



COMMENTARY

Answering More of the Same: A Reply to Nahm

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HIGHLIGHTS

A recent commentary in favor of postmortem survival rails against the very mistakes or misdirections that it verifiably engages in. Authors should call out distortions of their points or positions, but they should also convincingly back-up such charges.

ABSTRACT

Nahm's preceding commentary accuses me of seven misrepresentations. One of these is an acknowledged good-faith error about a peripheral detail, while the remaining six are demonstrably accurate descriptions of Nahm's statements. At the same time, Nahm verifiably misrepresents me frequently and intentionally over issues that he takes to be consequential, which is a much more serious offense. All authors should call out when an interlocutor get their points wrong, but only when they can definitively back up the charge. Where Nahm weakly attempts to show that I misrepresented him, I will show that, if anything, his showcase consists of six verifiably accurate characterizations of his Bigelow Institute contest-winning essay's conclusions. His commentary exemplifies the truism that one can appeal to a million frivolous reasons to dismiss what an opponent has to say if one is absolutely determined not to hear him. Though committed survivalists will undoubtedly be satisfied that survival researchers have responded to me regardless of whether they have responded well, those that care about the underlying issues will hopefully find value in my reply.

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INTRODUCTION

My (One) Accidental Misattribution

Irony seems lost on Michael Nahm in his preceding commentary on this summer's adversarial exchange on the Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies (BICS) essay contest (Nahm, 2022). For his commentary admonishes authors for misrepresenting others even while it engages in misrepresentation *frequently* and *intentionally*. Although Nahm characterizes my initial critique of the BICS essays unfavorably, in fact is it *his* preceding commentary that *demonstrably* falls short of "the standards of objectivity, impartiality, and scientific responsibility

required in academic debates" by *repeatedly* engaging in the very tactics that he rails against. The seven misrepresentations that Nahm accuses me of, on the other hand, amount to one minor mistake and six verifiably accurate characterizations of his BICS essay conclusions.

Where it is relevant to his commentary now, I will also occasionally address "what Augustine kept silent about" on Nahm's contribution to the BICS competition. What I could have earlier exposed about his reasoning is not flattering, so Nahm should be careful what he wishes for. But he should take some solace in the fact that I lack the space to address the vast majority of his **non sequiturs**, sparing him further embarrassment.



Nahm accuses me of mischaracterizing his view “on multiple occasions” when I mistakenly attributed *one* arguably trivial *detail* about his view to him that he did not hold—namely, about *at which* exact numerical *rank* he would place his acclaimed James Leininger case of the reincarnation type (CORT) among the (presumably evidentially) “important” before-cases (CORT investigated before the families involved met and so could not share details) that he listed in a table. Clearly, that CORT falls *somewhere* in a ranking of the 15 (most?) “important” before-cases that Nahm thought worthy of listing. *Exactly where* he thinks that it stands remains unclear since Nahm never tells us that *now*. But the answer is inconsequential since Nahm made clear in his BICS essay—and reiterates now—that he held it in *high regard*, even if we do not know exactly *how high*, since he characterized it as “impressive” (2021*, p. 28, Table 2), “quite remarkable” (2021*, p. 26n12), and “well-documented” (2021*, p. 26). So my error about an arguably small detail¹ did not affect the accuracy of my general characterization of his assessment of this specific CORT. Nahm now confirms that he *still* holds it in high regard, just not in the highest possible regard since there are (in his view) better before-cases. Since a second-place ranking would fall below a first-place one, I never suggested otherwise.

So I got right that his Table 2 was a table of what he regarded as 15 “important” before-cases, but got wrong that it *ranked* #2 on that list simply because it was *numbered* #2. Evidently, the items on Nahm’s list were not listed *in the order of* how evidentially strong Nahm deemed them to be, but they were all “important CORT” (Nahm, 2021*, p. 28, Table 2). *Mea culpa*. I’ll let readers decide for themselves what Nahm meant by “important” before-cases to avoid risking further “misleading” them. Nahm’s other six claimed misrepresentations are nothing of the sort, so I’ll address them in the penultimate section further below.

Nahm’s (Repeated) Intentional Mischaracterizations

When compiling information from notes on multiple sources jotted down months earlier, and then putting it back together in a coherent way, it’s easy to make minor mistakes. Like typos, these are *inevitable* since to err is human. Moreover, once Nahm pointed it out, I immediately *owned* making the ranking error. It’s an entirely different matter when an interlocutor *knowingly* attributes a position to an opponent that his opponent does not hold—for example, when an opponent publicly clarifies *repeatedly* that he is not advocating a particular position, but his interlocutor doubles down on maintaining that he

is despite being aware of that clarification. *That* sort of misattribution is far more serious, and much more aptly characterized as misconduct that “does not meet the standards of scientific debates.” Consequently, it’s remarkable that Nahm’s commentary engages in just such intentional mischaracterization.

