

Letters to the Editor

The Theory of Essence

To the Editor:

I am sympathetic to J. Kenneth Arnette's (1995) attempt to solve the problem of mind/body interaction by resorting to the physics of electromagnetism and quantum mechanics. Unfortunately, the solution he proposed—the theory of essence—raises a number of questions for which I do not find satisfactory answers in his paper. For example, if, as Arnette claimed, the essence has something in common with the body, then it does not belong to a differing order of reality, or “stuff,” but is an entity of the same order. If that is the case, does not his statement that the essence and the body are “extremely different” mean only that many of their characteristics are different?

Arnette wrote that the essence is composed of “something other than matter” (p. 80). What is the basis of this claim? Do we know exactly what matter is? There is as yet no conclusive answer. Can we then say for certain that there is something that is not matter? How the essence, which is made of nonmatter, generates an electrical field has not been explained. If it has an electrical field, can it be free of gravity? If the essence has a physical aspect, will it not be subject to disintegration or change, just as the physical body is? If it does not undergo change, what is the explanation?

Though Arnette told us that after bodily death the essence leaves “this universe” (p. 80), he gave no indication of how it comes into existence, how it becomes associated with a body, and, if there is an interval between its “birth” and association with a body, where it exists during this period. Furthermore, what is the reason for suggesting that a disembodied essence leaves “this universe”?

Arnette made it clear that “The essence is dependent on the accuracy and integrity of physical (biological) systems . . . for the sensory data and physical causality it needs in order to negotiate the world and life in it” (p. 97). Then how does it perceive the physical environment correctly during clinical death or similar situations when the biological systems are found not to be working normally? Also, if it goes to “another

universe" without the benefit of the physical body, how does it negotiate the new environment?

Arnette pointed out that a detached essence can pick up the thoughts of those in physical form by interacting with their essences. But is there any instance of similar communication the other way round, from a disembodied essence to essences in physical form—that is, people in their normal state? If not, why not?

More questions could be asked about the theory of essence, but I think I have made my point. As I have stated above, there can be only one order of reality, and we see different characteristics of it at different levels of analysis or in different situations (Krishnan, 1994, 1996).

References

- Arnette, J. K. (1995). The theory of essence: II. An electromagnetic-quantum mechanical model of interactionism. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 14, 77–99.
- Krishnan, V. (1994). On the mind/body problem [Letter]. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 13, 137–138.
- Krishnan, V. (1996). Misidentified flying objects [Letter]. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 14, 287–290.

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Review of *Parting Visions*

To the Editor:

This letter is concerned with Bruce Horacek's review of *Parting Visions* by Melvin Morse and Paul Perry (1994), published in the Spring 1998 issue of the Journal. I have read Morse's book, and found it very interesting and adding to our knowledge of near-death experiences (NDEs) and related phenomena. Therefore I was very disappointed by Horacek's review of this book. I think that Morse simply has not deserved such harsh criticism. Everybody who works in this field tries not only to present raw data, but to express his or her conclusions and impressions as well. Not every sentence can be proven "scientifically." A critical review is proper, but a harsh dismissal is not justified. Morse should go on with his work!

References

- Horacek, B. (1998). [Review of *Parting visions: Uses and meanings of pre-death, psychic, and spiritual experiences*, by Melvin Morse, with Paul Perry]. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 16, 223–227.
- Morse, M. L., and Perry, P. (1994). *Parting visions: Uses and meanings of pre-death, psychic, and spiritual experiences*. New York, NY: Villard.

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Response to Angerpointner

To the Editor:

I am sorry that Thomas Angerpointner perceived my review of *Parting Visions* (Horacek, 1998) to be harsh. My criticisms of some aspects of Melvin Morse's work should not detract from my overall, closing assessment that "this is a well-written book that articulates very nicely the vision, passion, and faith of a man who sees death-related visions as a meaningful and integral part of our lives" (p. 227). I agree with Angerpointner that Morse's book adds to our knowledge of near-death experiences and related phenomena; I disagree that my review was "a harsh dismissal" of Morse's work.

Reference

- Horacek, B. (1998). [Review of *Parting visions: Uses and meanings of pre-death, psychic, and spiritual experiences*, by Melvin Morse, with Paul Perry]. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 16, 223–227.

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