated living-agent psi hypothesis leads us to expect most of the data in need of explanation, and the presence of unexplained (recalcitrant) evidence does not significantly diminish the challenge posed to the survival hypothesis by a motivated living-agent psi hypothesis. Furthermore, considerations from chapter 5 show that standard survivalist objections to a motivated living-agent psi hypothesis are self-defeating for the survivalist. The considerations in chapters 6 and 7 support the claim that we are not justified to believe that survival is the best explanation of the data.

C. The final two chapters—chapters 8 and 9—summarize and augment the main argument of the book. I conclude in chapter 9 with a modest defense of the rationality of belief in survival by considering the prospects for (i) an experiential justification of belief in survival and (ii) empirical evidence adding to or increasing the justification of belief in survival on other grounds (experiential and philosophical). I also consider how empirical evidence can, in religious context, assist the development of an empirically informed religious eschatology, analogous to the use of philosophy in the development of philosophically informed models of survival and the afterlife.

1. Chapter 8 summarizes my multi-tiered argument for supposing that classical empirical arguments for survival do not provide a suitably robust justification for belief in survival, especially where the survival hypothesis is taken to be a scientific or quasi-scientific hypothesis or where the version of the survival hypothesis in view is that of personal survival. I also augment my main argument of chapters 5 through 7 by

showing that, even if the survival hypothesis is the best explanation of the data, the inference to a favorable probability judgment is unsuccessful.

2. Having argued the central thesis of the book, in chapter 9 I present an argument in defense of belief in survival. I first argue that belief in survival can enjoy a limited justification on experiential grounds, analogous to how religious experience provides an experiential justification of religious belief. Second, empirical arguments can plausibly make a number of modest contributions to the justification of belief in survival if combined with philosophical and religious considerations. Third, I also argue that empirical arguments can contribute to the development of religious eschatologies by providing constraints on theorizing about the afterlife similar to the conceptual constraints that have guided philosophically informed religious eschatologies. Thus, empirical arguments, even of the classical variety, can make a valuable contribution to inquiry into the afterlife.

IV. Detailed Outline of Chapters (with Chapter Abstracts)

Introduction

Chapter 1: The Concept of Postmortem Survival

Chapter 1 Abstract

Chapter 1 explores some fundamental features of the concept of postmortem survival. I highlight two such features because of their significance to the empirical case for survival: (i) what survives death and (ii) in what manner or mode it survives. Under (ii) I outline the traditional distinction between survival with a body (embodied survival) and survival without a body (disembodied survival). Under (i), I consider a range of survival possibilities that may be designated “personal” since they involve the postmortem persistence of qualities essential to personhood. Various “attenuated” forms of personal survival are explored, especially in connection with the idea of disembodied survival since these forms of survival present a *prima facie* challenge to the idea that postmortem persons would be sufficiently continuous with their ante-mortem counterpart to be plausibly considered one and the same person. Various non-personal conceptions of survival are also discussed; for example, the postmortem persistence of the contents of the unconscious, the dispositional basis of the personality, or a person’s images, emotions, thoughts, or ideas—all without the continuation of the stream of consciousness or experience with which they were originally associated.

1.1 Disembodied and Embodied Survival

1.2 Conceptions of Personal Survival

1.2.1 Individual Psychology: Robust and Attenuated

1.2.2 The Composite Self and the Unconscious

1.2.3 The Metaphysics and Epistemology of Personal Identity

1.3 Conceptions of Non-Personal Survival

1.3.1 The Persistence of Contents of the Unconscious

1.3.2 Broad’s “Dispositional Persistence” Hypothesis

1.3.3 Price’s “Place Memories” Hypothesis

1.3.4 Persisting Pure Awareness

1.4 A Typology of Possible Survival Hypotheses

Chapter 2: Empirical Evidence for Survival

Chapter 2 Abstract

In chapter 2 I provide an account of the empirical approach to survival, with a focus on the five kinds of ostensibly “paranormal” or “psychical” phenomena from which data allegedly suggestive of personal survival has been collected. (i) Out-of-body experiences and (ii) near-death experiences are phenomena suggestive of the ontological autonomy of consciousness, that is, phenomena that appear to show that consciousness in living persons has the capacity for existence independent of the body. (iii) Apparitional experiences, (iv) mediumistic communications, and (v) cases of the reincarnation type involve phenomena that appear to show that the consciousness of some formerly living persons has in fact persisted after death. Arguments for survival of death based on these phenomena I designate classical empirical arguments.

