

The Afterlife Experiments by Gary E. Schwartz (with William E. Simon). Atria Books, 2002. 376 pp. \$13.00 (paper). ISBN 0-7434-3658-X.

Immortal Remains: The Evidence for Life after Death by Stephen E. Braude. Rowman and Littlefield, 2003. 329 pp. \$24.95 (paper), \$75.00 (cloth). ISBN 0-7425-1472-2.

Two books on the same subject could hardly differ more than these two. The cover of Gary E. Schwartz's book proclaims that it provides "breakthrough scientific evidence of life after death." The reader of Stephen E. Braude's book, however, must wait for his last page to learn "that the evidence provides a reasonable basis for believing in personal postmortem survival." Such a stark contrast makes it wise to consider the books separately.

Schwartz reports a series of experiments with prominent mediums. Beginning with somewhat loose conditions in his first experiments, he tightened the controls until, in the last experiments, medium and sitter had with each other no sensory communication whatever. Schwartz adopted an unusual method of scoring that assumes the independence of grammatically separate items. For example, he counts separately "sitter's mother is very demanding" and "she kind of runs everything." One could also scold Schwartz for looking around for a correct target when what the medium said did not fit the identified sitter. For example, in one experiment Schwartz decided, when an experiment was well under way, that the medium was bringing a communication not to the sitter, but for him (Schwartz).

We have no reason to doubt, however, that the mediums Schwartz investigated demonstrated some paranormal powers. How does this bear on the survival of human personality after death? I have to say: little or not at all. For the data Schwartz presents I could not rank his mediums as better than second tier clairvoyants. They produce inventories of facts many of them correct for the sitter, but negligible evidence for an animating personality endeavoring to communicate. (I noted a few exceptions, particularly that of a communicator who seemed to stay around after one sitter left and another took that role.) American audiences, trained by television producers as they are, have no interest in clairvoyance. They want a communication from a deceased family member. To accommodate them, and to earn a living, persons with some paranormal powers style themselves "mediums," which should put what they say beyond question. Investigators adequately knowledgeable about the question of postmortem survival require evidence of motivation in the apparent communicator.

Some readers, even ones less austere than I am, may find the style of Schwartz's book displeasing, the more so because he does not flatter his readers. He depicts them as having been hapless victims of careless investigators. Now at last, he assures them, they are safely in the hands of a real scientist. Schwartz may have doubted himself whether repeated assertions of his status as a scientist accord with the flagrantly popular manner of his book. Perhaps this explains why the last 90 pages of the book reprint articles and extracts of articles from (scientific) journals.

If Schwartz has not fully earned all the praise he gives himself, I warmly commend him for venturing into the unconventional field of research on the question of postmortem survival.

Stephen Braude has been deservedly prominent in that field for many years. He states in the book to which I now turn that he took a decade to write it. I find this believable and praiseworthy. He has not written a survey of all the evidence bearing on the question of life after death, and he does not claim to have done that. Instead, he offers a review and discussion of what he believes are the most important types of relevant evidence. This leaves out a lot. Apparitions are barely mentioned, and Braude has nothing to say about the significance of postmortem reports in cases of the reincarnation type having birthmarks and birth defects. What remains, however, is more than a lot; and Braude discusses it very well indeed.

Braude has little patience with skeptics who dismiss the evidence by attributing it all to fraud and faulty investigation. For him, the only important alternatives in a serious discussion of the evidence are immense paranormal powers of the living (often referred to as "super-psi" or "super-ESP") and survival after death. Following the late Jule Eisenbud, Braude believes that even the most astute students of the evidence have underestimated the possibilities of unleashed paranormal powers that at least some living persons possess. Such powers could, in principle, bring down an airplane as much as gunfire. To acknowledge such powers undermines support for the belief in postmortem survival. In case after case Braude discusses the merits of these two opposing interpretations of the evidence. Along the way he reviews well-known cases, such as some of those of the mediums Leonora Piper and Gladys Osborne Leonard. In addition, he examines some cases that one does not find in all discussions of this topic, such as those of Patience Worth and Frederic Thompson.

Braude has an excellent command of the relevant publications. I observed only one place where I detected a factual flaw. He assigned the Cagliostro personality of Mrs. Soule, a Boston medium, to the group of "drop-in" communicators. By definition, however, a communicator of this category must be completely unknown to everyone present at a mediumistic session. Cagliostro may be little known today, but I cannot believe that in the first decades of the 20th century the medium and others present at a session with her would never have heard about him.

A book reviewer has no warrant to discuss how his views diverge from those of the book's author. Suffice it to say, therefore, that although Braude has not convinced me of the correctness of his judgments in every case, he has invariably obliged me to reconsider my own opinions.

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