



CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE NATURE OF REALITY

What Forty-Four Years of Cross-Cultural Investigation Has Taught Me

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"You are not a drop in the ocean. You are the entire ocean in a drop." - Rumi

"We are a way for the universe to know itself." - Carl Sagan

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A NOTE BEFORE WE BEGIN

I am a skeptic.

I say that not as a disclaimer but as a credential. I have spent over forty-four years investigating what most people are afraid to look at directly, and the discipline that has served me best in that work is not courage, though courage helps. It is the insistence on not believing something simply because I want it to be true.

I welcome rigorous skepticism. What I am not addressing here is the dogmatic dismissal of evidence without examination, which is not skepticism but its opposite. A skeptic follows the data. A dogmatist protects the paradigm. This thesis is written for the former.

I have stood in rooms where something was clearly wrong and had no explanation for it. I have also stood in rooms where something was clearly wrong and found a perfectly ordinary explanation within the hour. Both experiences matter. The first without the second is credulity. The second without the first is blindness.

I do not trust witnesses. Including myself. Witness testimony is the least reliable form of evidence available and I treat it as such in my own casework. What I trust is corroborated, independently verified, documented evidence. The cases and observations I present in this thesis meet that standard or are explicitly identified as unverified personal

experience.

What I am offering here is not a belief system I am asking you to adopt. It is a framework I have arrived at through direct experience, through decades of fieldwork across six continents, through time spent with some of the world's oldest living wisdom traditions, and through serious engagement with the findings of modern science. I am sharing it because I believe these ideas have real consequences for how people live, and because I think the conversation they generate is worth having.

WHAT IS CONSCIOUSNESS?

Before anything else can be said, this question must be answered honestly because it is the foundation everything else rests on.

I use the word consciousness reluctantly throughout this thesis because it carries so much philosophical baggage. What I mean by it is simpler and more fundamental than most definitions allow. Consciousness, as I use the term, means awareness: the capacity to sense and respond to environment. This exists on a spectrum. A plant orients toward light and responds to chemical signals of distress from neighboring plants. Molecules interact with their environment in ways that are responsive rather than merely mechanical. Human beings reflect on their own existence and contemplate their place in the universe. These are not categorically different phenomena. They are different expressions of the same underlying capacity at different levels of complexity and self-reflection.

I want to be clear about the status of this position. It is a working hypothesis, not an established scientific fact, and panpsychism is a contested philosophical position. It is the foundational assumption from which this thesis proceeds. The philosophical tradition closest to it is panpsychism, which has serious academic proponents including Professor Philip Goff at Durham University, whose work argues that consciousness is a fundamental property of the universe rather than something that emerges from sufficiently complex physical systems. I did not arrive at this position through philosophy. I arrived at it through forty-four years of fieldwork that kept pointing in the same direction. I then found that philosophers and physicists were arriving at the same place through completely different methods. That convergence is itself worth noting.

The conventional materialist position is that awareness is produced by brains. My working hypothesis is that awareness is expressed through brains, along with everything else, as part of a universe that is fundamentally aware at every level of organization. The brain does not generate consciousness any more than a radio generates the signal it receives. It is a receiver, a filter, and an amplifier of something that exists independently of it. If this hypothesis is correct, it has direct implications for everything that follows.

WHAT IS ANOMALOUS EXPERIENCE?

I use the phrase anomalous experience throughout this thesis rather than paranormal. The word paranormal implies that what is being described is outside nature. I do not believe that. What I investigate is phenomena that current science cannot adequately explain. That does not make it unnatural. It makes it unexplained. There is an important difference. Ball lightning was considered folklore for centuries before it was photographed and measured. Meteorites were thought impossible because stones could not fall from the sky. The history of science is a history of the natural

expanding to include what was previously dismissed as impossible. The phenomena I document belong to that history, not outside it.

THE REGRESSION

I was sixteen years old when my grandfather put me under.

Ed Warren was many things to many people. To me, he was the man who taught me that the most important investigation any of us will ever undertake is the one we turn inward. He had been trained in regression hypnosis, and one afternoon he sat me down and took me back.

The first thing I remember is looking for a calendar.

I was not watching a scene from a distance. I was inside it, in the first person, fully present in a life that was not the one I had woken up in that morning. I was sitting in a small salon and I needed to know what year it was. I looked around the room until I found a calendar on the wall. It told me I was somewhere in 1920s America. The Midwest. I was a shopkeeper. My closest friend was a farmer who was fond of licorice. We had married two sisters.

That was one window into that lifetime. In later sessions I was dropped into different moments of the same life, out of sequence. France during the First World War, struggling with a gas mask as mustard gas rolled toward us, my friend reaching over and securing it for me. Texas in the 1950s, a deputy sheriff making a routine traffic stop that ended in his death.