2.1 The Empirical Approach to Survival

2.1.1 Philosophical and Religious Approaches to Survival

2.1.2 Characterizing the Empirical Approach to Survival

2.1.3 Five Kinds of Phenomena Suggestive of Survival

2.2 Phenomena Suggestive of the Ontological Autonomy of Consciousness

2.2.1 Out-of-Body Experiences

2.2.2 Near-Death Experiences

2.3 Apparitional Experiences of the Dead

2.3.1 Early Investigations

2.3.2 Contemporary Apparitional Experiences

2.4 Mediumistic Communications with the Dead

2.4.1 Early Investigations

2.4.2 Contemporary Mediumship

2.5 Cases of the Reincarnation Type

2.5.1 Ian Stevenson’s Work

2.5.2 Four Strong Cases

2.5.3 Recent Research on Reincarnation Cases

Chapter 3: The Classical Empirical Argument for Survival

Chapter 3 Abstract

Chapter 3 discusses the content and formal structure of the classical empirical argument for survival. After a concise outline of the essential strands of data from the phenomena discussed in chapter 2, I discuss how prominent philosophers and survival researchers have construed the argument from these data to the hypothesis of survival, including both the alleged weight of the evidence and the criteria deployed for assessing the weight of the evidence. The inference to survival from the data is typically an explanatory one, specifically positing the survival hypothesis as the *best explanation* of the relevant data, so explanatory considerations play a central role in the assessment of the evidence for survival. Among such considerations—and the one I ultimately contend is most

significant—is how well the survival hypothesis and its competitors lead us to expect the relevant range of data. Survivalists routinely argue that the survival hypothesis better leads us to expect the data than non-survival alternatives. Some claim that the survival hypothesis leads us to expect data that are otherwise *quite* unlikely. However, a number of prominent writers argue that what is also required to properly assess the posterior probability of the survival hypothesis is a judgment regarding the antecedent or prior probabilities of the survival hypothesis and its competitors. The chapter culminates with what I designate the standard empirical argument (SEA), which attempts to arrive at a conclusion about the net plausibility of the survival hypothesis on the basis of both explanatory considerations and a favorable judgment of antecedent probability. I also contrast SEA with a more modest empirical survival argument—a Likelihoodist empirical argument (LEA)—based on a Likelihoodist approach to confirmation theory.

3.1 The Essential Strands of Evidence

3.2 C.J. Ducasse’s Argument from Analogy

3.2.1 The Criteria of Evidence for Mundane Survival “M”

3.2.2 Evidence for Postmortem Survival Sufficiently Similar to “M”

3.3 Survival as an Inference to Best Explanation

3.3.1 Explanation and Explanatory Candidates

3.3.2 The Predictive Power of the Survival Hypothesis

3.3.3 Ruling Out Explanatory Competitors

3.4 Formulating the Standard Empirical Argument for Survival

3.4.1 The Role of Antecedent Probability

3.4.2 The “Standard Empirical Argument” for Survival

3.4.3 A “Likelihoodist” Alternative

Chapter 4: Recalibrating the Survival Debate

Chapter 4 Abstract

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the relevant literature on classical empirical arguments for survival with the aim of (i) defining the central issues of debate and (ii) proposing a particular recalibration of this debate for the purpose of a new assessment of empirical arguments for survival.

Traditionally there have been three central issues in the debate concerning empirical arguments for survival. (a) The first concerns how to understand the survival hypothesis itself. What is the content of the survival hypothesis? Are we postulating the survival of the self in a robust or significantly attenuated sense? (b) The second issue concerns the epistemic credentials of the survival hypothesis independent of its ability to explain the data empirical survivalists adduce in its favor. More technically stated, what is the antecedent probability of survival? Skeptics assign a value here close to zero, whereas empirical survivalists typically adopt a defensive posture and argue that reasons adduced by skeptics for viewing the survival hypothesis as antecedently improbable are weak or defective. (c) The third issue of debate concerns the extent to which some hypothesis other than survival can adequately explain the data. While skeptical appeals to various naturalistic explanations have regularly entered the discussion here, the bulk of the

literature has focused on what is widely regarded as the most recalcitrant counter-explanation of the data: the appeal to psychic functioning—extra-sensory perception and psychokinesis—among living agents.