For example, Nahm characterizes me as “a physicalist who maintains not only that mind is positively caused by brain activity but . . . advocates the peculiar stance according to which all mental processes are brain processes and that the mind is the nervous system.” I don’t in fact advocate that “peculiar stance.” Perhaps Nahm failed to notice in the very summer exchange in question: “many contemporary philosophers of mind have been highly critical, for different reasons and for a long time, of both reductive physicalism and epiphenomenalism. . . . Their often persuasive (if not decisive) criticisms simply do not touch the dependence thesis—and so are irrelevant to its viability” (Augustine, 2022a, p. 385). Would I have characterized the criticisms of reductive physicalism as “persuasive” if I was persuaded by that view? If that wasn’t clear enough, I *reiterated* the point later in the exchange:

Contemporary philosophers of mind have been highly critical of both the identity theory and epiphenomenalism *for more than half a century*, and my arguments do not require one to assume either anyway, *as I had emphasized*. . . . [They] are largely skeptical of both identity theory (which already avoids causal exclusion) and epiphenomenalism (which seems to self-stultify by denying mental causation altogether). (Augustine, 2022b, p. 430n1)

And I explicitly pointed out that I have no interest in advocating reductionist physicalism/materialism (type identity theory) several years ago (in a source that Nahm cites!) when I noted that the contributors to my compilation, *The Myth of an Afterlife*, were not necessarily either reductionists or materialists, quoted one of them explicitly disavowing both, and pointed out that the most prominent arguments against an afterlife have come from David Hume and Bertrand Russell, “neither of whom were reductionists or materialists” (Augustine, 2016, p. 204). I framed the debate there, as in the book itself, as one between survivalists and mortalists (not “physicalists”), and more pointedly, one between opponents and proponents of the brain-dependence of individual consciousness (since that’s the more basic issue). Michael Sudduth got it: “Augustine and Fishman are not discussing the mind/brain identity thesis or contrasting it with mind/brain interaction. They’re comparing the mind/brain dependence

and mind/brain independence theses" (2021, p. 194). Further along, I reiterated: "One does not need to presume materialism, or indeed any theory of mind, in order to provide strong arguments for personal extinction" (Augustine, 2016, p. 222), and then listed the ways in which mind-brain theories that were neither reductionist nor materialist would entail personal extinction if they were true.

Now granted, in these comments I never outright repudiate the mid-20th-century position that mental states are simply *identical* to brain states, but that's only because I lack a knock-down refutation of it—and so remain appropriately agnostic about it.² But I have certainly never *advocated* type identity theory, and I haven't been coy about the mind-body theories to which I *gravitate*, either, which are not *that*. My *leanings* have always been toward theories closer to David Chalmers' property dualism (cf. Augustine, 2008, p. 239), or better, Russellian monism.³ These are just leanings, though, since I don't pretend to *know* the correct solution to the mind-body problem, which one need not resolve in order to have strong evidence against discarnate personal survival.⁴

To be fair, I *did* conclude Nahm's cited chapter by quoting Michael Spenard: "the best explanation [of mind-brain correlations] would be of a physical linkage: the mind is affected by alcohol because the mind apparently *is* the nervous system, which belongs to the same physical domain as alcohol" (Spenard, 2011, p. 62). But those are Spenard's words, and I would've worded his point about *assessing the neuroscientific evidence* most relevant to discarnate personal survival differently. One can advocate a "physical linkage" without advocating the narrower type identity that Spenard's "the mind apparently *is* the nervous system" implies. I quoted him to show that *others* have also inferred that the best explanation for known mind-brain correlations would yield the conclusion "that having a functioning brain is a *necessary condition* for having conscious experiences" (Augustine & Fishman, 2015, p. 203), which is *my* thesis explicitly defended throughout the chapter (and elsewhere in the book). (Type identity is compatible with this broader thesis, but is not required by it.) Indeed, I write about mental activity *depending* upon, being *caused* by, or being *enabled* by brain activity, but never about it being *identical* to brain activity, precisely because the latter view is not warranted by the mind-brain data. There's a *reason why* I talk about brain activity being a necessary condition, rather than a necessary *and* sufficient condition, for a having a human mental life. It could be both, I suppose, but if one has good reason to conclude that it's *at least* a necessary condition for it, then one has good reason to conclude that discarnate personal survival does not occur.

Spenard's exact words are imperfect, but so are

those of others whom I quote. When others make a central point that you're also trying to convey, you quote the words that are available to you. Other authors might make insightful points without putting them in the best possible way. Many of the quoted philosophers in the chapter, for example, make excellent points when talking about substance dualism specifically (e.g., Patricia Churchland, Frank Dille, Mathew Iredale, William Hasker, Mark Johnston, and Colin McGinn), even though their points are more applicable to a broader mind-brain independence thesis.⁵ Since mind-brain independence is what's necessary for discarnate personal survival to occur, whether *it* is true is the more basic issue for the survival question. But philosophers typically write a great deal about specific mind-body theories⁶ and very little about survival. In any case, if Nahm had misunderstood why I quoted Spenard at the end of my 2015 chapter, that misunderstanding should have been corrected by the *explicit* clarifications that I've made *in print* since (Augustine, 2016; 2022a; 2022b; cf. Sudduth, 2021) and of which Nahm is aware.