I want to be precise about the evidential status of this experience. It is unverified personal experience. I attempted to find records of a deputy killed at a traffic stop in 1950s Texas and found nothing. I present the regression not as evidence of reincarnation but as the formative personal experience that oriented my research questions. It was the first time I understood, not as an idea but as a direct experience, that the personality inhabiting a lifetime and the awareness underlying it might be different things. That distinction has shaped everything I have investigated since.

OTHER LIFETIMES: WHAT I KNOW AND WHAT I HAVE BEEN TOLD

I want to draw a clear line between what I have experienced directly and what I have been told by others, because that distinction matters to me and should matter to you.

What I know from my own regression work: I am aware of having lived during the American Civil War, served in the Navy as a lieutenant, and later taken my young wife west where we were killed by Indigenous Americans on a small farm. The Civil War bothers me in a way I have never been able to fully explain. I have no particular interest in studying it. That discomfort preceded any conscious awareness of this lifetime and has never been satisfactorily explained by any other means.

What I have been told and cannot personally verify: a psychic I trust has told me that in an earlier lifetime I was a Mongol warlord, murderous and powerful. I find that interesting rather than troubling. The path from unconscious to conscious is not linear. Every expression of power without wisdom is its own curriculum. The distance between a Mongol warlord and a man who has spent forty-four years giving frightened people their power back is not a contradiction. It is evidence of a very long education.

The same psychic told me I have two spiritual advisers. One is Pythagoras, whom she recognized. The other is Parmenides, whom she had never heard of. Parmenides argued that reality is singular, eternal, and unchanging, that change and multiplicity are illusions of perception, and that true being is one. His ideas align closely with what I have arrived at through my own investigation. I am not sure what to make of that. I am entirely sure it is worth noting.

I have also been told I am the reincarnation of Doubting Thomas. I doubt that. Though Thomas gets a reputation he does not deserve. He was the only apostle not present when Jesus reportedly rose. He refused to believe without direct evidence. When confronted directly, he believed. That is not doubt as weakness. That is doubt as discipline. It is the foundation of good investigation.

WHAT FORTY-FOUR YEARS OF INVESTIGATION TAUGHT ME

The regression reorganized my thinking at sixteen. The decades that followed tested it against reality in ways I could not have anticipated.

I have investigated cases on six continents, walked into homes where families had been driven to the edge of sanity by things they could not name, and carried forward the work of my grandparents as Director of the Warren Legacy Foundation for Paranormal Research. I have appeared on Netflix, the History Channel, and media outlets across more than twenty countries.

What taught me the most was time spent with people who had held this knowledge long before my tradition arrived at it.

I spent time in West Africa with the Animists of Mali, learning that everything in nature carries power and sentience and deserves to be treated accordingly. I spent time with the Kogi people of Colombia, one of the last intact pre-Columbian civilizations, who speak of Aluna, the thought-world that precedes and generates physical reality. I sat with the Dalai Lama. I spent time in Buddhist temples in Thailand and Nepal. I engaged deeply with Hinduism's understanding of the Atman, the true self identical to Brahman, the universal awareness underlying all existence.

In every tradition, approached on its own terms, I found the same architecture underneath the different vocabularies. Awareness is primary. The physical world is its expression, not its source. The individual self is real but not ultimate.

What I also found, consistently, was that the framework people bring to an anomalous experience does not merely describe what happens. It participates in shaping what happens. The underlying experience is real. The specific form it takes is at least partly constructed by the framework applied to it.

This is labeling theory applied to anomalous experience. Once you label something you impose rules on it. People would rather believe in a devil than deal with the unknown, because a named thing can be managed. An unnamed thing cannot. I have seen this pattern across every culture I have investigated, and I have come to believe it is one of the most important observations in my entire body of work.

An investigator who enters a situation carrying an inherited cultural framework is not a neutral observer. The framework becomes part of the dynamic. The label participates in shaping the manifestation. This has a practical consequence that I apply consistently in my own work: I do not enter any investigation with a predetermined explanatory framework. I follow the evidence and apply the simplest explanation that accounts for what is documented.

THE INTELLIGENT HAUNTING PROBLEM AND WHY IT MATTERS

If awareness is a fundamental property of the universe expressed through complex systems, and if the brain is a receiver rather than a generator of awareness, then awareness should in principle be capable of persisting after the biological receiver ceases to function. The documented evidence of what investigators call intelligent hauntings is not merely an anomaly to be explained. It is, if genuine, direct evidence against the brain-generates-consciousness model.

Before examining the evidence I want to make a distinction that is consistently collapsed in popular culture and that matters enormously for how this material is evaluated.