In the final section of the chapter I argue for a recalibration of the survival debate. While the three issues sketched above are important, they are most effectively engaged with a new focus: *the logical connection between the survival hypothesis and the features of the world that the survival hypothesis ostensibly explains*. The explanatory axis of the classical arguments assumes such a connection. However, not only is this matter inadequately developed in most of the literature, it has regularly been masked by the survivalist pre-occupation with the alleged inability of competitors to explain the data. The explanatory axis of the survival debate needs to be recalibrated with the central issue being the predictive power of the survival hypothesis or how well the survival hypothesis leads us to expect the relevant data. Otherwise stated, the central issue must be—in the language of confirmation theory—the likelihood of evidential outcomes according to the survival hypothesis.

Once predictive power or the likelihood of the evidence is the central issue, the other three issues will accordingly constellate. It will be necessary to explore the content of the survival hypothesis with a view to determining what kind of content best facilitates the needed logical connection between the survival hypothesis and the relevant features of the empirical world. It follows that assessments of the antecedent probability of survival will have to consider not only a core survival claim but also a range of auxiliary statements that are needed to facilitate the link between survival and the empirical world. Finally, proposed explanatory competitors will be more accurately assessed when their explanatory force is examined in the light of their own auxiliary statements.

Authors considered: C.D. Broad, Curt Ducasse, H.H. Price, Alan Gauld, Ian Stevenson, John Hick, Robert Almeder, David Ray Griffin, R.W.K. Paterson, Stephen Braude, and David Lund.

4.1 Survival Hypotheses

4.1.1 Robust Personal Survival

4.1.2 Attenuated Survival Hypotheses

4.1.3 Further Reflections

4.2 The Antecedent Probability of Survival

4.2.1 The Intelligibility of Survival

4.2.2 Substance Dualism and Survival

4.3.3 Personal Identity and Embodiment

4.3.4 Consciousness and Embodiment

4.3 The Challenge of Explanatory Competitors

4.3.1 The Alleged Failure of Naturalistic Explanations

4.3.2 The Alleged Failure of Living-Agent Psi Explanations

4.3.3 Super-Psi vs. Motivated Living-Agent Psi

4.4 The Need for a Recalibration of the Survival Debate

4.4.1 Why the Survival Debate Needs Recalibration

4.4.2 Recalibrating the Explanatory Axis

4.4.3 The Three Traditional Issues in New Perspective

Chapter 5: The Predictive Power of the Survival Hypothesis

Chapter 5 Abstract

In chapter 5 I present the first argument for supposing that the survival hypothesis (in various forms) does not have adequate explanatory power, namely that it lacks suitable predictive power over the relevant range of data it is adduced to explain. The chapter highlights the need for supplementing simple conceptions of survival with various auxiliary assumptions in order to generate “likelihoods” for the way the empirical world should look if survival is true, specifically in a way that conforms to the actual observational evidence. The necessary auxiliary assumptions include various hypotheses concerning the knowledge, intentions, and powers of discarnate persons, as well as laws governing a process such as reincarnation.

My exploration yields results that are decidedly unfavorable to empirical survival arguments. I first propose a minimalist set of necessary auxiliary assumptions, but show that they do not yield even general predictions. A proposed expanded set of assumptions only yields very general kinds of predictions relevant to some of the data. I argue that only a further expansion of auxiliaries into a very robust set would yield any plausible likelihood of the data. However, successive expansions of auxiliary hypotheses carry increasing epistemic blowback, for the needed auxiliary hypotheses suffer from a lack of epistemic credentials in general and a lack of independent testability in particular.