Given Nahm's professed concern with "disseminating misinformation that is often difficult to erase again from the literature," one wonders why he engages in it himself. Such behavior subverts scientific progress because, as Nahm notes, the "advancement of a scientific debate is impossible under such conditions."

Nahm's Mischaracterizations to Shift the Burden of Proof

Nahm also writes about my supposed "explanatory model for CORT according to which all facets of a case can be explained via mundane means"—though I have never offered such a thing. Not once have I claimed to *know* (even merely more probably than not) that no paranormal information or influences were responsible for specific features of a CORT. Rather, what I've claimed is that Nahm and other reincarnation researchers *have not shown* that paranormal sources of information or influence *were* responsible for accurate statements about past lives, say, or the presence of birthmarks. To suggest otherwise is to **shift the burden of proof** off of himself and ascribe it to anyone (such as a reincarnation *agnostic*) who does not affirm Nahm's belief. But as an empirical survivalist, Nahm is the one claiming that the reincarnation hypothesis best explains the presence of certain CORT features. So where is Nahm's inference to the best explanation (IBE), exemplifying the simple form laid out by philosopher of science Elliott Sober (in Augustine, 2022a, p. 374)? In the absence of a *formal* inductive argument of *some* kind (even if not an IBE), all that we have is Nahm's *assertion* that specific

CORT features warrant jumping to the conclusion that reincarnation has occurred in a particular case.

Whatever he imagines constitutes my “explanatory model for CORT,” Nahm oddly characterizes me as “a vigorous proponent of this model.” In the Introduction that he cites (Augustine, 2015, pp. 23–27), I surveyed extant criticisms of survivalist interpretations of CORT found in the literature—and nothing more. Granted, I mentioned only those that I think worth mentioning, and mentioned some details not mentioned in other surveys. But this is no different than what I did in other sections, such as in my survey of moral objections to theological conceptions of an afterlife (Augustine, 2015, pp. 11–19). And it’s no different than what James Matlock (1990, pp. 238–255), Harvey J. Irwin (1999, pp. 267–272), or Braude (2021*, pp. 12–19, 30–34) did except for the fact that I didn’t mention criticisms that invoke conjectural forces or entities unknown to science. Do *their* overviews of criticisms of survivalist interpretations of CORT render them “vigorous proponent[s]” of “an explanatory model for CORT” alternative to that of survival/reincarnation? If not for them, then not for me. Simply throwing into one’s literature review conjectural living-agent psi (LAP) possibilities does not make—or unmake—an explanatory model.

If I had actually had “an explanatory model,” I might have said how much weight to give each independent criticism or counter-explanation provided by different critics. I didn’t because I was not trying to *justify* any particular conventional explanation of CORT, just surveying the non-reincarnationist explanations that have been offered in the literature and how features of the CORT evidence itself do not warrant, and sometimes defy,⁷ a reincarnationist interpretation. The burden is squarely on those who argue that some novel sort of explanation is required to account for CORT or their features, which requires *them* to show that no alternative conventional explanations can otherwise account for these, since *they* are the ones making the positive claim that only actual reincarnation (or at least LAP) is (probabilistically) capable of accounting for such. I merely *questioned* that inference. The focus of my BICS critique was quite naturally on *empirical survivalists’ case* for a survivalist interpretation of CORT. Conventional counter-explanations are relevant to this only to the extent that they suggest that postulating reincarnation is superfluous.

No doubt it was better rhetoric for Nahm to associate the points that I surveyed with “[Paul] Edwards’ emotionally-tainted ridicule of CORT research” (Nahm, 2021*, p. 45) than with *identical* points noted in Braude (2021*, pp. 12–19, 30–34), Irwin (1999, pp. 267–272), or Matlock (1990, pp. 238–255), among other places.⁸ What matters to the factual debate is not their *authorship*, but Nahm’s

concession: “The listed points of criticism are principally valid and nobody has denied that several CORT might indeed suffer from such shortcomings” (2021*, p. 40). And an author comprehensively surveying (or even raising for the first time) criticisms of reincarnationist interpretations of CORT *in the literature* is *not* thereby suggesting that each criticism concerns a *sizable* problem known to infect the research, or even that it reveals known (rather than merely potential) problems “would have been *present* . . . thereby alleging that the reports of all before-cases [or any CORT] *are* seriously flawed” [emphasis mine]. Nahm merely sprinkles his **guilt by association ad hominem** with a dash of **hyperbole**.⁹

