Letters to the Editor

A Philosopher's View of Near-Death Research

To the Editor:

There is a great deal in Carl Becker's article in the Fall 1995 issue of the Journal on a philosopher's view of near-death research with which I agree. But I am afraid I cannot but comment on two observations he made. Becker wrote that a resolution of the debate over monism and dualism has no immediate relevance to the question of postmortem survival. I submit that it has. For, if the universe is found to be monistic, then it would follow that any aspect of ourselves that may survive after our death is of the same order of reality, or stuff, as that of the body, and therefore it must, like the body, be amenable to empirical study. I have elsewhere sought to show that there is no need to postulate two orders of reality to explain any phenomenon known to us (Krishnan, 1996).

The other statement of Becker's that I wish to comment upon relates to the out-of-body experience (OBE). According to Becker, it is "philosophically incidental" to what he considers to be the "core experience," because it can occur in situations that do not hold a threat to life, such as meditation, and can be induced deliberately. But, since he means by "core experience" an experience "directly affecting the individual's feeling about death and the afterlife" (p. 21), it is unclear why he excluded the OBE from this category. Many out-of-body experiencers have indeed said that they were convinced that the experience represented separation of the soul from the body, and that therefore it was evidence for postmortem survival. However, it should not be forgotten that there are other experiencers who look upon the OBE as only a pleasant or novel experience with no implications for the afterlife issue.

The important point to note here is that all near-death experiencers (NDErs) do not feel the same way about their experiences, because of differences in their belief systems, cultural backgrounds, critical faculties, social pressures, and so on. I therefore do not think it advisable to

© 2001 Human Sciences Press, Inc.

classify NDEs on the basis of what the experiencers feel about them. That does not, of course, mean that we need not pay attention to NDErs' interpretations of their experiences. By all means, let us examine them and try to account for the differences. At the same time, let us also try to understand—to put the matter in very general terms—the body-based mechanisms underlying the experience, with a view to finding out, among other things, whether knowledge about them can be put to practical use.

Let me cite some examples. Persons who have spontaneous and unexpected OBEs have said that they were insensitive to painful stimuli during their experience. Does this have any implications for pain management free of side effects? There are several accounts of accurate out-of-body perception. Do they not make a case for investigating whether we are capable of "eyeless sight" in situations when normal vision is in abeyance (Krishnan, 1985, 1988, 1993)? If we are found to have this ability in a latent form and if we could discover the underlying process, would it not help in attempts to devise a means of giving sight to those handicapped in this respect? Some NDE accounts contain a hint that some of the "transcendental" elements, such as visions of peaceful surroundings and the like, may perhaps have had curative or palliative effects on the NDErs who were ill at the time of their experience (Krishnan, 1995). If future research confirms this hint, can we not find out the process involved and use it as an adjunctive treatment of at least some kinds of disease? In my view, there is a great deal of practical and theoretical value to be learned from NDEs if only we ask the proper questions.

I hope I have made a reasonable case for not restricting near-death research or this Journal to any particular aspect of the NDE.

References

Becker, C. B. (1995). A philosopher's view of near-death research. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, *14,* 17–27.

Krishnan, V. (1985). Near-death experiences: Evidence for survival? *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies*, *5*(1), 21–38.

Krishnan, V. (1988). OBEs in the blind [Letter]. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, *7,* 134–139.

Krishnan, V. (1993). The physical basis of out-of-body vision [Letter]. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, *11,* 257–260.

Krishnan, V. (1995). Near-death experiences and healing [Letter]. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, *13,* 278–281.

Krishnan, V. (1996). Misidentified flying objects [Letter]. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, *14,* 287–290.

V. Krishnan
P. O. Box 1863
Kaloor
Cochin 682017
India

Marian Visionaries of Medjugorje

To the Editor:

Craig Lundahl's article "A Comparison of Other World Perceptions by Near-Death Experiencers and by the Marian Visionaries of Medjugorje" in the Fall 2000 issue of the Journal contained a geographical mistake. The author located Medjugorje in Croatia, which is not the case. Medjugorje is in the former Yugoslav republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This former Yugoslav republic is now, after a bloody civil war, an independent state with the same name. Bosnia and Herzegovina was and is a multi-ethnic state. Medjugorje is located in the part of Bosnia and Herzegovina called West Herzegovina. However, the majority of the population in Medjugorje are Croats.

Reference

Lundahl, C. R. (2000). A comparison of other world perceptions by near-death experiencers and by the Marian visionaries of Medjugorje. Journal of Near-Death Studies, *19,* 45–52.

Bogomir Golobič
IANDS Slovenia
Mestne Njive 10
8000 Novo Mesto
Slovenia
e-mail: bogomir.golobic@krka.si