I argue that the results defeat SEA in two ways. First, the survivalist can only maintain the explanatory power of the survival hypothesis (via its alleged predictive power) at the cost of a significant reduction in the antecedent probability of the survival hypothesis. This defeats the SEA premise that affirms a favorable antecedent probability for the survival hypothesis, and it does so quite independent of the typical considerations brought against the antecedent probability of the survival hypothesis. Second, even the liberal addition of auxiliary hypotheses will not allow the defender of SEA to justifiably claim that the survival hypothesis provides the best explanation of the data via its predictive power. This premise would depend on the SEA defender being able to show that the survival hypothesis (together with a robust set of auxiliary assumptions) renders the data more likely than the alternative non-survival hypotheses. However, having adopted a liberal principle of permissibility for enlisting survival-friendly auxiliary hypotheses, the SEA defender is in principle committed to permitting the same in the construction of alternative non-survival hypotheses. This inevitably results in non-survival hypotheses leading us to expect the data at least as well as survival hypotheses. I argue that in this situation the survival hypothesis has no predictive advantage and hence the explanatory power of the survival hypothesis is deflated. I argue that this second point defeats both SEA and the softer Likelihoodist argument that only considers the comparative likelihoods of the evidence.

At several points in the chapter I provide comparisons and contrasts between the ostensible predictive power of the survival hypothesis and the alleged predictive power of theism as a hypothesis that purports to explain features of the empirical world.

- 5.1 The Predictive Failure of Simple Survival Hypotheses
 - 5.1.1 Possible Afterlife Scenarios for Souls and Embodied Survivors
 - 5.1.2 Survivors, Survival Data, and Features of the Empirical World
- 5.2 Auxiliary Assumptions: Building a Robust Survival Hypothesis
 - 5.2.1 Necessary Minimalist Auxiliary Assumptions
 - 5.2.2 The Inadequacy of the Minimalist Auxiliary Assumption Set
 - 5.2.3 An Expanded Robust Set of Auxiliary Assumptions
 - 5.2.4 Additional Auxiliary Assumptions Covering “Reincarnation Scenarios”
- 5.3 Measuring Epistemic Blowback
 - 5.3.1 Independent Testability and General Epistemic Credentials
 - 5.3.2 Deflated Antecedent Probability
- 5.4 The Likelihoodist Empirical Argument to the Rescue
 - 5.4.1 Eliminating Considerations of Antecedent Probability
 - 5.4.2 Equal Likelihoods and Inscrutable Predictive Power

Chapter 6: The Psychological Dimensions of Survival Evidence

Chapter 6 Abstract

In chapter 6 I explore the extent to which non-survival hypotheses can lead us to expect the psychological and behavioral features of the data, especially persons identifying themselves as formerly living persons, persons exhibiting temporary possession by discarnate personalities, and persons exhibiting unusual skills and personality-traits indicative of some formerly living person.

The chapter explores depth-psychological models of the psyche and clinical data concerning dissociative phenomena to show that many of the prominent psychological features of the data would not be surprising if it turned out that survival is false. First, purely psychological considerations—for example, the range of established dissociative phenomena—would lead us to expect the dramatic and very lifelike personae of the deceased manifested in mediumship and cases suggestive of reincarnation. Second, there are many cases of unusual human abilities outside the cases allegedly suggestive of survival that exhibit the qualities found in the better cases allegedly indicative of survival, which makes their appearance in the latter context overall less surprising. Finally, the chapter looks at how models of the psyche which emphasize the unconscious reveal the subtle nature of human needs and motivations, which in turn opens up the plausibility of a motivational explanation of the prominent and otherwise quite curious psychological facts exhibited in cases suggestive of survival, not the least of which is how unusual psychological phenomena take a form that is *prima facie* suggestive of survival. This is applied to several historical cases of alleged reincarnation, spirit communication, near-death experiences, and apparitional experiences.

- 6.1 The Self and Dissociative Phenomena
 - 6.1.1 The Ego, Complexes, and Dissociation
 - 6.1.2 Dissociative Phenomena and Dissociative Disorders
 - 6.1.3 Dissociative States and Mediumistic Personae
 - 6.1.4 Dissociative States and Reincarnation Personae