Has Nahm *ruled out* a given possibility as a factor that might produce certain features of CORT? In at least some cases, perhaps he *has*! The only way for anyone to know is for Nahm to explain *how* he has ruled out a conventional factor:

Sometimes, Stevenson used different interpreters during his repeated visits for follow-up studies, and the important details were always congruent. The previous translations and case reports held. They also matched with the reports of independent local researchers who investigated the same cases as Stevenson with or without exchanging their notes. Of course, Pal, Nissanka, and others were able to understand the mother tongue of the interviewed families. Moreover, Stevenson, Haraldsson, Keil, Mills, and other Western researchers investigated numerous cases in which they were able to communicate directly with the interviewees, for example in French or English, and this not only in the West. Finally, the initial written records made in many before-cases were recorded and verified by native speakers, so it seems unlikely that they were misunderstood. (Nahm, 2021*, p. 46)

This is a *good response* to a particular *concern* initially raised by Ian Wilson and reiterated by others. The concern would obviously not apply to those cases where native speakers were the ones investigating the cases, though, and those who mention this concern *never claimed otherwise*. And Nahm’s response is not a once-and-for-all reason to disregard any and all criticisms of reincarnation research from here on out.¹⁰ Nahm’s mistake was to assume that by having simply *mentioned* the criticism, I thereby thought that the potential problem identified was *definitively known to be present* in some or many cases, when in fact I raised the issue simply because it needed to be *considered*:

Local interpreters who share a common societal belief in reincarnation *may* even unintentionally **distort their translations** of interviewees to make their testimonies seem more evidential than they really are (Wilson, 1982, p. 50), and *those who do not speak the language of the witnesses have no way of detecting such distortions* (Rogo, 1985, p. 74). [emphasis mine] (Augustine, 2015, p. 26)

This lone sentence is neither an explanatory model nor part of one, and it does not claim to explain all, many, or even a single feature of any particular CORT. Nowhere did I say that this possibility *has been detected*, unlike where I said that CORT produced by normal childhood play “have been uncovered” (Augustine, 2015, p. 25). As before, my concern was with whether reincarnation researchers have *ruled it out*, since that’s what *science* (in part) requires them to do to back up their claim to have good *empirical evidence* of reincarnation. As an empirical survivalist, Nahm asks the wrong question: “Where exactly did the parental coaching, misinterpretation, misreporting, or cheating enter the reports about Ryan and Gnanatilleka’s cases? What is the flaw that renders them untenable?” The scientific community (not me) asks a different question: “Where exactly did Nahm (or anyone else) rule out all non-reincarnationist conventional explanations, including those where dark data are potential factors?”

In order for Nahm to meet his burden and *show* (by the standards of the scientific community) that paranormal information or influence *was* responsible for certain features of a CORT, *he* would have to provide (good) *positive evidence* that reincarnation caused the presence of those features. How might he go about doing that?

Suppose that an investigator wants to know if a surface-to-air missile (SAM) caused a plane to crash. He does not merely rule out various (and certainly *not* exhaustive) alternative explanations to the SAM hypothesis, like fuel tank sparks, pilot error, instrument error, mechanical failure, dangerous weather conditions, etc.—though doing so might help him determine *where else to look* for an explanation. To clinch the case (in a way that would be acceptable *in a court of law* per the BICS beyond-a-reasonable-doubt standard), the investigator would have to *additionally* look for—and find—missile fragments, damage to the plane consistent with a missile strike, missile component residue on the wreckage, etc.

Do unexplained lights in the sky clinch the case for extraterrestrial visitation? Certainly not, since that involves ruling out all alternative possible causes for them

(including currently *unknown* atmospheric phenomena). A crashed extraterrestrial spacecraft (or other extraterrestrial artifact), on the other hand, would do the trick. So, with these examples in mind, how do survival researchers like Nahm establish—in a clinching way—that a birthmark was caused by the transmigration of a soul? How do they establish that it was alternatively caused by the PK of a living person who really wanted to see a deceased loved one again, and so “psychokinetically manufactured” evidence that would fulfill that wish? The ball is in Nahm’s court to answer that sort of question, since he is the one claiming to have strong evidence for reincarnation.

If both of us disappeared tomorrow, psychology textbooks would *continue to* omit reincarnation among their items of psychological knowledge because the question of whether or not we have scientifically authenticated evidence of reincarnation is not up to either of us to decide.

Nahm’s Seven Wonders of the World

In the preceding sections I’ve owned *accidentally* making one (arguably trivial) misattribution to Nahm (his example #3), in contrast to Nahm’s repeated, intentional, and significant¹¹ mischaracterizations of my views. In this section I will provide the fuller context of the other six supposed misattributions that I make to Nahm to show that, in fact, they are nothing of the sort. After reading his own words at length, readers can judge for themselves whether I quoted Nahm “out of context” for the purpose of “contorting their original meaning.”