There are two fundamentally different categories of phenomena that are routinely described under the same label.

The first I will call residual phenomena. These appear to replay specific moments or sequences from the past without responding to the observer's presence, acknowledging anyone in the room, or altering their behavior based on who is there. They are not interactive. The phenomenon exists independently of the observer but it is not in dialogue with the observer.

Critically, residual phenomena are not perceptible to everyone. They are not universally accessible experiences waiting for any passerby to notice them. Only individuals with sufficient sensitivity to detect the embedded signal can perceive them at all. An insensitive observer may stand in the same room and experience nothing whatsoever while a sensitive observer perceives a full visual or auditory phenomenon. Some sensitives can capture these on photographic or video equipment, suggesting the phenomena have a physical component that instruments can sometimes register even when ordinary human perception cannot. The phenomenon exists independently. The sensitive observer is the instrument through which it becomes perceptible.

The second category is intelligent phenomena. These respond. They react to specific individuals. They communicate information that observers had no prior access to. They demonstrate awareness of the current environment rather than simply replaying past events. They make choices about whether and how to interact. This is categorically different from a residual replay and the distinction matters because the evidence requirements and the theoretical implications are completely different.

The so-called demonic framework collapses both of these categories into a single supernatural explanation that does not withstand scrutiny. If genuinely malevolent intelligences with centuries of accumulated wisdom existed and their explicit purpose was to harm humanity, their performance record is extraordinarily poor. They consistently target the most vulnerable, the traumatized, the mentally ill, the frightened. They are neutralized by sincere focused intention regardless of which religious tradition that intention comes from. They respond to the quality of the practitioner's awareness rather than to the specific doctrinal content of the ritual. This is not the behavior of an ancient malevolent intelligence. It is the behavior of a phenomenon that amplifies fear and is diminished by confidence. The framework is a cultural explanation applied to a real phenomenon that the cultural vocabulary cannot accurately describe.

The documented cases in which apparently intelligent post-mortem communication provided specific verifiable information represent the strongest available evidence for awareness persisting beyond biological death. In 1897 in Greenbrier County, West Virginia, Mary Jane Heaster reported four consecutive visitations from her murdered daughter Zona that described the specific manner of her death. The exhumation of the body that followed confirmed a broken neck and crushed windpipe. Her husband was convicted of murder. In 1977 in Chicago, specific names,

telephone numbers, and the location of stolen jewelry were provided through an apparent communication from murder victim Teresita Basa to a coworker. The information led directly to a murder conviction and the recovery of physically verified stolen property. In both cases the conventional explanation, that the recipient unconsciously assembled prior knowledge, does not fully account for the specific verified details that proved accurate.

A companion case studies document presenting fully documented cases from my own field investigation, conducted under blind protocols with named independent witnesses and video documentation, is available on request.

THE BRAIN AS RECEIVER: WHAT THE EVIDENCE SUGGESTS

The materialist model predicts that consciousness cannot exist without a functioning brain. Several converging lines of evidence are inconsistent with this prediction.

People in comas with minimal or no measurable brain activity have reported accurate accounts of conversations and events that occurred around them while they were apparently unconscious. The accuracy of these reports has been independently verified in documented cases. A brain generating consciousness should produce no awareness when it is not functioning. A brain receiving and amplifying awareness that exists independently of it might allow that underlying awareness to continue perceiving even when the receiver is severely compromised.

Professor Pim van Lommel, a cardiologist at Rijnstate Hospital in the Netherlands, conducted a prospective study of near-death experiences in survivors of cardiac arrest published in *The Lancet* in 2001. He documented cases of verified accurate perception during cardiac arrest with confirmed flat EEG. He concluded that his findings were not consistent with the brain generating consciousness and proposed that the brain functions as a receiver rather than a generator. That is a cardiologist publishing in one of the world's most prestigious medical journals arriving at the same hypothesis I arrived at through field investigation.

The Pam Reynolds case remains the single most evidentially significant NDE account in the literature because the surgical conditions were so precisely documented. Her body temperature was lowered to clinical death. Her brain showed no measurable electrical activity. Her eyes were taped shut and her ears plugged with monitoring equipment. Under those conditions she accurately described specific surgical instruments, specific conversations between surgical team members, and specific procedural details she had no physical means of perceiving. Conventional neurological explanations for NDE phenomena account for the subjective quality of the experience. They do not account for the verified information content.

