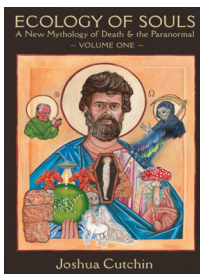


**BOOK
 REVIEW**

Ecology of Souls: A New Mythology of Death & The Paranormal (Volumes 1 and 2)

John Alexander
 nonlethal2@aol.com



ISBN 978-1733980852



ISBN 978-1733980869

<https://doi.org/10.31275/20232993>

PLATINUM OPEN ACCESS



Creative Commons License 4.0.
 CC-BY-NC. Attribution required.
 No commercial use.

To begin at the ending, these volumes are recommended for members of the SSE. That is despite the many difficulties that I found in reviewing these books. It appears to me that the author is an astute observer and reporter on various phenomena, as opposed to being a practitioner, experienter, or independent researcher of the topics about which he writes. Nonetheless, the sheer volume of anecdotes collected from around the world is worth the trip.

From a personal perspective, the subtitle raises questions. That subtitle is called *A New Mythology of Death & the Paranormal*. Frankly, I and many members of the SSE have been addressing the integration of these topics for decades. Ken Ring wrote about the parallels between NDEs and UFO abductions over three decades ago. That was published in *The Omega Project: Near-Death Experiences, UFO Encounters, and Mind at Large* in 1992. That same year, I gave a presentation on that topic at the conference on alien abductions at MIT. That famous conference was hosted by celebrated psychiatrist and Pulitzer Prize-winner, John Mack, M.D. of Harvard, and world-renowned optical physicist David Pritchard of MIT in 1992. My presentation, also based on Ring's work, was titled, "Comparative Phenomenology" and can be found in the *Proceedings of the Abduction Study Conference at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology*. Cutchin is aware of Ring's book as it is addressed on pages 31-32 of Volume One.

While we might agree with much of the discussion, the idea of coincidence of these disparate topics would hardly be considered new. The newness of the concept of cross-pollination and interrelationships between seemingly disparate phenomena may be true for the casual reader but not likely for most SSE members. For at least decades, many of the SSE members have been aware of theoretical entanglements of interdisciplinary studies of phenomena.

It is notable that several experts in related fields have provided laudatory comments in support of these works. It also is observed that the volumes are highly referenced. So much so, that it encompasses an entire third volume devoted solely to those references. That volume with over 4,200 citations is available for free at Cutchin's website: https://www.joshuacutchin.com/_files/ugd/e44a4e_0c39cd7964e145fd8e6c71bf5343a4d7.pdf.

Of concern is that all numeric references are listed for nearly every paragraph, but there is considerable disparity in the qualifications of those persons. For example, on page 75, Lobsang Rampa is quoted and footnoted as 421. There is no doubt that T. Lobsang Rampa is a highly published author of numerous popular books, including his best-known, *The Third Eye*. Upon investigation, it was discovered that T. Lobsang Rampa was a pseudonym for one who was posing as a venerable Tibetan Lama when, in reality, he was later exposed as a Canadian plumber. Those books are very detailed and interesting, it is just that the authenticity of the author is dubious (although Rampa later claimed



that he was a soul transplant into the plumber's body after being caught in the atomic bomb attack on Hiroshima, Japan). There are several other examples in which popular writers are listed as references. The issue is not sourcing but credibility.

Conversely, there are listed more highly credible references, many of whom are personal friends, and some are even members of the SSE. The problem for the reader is that unless they have extensive background in the topics, they might not differentiate between highly qualified references and those who may not be as credible.

These volumes contain a vast overview of the material Cutchin has reviewed, and it is prodigious. A worthy attempt. However, there were substantial omissions of well-known works related to the fields. Carlos Castaneda comes to mind as a specific example. When discussing near-death experiences (NDE) studies, a few were covered, including Raymond Moody and Ken Ring. However, other key scientists, ones who have shaped the field, are not. These might include Bruce Greyson and Michael Sabom, who, like Ring and Moody, were the founding members of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS). Among those not mentioned was Eben Alexander, the neuroscientist who has produced some of the most profound works based on both his professional background and personal NDE. In fact, the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) is not listed as a reference. That is surprising, as IANDS is the premiere organization in the world on the main topic of these books.

Considering the substantial discussion concerning spirits, I would have expected to find extensive literature by Allan Kardek, who generally is regarded as the founder of Spiritism religions such as Candomblé, Umbanda, or Santo Daime. Those religions are prevalent in South America and are derived from practices in old Dahomey in West Africa and imported to Brazil with the Portuguese slave trade. To be clear, physical possession by discarnate entities and interactions with psychopomps are mainstream fare in the Spiritist ceremonies and would add to, not detract from, the basic thesis of Cutchin's volumes.

One of the highly credible experts Cutchin relies on is Terrence McKenna, an ethnobotanist who explored naturally occurring psychedelic plants. In fact, on page 217 of Volume One, he credits McKenna with the title phrase, "ecology of souls." Terrence and his brother Dennis are well known for their studies on ayahuasca and the psychoactive ingredient dimethyltryptamine known as (DMT).

The volumes lead to broad interpretations and leaps in logic. Page 218 of Volume One begins, "If psychedelics take us to the afterlife, then they are guided tours in the 'afterlife vehicle.'" A lot is covered by the caveat "if" but leads to further leaps. Two paragraphs later, in the discussion of various psychedelic drugs, Cutchin states, "altered states of consciousness themselves are psychopomps, providing foreknowledge of the afterlife realm." That would certainly be open to debate by those who study psychopharmacological substances. While an interesting hypothesis, what realms are being explored is far from a certainty.

There are extensive discussions about souls and their attributes. There are extensive reports of the interactions of psychopomps, agents such as spirits, angels, or deities in many religions whose duty is to escort newly deceased souls from Earth to the afterlife. These emerge as discussions of the interactions between the physical and non-physical. Can outside technology interact with the non-physical or spirit world?

Some of Cutchin's comments come across as somewhat flippant. As an example, on page 164 of Volume Two, he addresses psychic explorations by Andrija Puharich. Here he states, "Puharich investigated claims of self-proclaimed psychics like Uri Geller," Having known Andrija, and still friends with Uri Geller (who did write the foreword for my most recent book), the notion of "self-proclaimed" seems an unnecessary denigration. In fact, several members of the SSE were involved in extensive testing and validating of his extraordinary capabilities and have spoken out supporting him. Since Uri's capabilities were topics I discussed with Andrija on several occasions, I am confident he would not concur with the "self-proclaimed" description either.

When viewed as an extensive collection of tales of fantastical events that are evidenced in physical reality, the works have considerable merit. There is also a benefit in the philosophical issues raised.

In the end, while *Ecology of Souls* is a substantial exploration of psychic topics, it is more a compendium of what Cutchin has read than a complete text of all the issues. The latter is probably impossible, even with the more than 260,000 words he has used admirably in these two volumes. An astute observer of what he has read, Cutchin is still bound by his established beliefs based on his Christian upbringing. That is an effect of which he is well aware, and notably quotes John Keel, "Belief is enemy."