In example #1, Nahm says that I misinterpreted “what [he] wrote in a remarkable way.” I had written that Nahm invoked a double standard by “writing of the dependence thesis,¹² ‘it is impossible to prove it from a purely logical perspective,’ even though, incredibly, he had just written ‘we usually don’t speak of ‘proof’ in sciences like psychological research’” (Augustine, 2022a, p.391n7). Nahm *now* says that by this he meant: “In contrast to for instance mathematics, one should principally not speak of obtaining proof in natural sciences including psychological research *and* neuroscience because it is virtually impossible to obtain 100% ‘proof’ for something in these areas from a logical perspective.” But this is *not* what Nahm said in his BICS contribution. There he said: “In fact, William James, the founder of American psychology, argued more than 100 years ago that it is principally impossible to prove that brain chemistry produces consciousness—all we can observe are ‘concomitant variations’ of brain states and states of consciousness” (2021*, p. 3). Now perhaps it’s just a coincidence that Nahm made a trivial point about the generic difference between science and mathematics with a callback to a specific Jamesian argument that

the hypotheses of mind–brain dependence and independence (or of producing and transmitting/permitting consciousness, if Nahm prefers) are *evidentially on a par*. Perhaps Nahm had no intention to convey the notion that the neuroscientific evidence in particular proves nothing, rather than merely that scientific evidence in general *proves nothing*. *Perhaps . . . but not likely*. For James uses it in exactly the manner that I had indicated, writing:

The theory of production is therefore *not a jot more simple or credible in itself than any other conceivable theory*. It is only a little more popular. . . . For polemic purposes, *the two theories are thus exactly on a par*. [emphasis mine] (James, 1898, p. 22)

Nahm, who explicitly takes his inspiration from and emulates James, is not making a point about the difference between *natural sciences* on one hand and *mathematical sciences* on the other—or anything of the sort. For that is not what James is doing, and Nahm’s explicit reference to only being able to observe “concomitant variations” between mental states and brain states has nothing to do with the certainty with which we can come to mathematical conclusions compared to how much less confidently we can come to scientific ones. Rather, the reference to concomitant variations is a callback to the stock commonplace that “correlation is not causation,” which psychical researchers have leaned on since James to argue that *the neuroscientific evidence specifically* proves nothing against discarnate personal survival. For Nahm nowhere draws the takeaway that *no* scientific conclusions are warranted in *any* empirical discipline (compared to mathematical conclusions), and James explicitly drew from this line of reasoning that he could dispose of “the physiological objection to immortality” (James, 1898, p. 51).

James argues that *the neuroscientific evidence* can never make a difference to which theory (production vs. transmission/permission) is more *credible* than the other. According to James, even though “physiological science has come to the conclusion cited” (James, 1898, p. 7)—that our inner lives are a function of our gray matter—nevertheless *its* evidence in particular (not that of natural science in general) can never *favor* one of these sorts of theories over the other. Nahm clearly does *not* believe that this is true of *other* evidence from psychical research since he cites *that evidence* as favoring reincarnation. Thus I *accurately* characterized Nahm as “raising the bar for neuroscientific evidence while lowering it for evidence from psychical research” (Augustine, 2022a, p. 391n7). It’s not a coincidence that neither Nahm nor any

other psychical researcher has ever appealed to Jamesian reasoning to argue, for example, that we can never “prove” (in a mathematical sense) that micro-PK affected random number generators (RNGs) because, after all, all that we have are concomitant variations between PKrs’ attempts and RNG output. Recall Nahm’s specific use: “William James . . . argued more than 100 years ago that it is principally impossible to prove that brain chemistry produces consciousness” (2021*, p. 3). There’s a reason why Nahm says *this*, but not that it’s principally impossible to “prove” that the Moon produces the tides, or that the heart produces the circulation of the blood.¹³

Contra the Jamesian argument, C. S. Peirce and Sober (and many others) have shown us how the (chiefly) neuroscientific evidence *can* favor the dependence of individual consciousness upon the brain (over the alternative hypothesis). I simply *applied* their abductive reasoning about evidence in general to demonstrate how this specific evidence *does* favor it. Empirical survivalists have long used Jamesian reasoning to deflect having to *weigh* the neuroscientific evidence against the survival evidence.¹⁴ For weighing the *totality* of the relevant evidence available to us—that is, *not* arbitrarily *excluding* the chiefly neuroscientific evidence in one’s assessment—would clearly tip the scales against discarnate personal survival. I understand that this finding is an unwelcome one *for survival proponents*, but focusing on potentially favorable evidence at the exclusion of any unfavorable evidence in an evidential/empirical assessment is mere politicking, not science.