Traumatic brain injury provides a different line of evidence. TBI can alter personality dramatically, sometimes beyond recognition. A skeptic will argue this demonstrates that consciousness is produced by the brain. I would argue it demonstrates that the vehicle matters enormously to the expression of the driver without requiring that the vehicle generates the driver. A car with a damaged steering column handles completely differently than before the accident. That does not mean there is no driver. People who love someone who has experienced severe TBI consistently report recognizing something of the original person beneath the changed behavior. The personality is contingent on the condition of the physical system. The awareness underlying it may not be.

I acknowledge that this argument does not settle the question. The observed correlation between brain state and personality is real and must be accounted for. The honest position is that current evidence is consistent with both the brain-generates-consciousness model and the brain-as-receiver model, and that distinguishing between them requires

exactly the kind of research program I propose at the end of this thesis.

Van Lommel, P., van Wees, R., Meyers, V., and Elfferich, I. (2001). The Lancet, 358(9298), 2039-2045.

THE SCIENCE THAT KEEPS ARRIVING AT THE SAME ADDRESS

I want to be precise. I am not a physicist. I am not going to claim that science has proven the hypotheses in this thesis. What I am going to say is that the leading edges of several scientific disciplines keep producing findings that ancient wisdom traditions described thousands of years ago without the benefit of a laboratory, and that the conventional dismissal of anomalous phenomena as impossible reflects a paradigm problem rather than a principled scientific judgment.

Thomas Kuhn documented this thoroughly in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Paradigm shifts are resisted, sometimes for generations, by researchers who have built careers on the existing framework. The history of science is not a smooth curve of open-minded inquiry. It is a series of fights between new evidence and entrenched assumption.

There is also the matter of the fundamental incompatibility between quantum mechanics and general relativity. These are the two most successful and rigorously tested theories in the history of physics and they are mathematically irreconcilable. A unified field theory that reconciles them does not yet exist. My hypothesis is that when physics arrives at that unified framework it will provide tools for understanding phenomena that currently resist explanation, in the same way that Einstein's relativity provided tools for understanding phenomena that Newtonian physics could not account for. I am not claiming that current physics explains what I have documented. I am claiming that current physics may be incomplete in ways relevant to this territory.

What follows is a summary of the scientific research most relevant to the hypotheses in this thesis, with explicit connections to my own field observations.

ORCHESTRATED OBJECTIVE REDUCTION

Sir Roger Penrose at Oxford and Dr. Stuart Hameroff at the University of Arizona propose that consciousness arises from quantum computations in neuronal microtubules that are non-local and tied to the fabric of spacetime itself. A 2025 study produced experimental evidence of quantum effects in microtubules at room temperature and direct physical evidence of a macroscopic quantum entangled state in the living human brain correlated with conscious states.

This is relevant to my work because if consciousness is rooted in quantum processes connected to the fabric of spacetime, then brain damage disrupts the interface rather than the consciousness itself, consistent with the receiver model. Additionally, consciousness operating through quantum processes tied to spacetime may be capable of persisting in some form after the biological brain ceases to function, which is the foundational premise of the intelligent haunting hypothesis.

Hameroff, S., and Penrose, R. (2014). Physics of Life Reviews, 11(1), 39-78.

RETROCAUSALITY AND THE BLOCK UNIVERSE

Huw Price at Cambridge and Ken Wharton at San Jose State have developed frameworks in which time is symmetric or illusory and all events coexist simultaneously. The block universe model holds that past, present, and future all exist simultaneously and that what we experience as the flow of time is a feature of perception rather than of reality itself.

This is directly relevant to the Temporal Overlap Hypothesis. If all moments coexist in the block universe then moments that are temporally distant might under certain conditions become spatially adjacent. The past is not gone. It is next door. This is also what the Akashic Record has described for thousands of years: a field in which every experience that has ever occurred remains accessible. Ancient mystical traditions and modern theoretical physics are describing the same underlying structure from completely different directions.

Price, H. (2012). Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part B, 43(2), 75-83.

QUANTUM DECOHERENCE

Wojciech Zurek at Los Alamos National Laboratory has done foundational work on quantum decoherence, the process by which quantum systems lose their coherence when they interact with their environment. Under ordinary conditions quantum effects vanish at macroscopic scales because decoherence is rapid and ubiquitous.

This is relevant to my work because it suggests that conditions which preserve or restore quantum coherence, such as locations of extreme historical trauma where the normal electromagnetic environment may have been significantly altered, could potentially allow quantum-level phenomena to manifest at perceptible scales. This is a speculative connection but it provides a direction for investigation rather than leaving the mechanism entirely unaddressed.

Zurek, W. H. (2003). Reviews of Modern Physics, 75(3), 715-775.

MAGNETORECEPTION AND ELECTROMAGNETIC SENSITIVITY

Joe Kirschvink at Caltech demonstrated through controlled experiments that human neurons respond to changes in Earth's magnetic field below the threshold of conscious awareness. Participants showed measurable changes in brainwave activity in response to rotating magnetic fields.