- 6.2 Unusual Abilities and Skills
 - 6.2.1 The Sudden Manifestation of Linguistic Skills
 - 6.2.2 The Sudden Manifestation of Artistic Skills
 - 6.2.3 The Sudden Manifestation of Other Interesting Abilities
- 6.3 Motivational Factors and Belief in Survival
 - 6.3.1 The Subtle Nature of Needs and Motivations
 - 6.3.2 Depth Psychology and the Unconscious
 - 6.3.3 Motivations Arising from the Unconscious
 - 6.3.4 How “Survival” Meets Fundamental Psychological Needs
- 6.4 Some Ostensible Cases of Survival Viewed Motivationally
 - 6.4.1 Cases of the Reincarnation Type
 - 6.4.2 Cases of Mediumship
 - 6.4.3 Cases of Near-Death Experiences
 - 6.4.4 Cases of Apparitional Experiences

Chapter 7: The Veridical Dimensions of Survival Evidence

Chapter 7 Abstract

In chapter 7 I explore the extent to which non-survival hypotheses can explain the veridical features of cases allegedly suggestive of survival. In particular, the chapter provides a detailed look at what most survivalists regard as the strongest explanatory competitor to survival at this juncture, the supposition of living agent psychic functioning in the form of extra-sensory perception and psychokinesis, which would in principle grant living agents epistemic access to information that otherwise seems to require a formerly living person as its source, and—in the case of psychokinesis—which might also account for physical phenomena associated some pieces of survival evidence.

I argue that there is a version of the living-agent psi hypothesis, one which integrates the psychological insights canvassed in chapter 6, that would lead us to expect the same sorts of generalized phenomena presented by the better cases of survival. Of crucial importance to this chapter is my showing how a psychologically robust ordinary-psi hypothesis (not extravagant or super-psi) poses an efficacious challenge to the explanatory power of the survival hypothesis (in each of the forms considered in earlier chapters). The point argued here is not that this exotic counter-explanation is a superior explanation to survival, but rather that it challenges the superior explanatory power of the survival hypothesis by yielding the same likelihoods of evidence as survival, especially once appropriate auxiliary hypotheses are introduced. Moreover, since the survival hypothesis is committed to an auxiliary assumption entailing psychic functioning (in both living agents and the deceased), the survivalist is poorly situated to reject counter-explanations in terms of exotic cognitive processes and causal powers that survivalists must also postulate. Finally, the chapter demonstrates why the appeal to super-psi (judged by many survivalists to be implausible) is unnecessary to defeat the explanatory power of the survival hypothesis.

- 7.1 Ordinary Psi and Super-Psi
 - 7.1.1 The Extent of So-Called Ordinary Psi and Its Explanatory Salience
 - 7.1.2 The Facts that Ordinary Psi Allegedly Cannot Explain

- 7.1.3 The Status and Relevance of Super-Psi
- 7.2 Motivational Psi Theory
 - 7.2.1 Stephen Braude's Motivational Psi Hypothesis
 - 7.2.2 Application to Some Actual Cases
 - 7.2.3 Response to Survivalist Objections
- 7.3 The Psychologically Robust Psi Hypothesis
 - 7.3.1 What the Motivational Psi Hypothesis Explains
 - 7.3.2 The Need for Auxiliary Assumptions
 - 7.3.3 Predictive Power and the Data of Survival
- 7.4. Concluding Remarks

Chapter 8: Assessing the Weight of the Evidence

Chapter 8 Abstract

In this chapter I provide a summary and extended analysis of the weight of the empirical evidence for postmortem survival in the light of the arguments of chapters 5 through 7. The analysis compares how different survival hypotheses fare in relation to each other, as well as how the best survival hypotheses compare with a psychologically robust living-agent psi hypothesis.

I first summarize the argument of chapters 5 through 7 for supposing that the reasons traditionally proposed for thinking that the survival hypothesis is the best explanation of the data are nowhere nearly as strong as many empirical survivalists have maintained. I further show that the arguments of chapters 5 through 7 not only undercut the survivalist attribution of superior explanatory power of the survival hypothesis, but they actually rebut it by giving us very good reason for supposing that survival is not the best explanation of the data. As in earlier chapters, I emphasize the importance of the predictive power of the various hypotheses under consideration, which is important in both Likelihoodist and Bayesian approaches to confirmation theory.