In his example #2, Nahm objects to my paraphrase that “Nahm concedes [that near-death experiences/NDEs] are characterized by more differences than similarities” (Augustine, 2022a, p. 381) (caviling about the typo in the page number cited, too). Earlier, I had quoted him stating that NDEs “are clearly culturally influenced” (Nahm, 2021*, p. 16; cf. Augustine, 2022a, p. 376). My supposed mischaracterization purportedly stems from my failure to quote his earlier statement: “Although they are marked by cultural influence, NDEs share a common core structure featuring several elements” (Nahm, 2021*, p. 14). Since there is no inconsistency between any of these cited statements, Nahm’s complaint *now* that he had then “highlighted” that “NDEs share overall communalities *despite* their being culturally influenced” is misplaced.

Since I quoted Nahm stating that NDEs are “clearly culturally influenced,” and Nahm quoted himself stating that they are “marked by cultural influence,” it’s worth noting that one definition of the verb “marked” is “having a distinctive or emphasized character” (*Merriam-Webster*). Though Nahm cavils about the exact phrase “more differences than similarities,” my point was that the cul-

tural influences were so prevalent as to be impossible to miss. In other words, to anyone who actually reads the accounts, they are noticeably culturally influenced *through and through* (cf. Belanti, Perera, & Jagadheesan, 2008, pp. 123-127; Groth-Marnat, 1994, p. 11; Schlieter, 2018, pp. 286-290). This would be true even if Nahm meant something else by “marked,” making what he meant by it rather moot. What matters in the context of my point is that *it’s true that* there are more dissimilarities than similarities between uncontaminated NDE accounts from different cultures: “deceased or supernatural beings are encountered. These are often met in another realm . . . [that] is a social world not dissimilar to the one the percipient is from. . . . [T]he consistency of these reports suggests that at least these two [very general] features of the NDE are indeed cross-cultural” (Kellehear, 1996, p. 33). Later, Allan Kellehear elaborates on this point: “encountering supernatural and deceased beings, otherworld vistas, and perhaps a darkness,¹⁵ do seem to be crosscultural features associated with NDEs. Yes, these are general, and they are what you would expect from people claiming some sort of encounter with death or dying. But that observation does not lessen their significance or validity” (2007, p. 149). That even the “core” features of Western NDE accounts ubiquitous in popular culture are rarely if ever found in minimally culturally contaminated non-Western accounts *implies* more dissimilarities than similarities between them. Nahm’s complaint cavils, too, because I only *incidentally* commented on Nahm’s view here when making an altogether different point about Ian Stevenson’s motivated reasoning (only *mentioning* Nahm because the critique’s focus was the BICS contributions). The incidental comment *naming Nahm* could’ve easily been substituted with an otherwise identical one naming cross-cultural NDE expert Kellehear instead, and the point would stand (otherwise unaltered) as a true statement.

In his example #4, Nahm gripes:

But “survival researcher” Nahm did not “call” or “declare” anything to be a “prediction” in the context Augustine referred to. It was Augustine alone who retroactively declared some aspects of my introductory overview of empirical findings concerning CORT to be “predictions.” Because he did not inform his readers about his move, they are led to erroneously believe that I used this prominent scientific catchword inappropriately on several occasions.

Here Nahm again cavils, because it’s true that he never uses the word “predictions” when he lists his reincarnation hypothesis predictions. In the alleged misat-

tribution, I pointed out that Nahm *exemplified* “Survival researchers . . . [who] retroactively declare these patterns to be ‘predictions’ of the reincarnation hypothesis” (Augustine, 2022a, p. 380). My point was not that Nahm actually used the word “predictions,” but that he *derived* what he took to be predictions from his reincarnation hypothesis (whether he called them that or not). As the sentence immediately after the alleged misattribution makes clear (“But are they really its predictions?”), the quotation marks around “predictions” were shorthand for “so-called predictions” since one cannot *logically derive* from the reincarnation hypothesis (either deductively or inductively) the observational consequences that Nahm took from it. So I never claimed that Nahm “used this prominent scientific catchword¹⁶ inappropriately.” Rather, my point was that he was *deriving* observational consequences from the reincarnation hypothesis that one cannot, in fact, logically derive from it, plain and simple.

Nahm goes on to say that he agrees with me (for different reasons) that the observational consequences that he thinks support the reincarnation hypothesis “are no predictions at all.” But the way that Nahm uses them—as *scientific evidence for* reincarnation—that’s exactly the role that he gives them:

Science textbooks are more cautious about laying out recipes for science than they used to be, but descriptions of the hypothetico-deductive method [i.e., scientific method] are still fairly common. . . . In these [somewhat Popperian] versions, the hypothetico-deductive method is a process in which scientists come up with conjectures and then deduce observational predictions from those conjectures. If the predictions come out as the theory says, then the theory is [evidentially] *supported*. If the predictions do not come out as the theory says, the theory is not supported and should be rejected. [emphasis mine] (Godfrey-Smith, 2021, p. 94)