This is directly relevant to my hypothesis about psychic sensitivity. If human neurons respond to magnetic field changes that the conscious mind does not register, then individuals who report sensing anomalous phenomena before any instrument detects anything unusual may be responding to genuine electromagnetic information through a biological capacity that most people do not consciously access.

Connected to this is what I believe may be a vestigial capacity. Human beings evolved in environments where sensing subtle electromagnetic signals may have been a genuine survival advantage. As artificial light and technological electromagnetic saturation became ubiquitous that capacity became less necessary and less culturally supported. The observation that anomalous phenomena are reported more frequently in conditions of low artificial light is consistent with this. Light produces significant electromagnetic output. Darkness reduces that output. A weak signal would be more perceptible against a quieter electromagnetic background. This is not supernatural. It is signal to noise ratio.

The God Helmet experiments conducted by Michael Persinger at Laurentian University demonstrated that targeted electromagnetic stimulation of the temporal lobes could induce feelings of a sensed presence and encounters with apparently external entities in laboratory subjects. Swedish researcher Par Granqvist conducted a double blind replication and attributed the effects largely to suggestion, a conclusion Persinger disputed. What is not in dispute is that a measurable relationship exists between electromagnetic environments and anomalous subjective experience.

Wang, C. X., Hilburn, I. A., et al. (2019). eNeuro, 6(2).

PRECOGNITION AND NON-LINEAR TIME

Mossbridge and colleagues conducted a meta-analysis demonstrating that people exhibit measurable physiological changes in anticipation of future emotionally significant events before those events occur. This is peer-reviewed replicated data.

This is relevant to my work because it provides direct empirical support for the idea that awareness is not confined to the present moment. If the body can respond to future events before they occur, the strict linear model of time is inconsistent with how consciousness actually operates. This is consistent with the block universe model and with the Temporal Overlap Hypothesis.

Mossbridge, J. A., Tressoldi, P., and Utts, J. (2012). Frontiers in Psychology, 3, 390.

Daryl Bem at Cornell published experimental evidence in 2011 for anomalous retroactive influences on cognition with a meta-analysis of 90 trials across 33 laboratories in 14 countries producing supporting results. A large scale pre-registered replication in 2023 did not replicate the findings. The pattern of weak but persistent statistical anomalies appearing consistently across independent laboratories and then proving difficult to capture in rigorous replication is worth examining rather than dismissing. A phenomenon sensitive to the quality of focused attention rather than to the mechanical protocol will not replicate reliably. That is what the focused intention hypothesis would predict.

Bem, D. J. (2011). Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 100(3), 407-425.

THE GLOBAL CONSCIOUSNESS PROJECT

The PEAR lab at Princeton conducted decades of experiments examining whether human intention could produce statistically measurable effects on random number generators, finding small but consistent deviations from chance across thousands of trials. Peter Bancel, chief analyst for the Global Consciousness Project, conducted a rigorous seventeen year analysis and found that the anomalous effects appeared to be associated with individuals directly engaged with the experiment rather than with a diffuse global consciousness field.

This finding is directly relevant to my own field observations about focused conscious intention as the primary mechanism in anomalous phenomena. The effect does not appear to come from a mysterious global field. It appears to come from the directed awareness of the people involved. Bancel's finding is not a disappointing result for consciousness research. It is a more specific and more interesting one because it points directly at the mechanism.

EXCEPTIONAL EXPERIENCE RESEARCH

Fach and colleagues at the IGPP in Freiburg documented that between 30 and 50 percent of Western populations report exceptional experiences, with rates rising considerably higher in other cultural contexts. Their four-category classification, external phenomena, internal phenomena, coincidence phenomena, and dissociation phenomena, maps closely onto the case patterns documented across forty-four years of field investigation.

This is relevant to my work because it establishes that anomalous experience is not a rare pathological condition. It is a common human experience distributed across the population and shaped by cultural context. This supports the neuroplasticity hypothesis: the capacity exists broadly, and cultural permission determines whether it is developed or suppressed.

Fach, W., et al. (2013). Frontiers in Psychology, 4, 65.

THE PHILIP EXPERIMENT

In 1972 the Toronto Society for Psychical Research invented a fictional ghost named Philip and attempted to contact him through seance. What followed, documented by A. R. G. Owen in *Conjuring Up Philip*, included knocking, table movement, and responsive phenomena apparently generated by the group's collective intention. Subsequent replication attempts produced inconsistent findings.