In the second part of the chapter I show that even if survival is granted superior explanatory power, the inference to survival remains problematic in a way not adequately acknowledged by defenders of the empirical arguments. Many survivalists intend to justify belief in survival on the basis of the evidence presented by way of the classical arguments. They aim at showing that the survival hypothesis has a net plausibility sufficient for acceptance. However, it is one thing to show that the evidence favors the survival hypothesis over all available competitors; it is quite another matter to argue that the survival hypothesis has epistemic credentials that suffice for its rational acceptance. Since survivalists who endorse the empirical arguments routinely contend that the evidence justifies belief in survival because it renders the survival hypothesis more probable than not (or even highly probable), the challenge facing the empirical survivalist is to show how judgments of favorable epistemic probability or likelihood of truth follow from the attribution of explanatory virtue to the survival hypothesis. I argue that they have not been successful in this regard, even with the introduction of considerations from the antecedent or prior probability of the survival hypothesis.

In the effort to reinforce the contention of section two of the chapter, in the third section I provide a comparative analysis of the antecedent probability of the various explanatory candidates, highly relevant to the issue of assessing the net plausibility of the survival hypothesis. I look at the issues of simplicity and fit with background knowledge. My analysis reinforces and further develops an important implication of the argument of chapter 5: the real antecedent probability challenge to survival hypotheses lies in the challenge posed to the epistemic status of the auxiliary hypotheses needed to generate sufficiently precise predictions, not the general supposition of survival itself. Hence, the antecedent probability of survival hypotheses cannot be sufficiently raised by merely undercutting or rebutting traditional materialist objections to survival. The survivalist emphasis on critiquing various species of materialism and offering defenses of substance dualism has masked rather than addressed how the survival hypothesis is challenged by considerations relevant to the antecedent probability of the hypothesis.

- 8.1 Survival vs. a Psychologically Robust Psi Hypothesis
 - 8.1.1 Assessing Different Survival Hypotheses
 - 8.1.2 Comparison of Predictive Power of Explanatory Competitors
 - 8.1.3 The Problem of Recalcitrant Evidence
- 8.2 The Limits of Inference to Best Explanation
 - 8.2.1 Bas van Fraassen and Peter Lipton on IBE Arguments
 - 8.2.2 The Gap Problem in the Standard Empirical Argument
 - 8.2.3 Survivalist Gap-Bridging Maneuvers
- 8.3 Antecedent Probability Considered Again
 - 8.3.1 Fit with Background Knowledge
 - 8.3.2 Simplicity and Other Trade Offs
- 8.4 Concluding Remarks

Chapter 9: The Justification of Belief in Survival

Chapter 9 Abstract

Having argued in earlier chapters that classical empirical arguments for survival do not provide a suitably robust justification for belief in survival, I propose in this chapter to consider the extent to which belief in survival can nonetheless be justified, as well as the extent to which empirical arguments for survival might contribute to this. First, I favorably consider the prospects for a direct experiential justification of survival beliefs analogous to how philosophers of religion have argued for a direct experiential justification of religious belief based on religious experience. I outline similar prospects for survival beliefs based on subjects who have apparitional experiences, experiences as mediums, and out-of-body and near-death experiences. Second, I consider how empirical arguments for survival might play an auxiliary role in the justification of belief in survival. For example, I show how they might shore up the justification of experientially justified survival beliefs, as well as operate in tandem with philosophical arguments for survival. Finally, I consider the value of empirical arguments for survival when they are relocated in a religious context. Here I argue, largely in a programmatic manner, that empirical survival arguments can contribute to the development of religious eschatologies

by providing constraints on theorizing about the afterlife similar to the conceptual constraints that have guided philosophically informed religious eschatologies.

9.1 The Prospects for an Experiential Justification of Belief in Survival

9.1.1 Experiential vs. Inferential Justification of Belief in Survival

9.1.2 Experiential Grounds for Belief in Survival

9.1.3 Religious Experience and Survival Experiences

9.2 Empirical Arguments in Philosophical Context

9.2.1 Philosophical Arguments for the Existence of Souls

9.2.2 Empirical Arguments and the Nature of the Afterlife

9.3 Empirical Arguments in Religious Context

9.3.1 Apparent Conflicts between Empirical Evidences and Religious Conceptions of the Afterlife

9.3.2. Empirical Evidence and the Intermediate State

9.3.3 Reincarnation Evidence Considered in Religious Context

9.4 Concluding Remarks

Conclusion