What it means for an observation to be *evidence for* a hypothesis (in part)¹⁷ is that we would expect that observation to be made if that hypothesis were true—i.e., that it’s minimally more likely than not that we’ll find it if the hypothesis is true. Whenever Nahm talks about evidence/data (purportedly) favoring reincarnation over alternative explanations, he is talking about (putative) predictions of the reincarnation hypothesis that were borne out. By claiming that “the best available evidence for survival among the different kinds of survival phenomena. . . . is constituted by cases of the reincarnation type (CORT)” (Nahm, 2021*, p. 5), Nahm is claiming that

we would expect to find CORT if personal survival—and implicitly reincarnation—were true. So Nahm thinks that CORT are more likely to be found than to be undiscovered if reincarnation is true. And when Nahm says that with the presence of wound-birthmark matches, a CORT “gains considerable strength” (2021*, p. 34), he is saying that the reincarnation hypothesis leads us to expect (i.e., *predicts*) birthmark cases even more strongly than it leads us to expect CORT that lack birthmarks.

However he labels them, Nahm’s predictions are nothing of the sort since the reincarnation hypothesis neither deductively entails them nor inductively implies that they will be found with a greater than 50% probability. *Failing to* have found Nahm’s “evidence” would *not* have not falsified/disconfirmed the reincarnation hypothesis because that hypothesis never predicted that evidence in the first place. For the same reason, finding his “evidence” would not confirm or lend evidential support to the reincarnation hypothesis, either. A hypothesis’ successful predictions *do* constitute evidence favoring that hypothesis—but only if the hypothesis really does lead us to expect that evidence. There’s a reason why early substance dualists like René Descartes never “predicted” that we would ever view our bodies from an out-of-body perspective—because dualism (sans the addition of uncheckable auxiliary assumptions) predicts no such thing. If an observation’s absence is not evidence against a theory, then its presence is not evidence for it, either.

Nahm writes that he “nowhere proclaimed the sweeping generalization ‘dependence thesis proponents regard survival impossible in an aprioristic way’” in his BICS essay. And, indeed, he never *stated* that idea that explicitly. But it is a plain implication of other things that he *did* state, making empty his complaint that “selling inferences for facts when quoting selectively . . . is misplaced in scientific debates.” He writes that “impartial court members would disregard socioculturally determined preconceptions about the nature of consciousness. They would not regard survival ‘impossible’ in an aprioristic way” (2021*, p. 66). Who does Nahm believe would *not* disregard the so-called “socioculturally determined preconceptions about the nature of consciousness”? Most plausibly, those production hypothesis proponents against whom his “impartial court members” stand in stark contrast:

To be more precise, truly impartial court members would act like this: They would *question the production hypothesis* according to which consciousness is exclusively generated by brain chemistry. Numerous lines of evidence introduced in my essay have shown that *this hypothe-*

sis is far from being established; and as stated in the Introduction, *it is impossible to prove it from a purely logical perspective*. Its widespread acceptance in Western cultures is merely socioculturally conditioned. [emphasis mine] (Nahm, 2021*, p. 66)

Who wouldn’t “question” the production hypothesis? By implication, those production hypothesis proponents who are *not* “truly impartial.” Since Nahm never distinguishes between partial and impartial production hypothesis proponents, but he *does* distinguish between “impartial court members” and those who *never* “question the production hypothesis,” his wording implies that *all* production hypothesis proponents are partial/biased, in contrast to his imagined dispassionate arbiters of truth.

Nahm’s sixth gripe is that I *labeled* the penultimate sentence of his section on mental mediumship—“The qualitative strength of mental mediumship cannot be regarded as ‘high’¹⁸ (2021*, pp. 13–14)—an “overall assessment” (Augustine, 2021a, p. 377). Nahm protests that “It is the sum of these five criteria that represents my overall evaluation,” not just this particular *evidential* criterion. Since he never provides a brief synopsis of how all five of his criteria would apply here, I reproduced from Nahm’s page-long appraisal only those comments most relevant to an *evidential* assessment of mental mediumship. I picked out Nahm’s caution not to read too much into this evidence to contrast his guarded judgment of its evidential strength against the less-guarded judgment stated in another BICS essay (and quoted at a comparable length).

Nahm’s other four criteria were: investigability, repeatability, quantitative strength, and relevance (to personal survival). The *investigability* of mental mediumship (that I had already quoted Nahm on) speaks to limitations on what sorts of evidence *are possible*, not the state of the survival evidence *obtained*. The *repeatability* of the phenomenon obviously informs investigability; *quantitative strength* concerns cases’ “complexity or richness in details” (2021*, p. 7); and *relevance* to the survival question is self-explanatory. Compared to these four criteria, I think that readers can see why Nahm’s assessment of *qualitative strength*—of observational conditions, eyewitness reliability, the objectivity or subjectivity of the evidence, and the ambiguity of its interpretation (2021*, p. 7)—would be a better indicator of what he took to be the *overall strength of the evidence* actually obtained.¹⁹

Although quoting it verbatim, by *labeling* the (arguably) most relevant of his five particular conclusions an “overall assessment,” Nahm takes me to have put his conclusion “into a false and inflated context.” Readers may want to compare my use (Augustine, 2022a, pp. 377–378)

against Nahm's page-long appraisal (2021*, pp. 13–14) and judge for themselves.