This is relevant to my work in two ways. First it provides a controlled demonstration that consciousness-generated phenomena are possible, consistent with the broader hypothesis that awareness participates in constructing rather than merely observing reality. Second the inconsistent replication record is itself significant. If the effect depends on the quality and focus of collective intention rather than on a repeatable mechanical protocol, inconsistent replication is exactly what the focused intention hypothesis would predict.

Owen, A. R. G. (1976). Conjuring Up Philip. Harper and Row.

NEUROPLASTICITY AND THE TRAINING OF SENSITIVITY

Huels and colleagues published research in 2021 demonstrating measurable neurological differences between experienced shamanic practitioners and controls, with practitioners showing altered states of consciousness comparable to those produced by psychedelic compounds. A separate study found that 90 percent of human societies have institutionalized one or more altered states of consciousness, and that individuals in possession trance showed enhanced alpha brainwave patterns not present in non-possessed participants performing identical ritual movements.

Benson at Harvard documented that advanced g-Tummo practitioners could increase peripheral skin temperature by up to 8.3 degrees Celsius through meditation alone, published in *Nature* in 1982. The effect is real, requires years of disciplined practice, and represents conscious direction of physiological processes ordinarily beyond voluntary control.

The brain's capacity to rewire itself around damaged tissue following stroke or traumatic brain injury is well established in mainstream neuroscience. If the brain can accomplish this in response to physical damage, the development of new perceptual capacities through sustained deliberate practice is the same mechanism directed

toward a different purpose. My hypothesis is that psychic sensitivity is at least partly a trainable neurological capacity: the conscious development of sensitivity to electromagnetic and other subtle environmental signals that most people in modern technologically saturated environments have learned to filter out or have never been given cultural permission to develop.

Huels, E. R., et al. (2021). Frontiers in Human Neuroscience, 15, 610466.

Benson, H., et al. (1982). Nature, 295, 234-236.

THE GUNAIKURNAI CAVE RITUAL

Archaeological work published in Nature Human Behaviour in 2024 documented a ceremonial practice at Cloggs Cave in Victoria, Australia dated to approximately 12,000 years ago matching 19th century ethnographic accounts of the same Gunaikurnai practice in precise detail. This represents approximately 500 generations of continuous cultural transmission. Practices that produce no meaningful effect tend to be abandoned. A ritual maintained for 500 generations suggests that the people performing it believed, generation after generation, that it was working.

David, B., et al. (2024). Nature Human Behaviour. DOI: 10.1038/s41562-024-01912-w

RITUAL, FOCUSED INTENTION, AND THE PLACEBO REFRAME

Most rituals fail. When they succeed, focused conscious intention appears to be the primary mechanism regardless of the specific cultural or religious framework employed. The words and symbols are not the mechanism. The directed awareness behind them is.

The double blind intercessory prayer studies provide the most rigorous empirical support for this principle while simultaneously illuminating its limits. In Byrd's 1988 randomized controlled trial at San Francisco General Medical Center, neither patients nor treating physicians knew which patients were being prayed for. Patients who were prayed for showed statistically better health outcomes than controls. The 2006 STEP study by Benson and colleagues, the largest and most rigorous intercessory prayer trial conducted, found no benefit from scripted prayer delivered by strangers and a slight negative effect in patients who knew they were being prayed for. The pattern across the literature is consistent with a mechanism sensitive to the quality of focused intention rather than the mechanical performance of prayer.

A skeptic will respond that this is simply the placebo effect and therefore not evidence of awareness shaping reality. This objection deserves a direct answer.

The placebo effect is not evidence against awareness shaping physical reality. It is evidence for it. If a sugar pill produces measurable physiological changes including genuine pain relief, reduced inflammation, and altered brain chemistry purely through belief and expectation, then awareness demonstrably produces real physical effects in the body under controlled laboratory conditions. The question is not whether awareness can produce physical effects. The placebo effect proves that it can. The question is how far that capacity extends beyond the individual body of the person who holds the belief. That is the genuinely open question this paper is attempting to frame for investigation.

Byrd, R. C. (1988). Southern Medical Journal, 81(7), 826-829.

Benson, H., et al. (2006). American Heart Journal, 151(4), 762-764.

THE TEMPORAL OVERLAP HYPOTHESIS

I want to address something that has become a persistent piece of folklore in investigation circles, because it is passed around as though it were an established theory when it is nothing of the kind.

The stone tape theory proposes that anomalous phenomena are recordings imprinted in the physical fabric of buildings and landscapes and played back under certain conditions. This idea was introduced in a 1972 BBC television drama called *The Stone Tape*, written by Nigel Kneale. It is a literary device created for dramatic effect, not proposed by a physicist or a researcher. It has no scientific basis. Stone does not have the electromagnetic properties required to store and replay complex visual and auditory information. It does not explain why phenomena are perceptible only to sensitive individuals. It does not explain why phenomena appear to interact with observers in some cases. It does not explain why phenomena appear to diminish over time. It explains nothing because it was never designed to explain anything.

What I am proposing instead is the Temporal Overlap Hypothesis. I use the word hypothesis deliberately. This is a speculative framework that attempts to account for documented anomalies and generates specific testable predictions. It is not a theory in the scientific sense. It is a direction for investigation.

Einstein's relativity established that time and space are a single fabric, spacetime, that can be warped by mass and energy. I am not claiming that the electromagnetic output of a single human being is sufficient by currently understood mechanisms to produce measurable spacetime distortion. The honest position is that current physics may be incomplete in ways relevant to this territory. The phenomena I have documented across forty-four years point toward mechanisms that current physics has not yet identified. Proposing a direction for the mechanism is not the same as claiming to have found it.

The hypothesis proposes two components.

The first is environmental embedding. Events of extreme emotional intensity, particularly death and mortal crisis, may produce changes in the local field of a location that persist independently of any living observer. If awareness is a fundamental property of matter as the panpsychist hypothesis proposes, then the consciousness-saturated energy of an extreme event may become embedded in the location as a genuine alteration in the local field. The location itself retains something of what occurred there. This is conceptually related to Rupert Sheldrake's morphic resonance hypothesis, which proposes that memory is inherent in nature and that patterns can be transmitted and retained without conventional physical storage. I did not arrive at this observation through Sheldrake's work. I arrived at it through fieldwork and found the parallel afterward. That convergence is worth noting.

The second is sensitive activation. The embedded information requires interaction with a sufficiently sensitive living awareness to become perceptible. This is why residual phenomena are not universally accessible. They require a sensitive instrument, a person whose neurological capacity for detecting subtle electromagnetic signals has been developed sufficiently to register a weak embedded field. The phenomenon exists independently of the sensitive observer but requires that observer to become manifest, in the same way that a radio signal exists independently of a receiver but requires a functioning receiver to become audible.

This two-part mechanism also addresses the question of why anomalous phenomena do not appear randomly at all historical locations regardless of cultural memory. The embedded field exists at the location independently of living

memory. But the quality of sensitive attention brought to a location may affect how accessible the embedded information is. As the thread of living connection to specific events dissolves over generations, fewer sensitive observers bring focused attention to those locations and the phenomenon becomes increasingly inaccessible even if the embedded field persists.

The strongest objection to this hypothesis is that no physical mechanism has been identified for the embedding process or for the role of sensitive observation in making the embedded field manifest. This objection is valid and I acknowledge it directly. I do not have a proposed physical medium for these processes. Neither does anyone else for phenomena in this territory. Identifying that medium is the most important open question in the research program I propose below. The observation that the phenomenon exists is not dependent on having identified the mechanism. We observed gravity for centuries before we had a theory to explain it.

THE EGO AS VEHICLE, NOT DRIVER

The insight I took from my regression at sixteen has only deepened with time.

The personality inhabiting that 1920s Midwest lifetime and the person writing these words share almost nothing in terms of temperament, instinct, or way of moving through the world. And yet something connects them across the gap of lifetimes just as something connects a TBI patient to the person they were before injury. The personality is contingent. The awareness underlying it may not be.

I find it equally striking that this process operates within a single lifetime. I am not the twenty-year-old that once existed. I am not the person I was five years ago. Each chapter of a life is in its own way an incarnation. The underlying awareness is always doing this, shedding one expression of itself, carrying forward what it has learned, building the next on what was understood.

TOWARD A RESEARCH PROGRAM

A working thesis is not a finished argument. It is an invitation to a conversation, and that conversation must address the falsifiability question directly.

I do not have the resources or institutional infrastructure to conduct controlled experiments. What I have is forty-four years of field observations that generate testable hypotheses. What I am looking for is research partners with the methodological tools to design the tests. I do not want to be proven right. I want to see the data.

On the cultural neuroplasticity hypothesis: If cultures that normalize anomalous experience produce higher rates of those experiences simply because of suggestion and expectation, neuroimaging should show no meaningful difference between practitioners in those cultures and ordinary control subjects. If the capacity is genuinely neurological and trainable, we would expect measurable differences in brain structure and function between experienced practitioners and controls. I would revise my position if such studies found no neurological differences.

On the Temporal Overlap Hypothesis: If the hypothesis is correct, anomalous phenomena at documented historical sites should correlate with measurable electromagnetic anomalies, be reported more frequently by individuals scoring higher on magnetoreception sensitivity measures, and be reported more frequently by individuals who bring

deliberate focused attention to those locations. If systematic investigation found no correlation between anomalous phenomena and electromagnetic measurements and no correlation with individual sensitivity, that would count significantly against the hypothesis.

On psychic sensitivity as a testable capacity: I have developed and apply a field protocol across all investigations involving sensitive individuals. The sensitive has no access to any case notes or files before investigation. They enter the location cold and record their impressions independently before any communication with the investigative team. Those records are sealed until after the team has completed its own independent investigation. No two sensitives work together on the same case. The contaminating effect of shared impressions is one of the most significant sources of unreliable data in this field and I have seen it produce results that are worse than useless.

Under this protocol I have documented cases in which specific verifiable information was provided before any knowledge of the location's history was available. In Bogota, Colombia, I suggested that bodies had been disposed of in a cellar using chemical decomposition agents. This was confirmed by an independent government liaison. Outside Lima, Peru, I identified two separate deaths at two specific locations within a property, characterized the dominant figure of the household, and identified the presence of a skull buried in the garden taken from a local cemetery as part of a Peruvian folk practice for calling guardian spirits, a practice I had no prior knowledge of. All of this was confirmed by the research team with prior knowledge. Video documentation with named witnesses exists for these and other cases.

A proper research program would systematize this protocol, apply it across multiple sensitives at multiple locations, pre-register predictions before any verification occurs, and analyze hit rates statistically against chance. If hit rates proved statistically indistinguishable from chance across multiple subjects and locations, that would be meaningful evidence against the sensitivity hypothesis.

On ritual efficacy and neuroimaging: If ritual works through focused conscious intention, neuroimaging of subjects undergoing ritual should show measurable changes in brain activity correlating with reported experiential shifts regardless of the specific cultural or religious framework. Studies of practitioners performing ritual exist. Studies of subjects receiving ritual, examining what happens neurologically to the person undergoing rather than performing the ceremony, are largely absent from the literature. That gap is worth addressing.

These are genuine research proposals from someone who has been working largely in isolation and who would rather be proven wrong by good data than remain unchallenged by the absence of it.

WHAT THESE PHENOMENA ACTUALLY TEACH US

Most people encounter what I investigate through fear. That is understandable. But after forty-four years of walking into the most disturbing situations most people will only ever read about, I want to offer a reframe that I believe changes everything.

What I have documented across forty-four years is not evidence of how powerless we are. It is the most dramatic possible demonstration of how powerful awareness is.

If awareness can survive physical death, then what you are is not contingent on the body that carries you. If thought-forms and collective intention can produce physical effects, as the Philip Experiment and the prayer studies

both suggest in different ways, then your mind is not merely observing reality. It is participating in constructing it. If the Temporal Overlap Hypothesis is correct, if the intensity of human awareness leaves permanent marks on the fabric of existence, then awareness is not a passenger in a physical universe. It is a force that shapes the world it moves through.

Every case I have ever investigated, properly understood, is not a horror story. It is a physics lesson. It is awareness demonstrating its own reach, its own persistence, its own capacity to shape local reality in ways that our current scientific paradigm is only beginning to find language to describe.

Electricity can kill you. It can also light your home and connect you to every other human being on the planet. The danger does not define the force. The same is true of what I have spent my life investigating. The danger is not the lesson. The power is the lesson.

In his novel *Illusions*, Richard Bach wrote that if you argue for your limitations, they are yours. The moment you accept that you are small, powerless, and at the mercy of forces beyond your control, you have made that true. Not metaphorically. Literally. Because awareness shapes local reality, and an awareness organized around its own powerlessness will consistently produce evidence that confirms it.

The inverse is equally true.

AN INVITATION

This is a working thesis, not a finished argument. The science I have cited is real, peer reviewed, and conducted by researchers at serious institutions. The experiences I have described are my own, clearly distinguished from what others have told me. The framework I am proposing is one I have tested against forty-four years of direct investigation across six continents and found consistently supported, while remaining genuinely open to the evidence that would require me to revise it.

The ancient traditions and the modern laboratories keep arriving at the same address. Awareness is not a byproduct of matter. It is the ground of reality itself. The self you defend so vigorously is the vehicle, not the driver. The fear that limits you is not the truth of what you are. And the moments you think are gone are not gone at all. They are next door.

You are not small. You are not here by accident. You are not a body that happens to have awareness.

You are awareness that has, for now, a body.

What you do with that knowledge is the whole question.

Chris McKinnell is the grandson of Ed and Lorraine Warren and Director of the Warren Legacy Foundation for Paranormal Research. He has investigated over 10,000 cases across six continents over forty-four years. He is currently developing *The Warren Files* television series with supervising producer Brian Prowse at A&E; and the History Channel.