In his seventh and final example, Nahm clarifies that he prefaced his conflation “the living-agent psi model is also called the ‘super-psi’ model” (2021*, p. 49) with the adverb “Traditionally, . . .” Nahm suggests that this subtle qualification is equivalent to that of Sudduth's clearer “so-called Super-ESP hypothesis” (2009a, p. 399) (which is doubtful), but fails to acknowledge that, unlike Sudduth, Nahm never cautioned readers with any qualification as plain as day as “the term ‘super-psi’ is laden with unwanted and misleading connotations” (Sudduth, 2009b, p. 168).²⁰ Instead, Nahm's very next sentence says: “This term [super-psi] points to *the fact that* psi of an enormous quality and quantity *is required* to explain all facets of survival phenomena” [emphasis mine] (2021*, p. 49), which is question-begging and prejudicial (Augustine, 2021a, pp. 392–393n19). If Nahm had held that the traditional terminology was as unfortunate as Braude has long said (and whom Nahm now quotes), why didn't Nahm simply say so himself in his BICS essay? He could've easily talked about the *putative* fact or the *notion* that a disproportionate amount of psi is *said to be* required or is *arguably* required to explain the survival evidence. As I (and others) have pointed out, whatever “amount” of psi would be needed by the living—*however* one understands amount/degree—would be no less needed by the dead to produce the phenomena, so the entire premise of this loaded term is baseless. Since any psi phenomena requiring living psi superstars on LAP interpretations would require equally powerful deceased psi superstars on survivalist interpretations, it's simply false that “the psi or super-psi required must be attributed to living beings but not to deceased agents” (Nahm, 2021*, p. 50)—unless by “must” all that Nahm meant was that LAP interpretations *stipulate* that living agents are the source of the psi in question, whether that psi was below average, average, or absolutely stunning psi.

But Nahm's own words betray that he did *not* mean this. Nahm wrote: “The related term ‘living-agent psi’ is a qualitative attribution similar to saying that a star or super-star can be a ‘music star’ or a ‘movie star’” (2021*, p. 49). There is nothing either quantitative (how much psi) or qualitative (how rich/complex the psi) inherent to the concept of LAP. The term denotes *no more than* that the hypothesized psi originates from living persons. Any other characteristics *read into* the concept of LAP—such as Nahm's “complexity, qualitative and motivational aspects, theoretical ramifications, and . . . meta-evidence”—*project* various unstated and unverifiable assumptions on to this simple concept. Whether the psi originates from the living, the dead, the inanimate, the demonic, the ex-

traterrestrial, the interdimensional, or what have you, any one of those sources can produce as circuitous or as straight-line psi as any of the others—at least until we are furnished with a good reason to think otherwise.

Nahm's misuse of Braude's crippling complexity argument illustrates this well: “the ‘crippling’ complexity of some especially impressive CORT would have to involve the unusual but successful interplay of multiple sources of information from the living-agent psi perspective, thus weakening its position compared to the simpler causal nexus underlying the survival model” (Nahm, 2021*, p. 54). But Braude wrote in *his* BICS essay:

Ordinarily, we understand (roughly at least) what it means to say that a piece of information is obscure. But that conception of obscurity applies only to *normal* methods of acquiring information. For example, we consider information to be obscure when it's not widely known and when it takes some work to uncover. And by saying that it takes work to uncover, I mean that the information is either outside our perceptual field or otherwise difficult to access physically (e.g., if it's behind layers of security or other barriers, or if it's remote geographically and not accessible electronically). Notice, though, that *all* information allegedly acquired psychically by the deceased in a mediumistic scenario, either about a living person's thoughts or about some present physical state of affairs, counts as obscure in this sense, just as it does for ESP on the part of the living. In both cases, there's no familiar *physical* access to the acquired information, and so both survivalist and LAP interpretations of mediumship require access to information considered obscure—and for the same reason. Thus, survivalists are in no position to claim that the normal obscurity of mediumistically conveyed information places LAP-advocates at an explanatory disadvantage. (Braude, 2021*, pp. 6–7)

Braude adds that the supposed crippling complexity that Nahm attributes to LAP interpretation of CORT “poses a comparable problem” for a survivalist one: “As far as we know, psychically accessing multiple sources of normally obscure information is no more imposing than accessing one” (2021*, p. 8), whether it's done by the living or the dead. In short, Nahm has to impose conventional physical restrictions on what LAP can do that, if applicable, also apply to what deceased persons can do—and that we have no reason to believe are applicable to any kind of psi anyway (whatever its source).

CONCLUSION: ASSERTIONS SHOULD BE SUPPORTED

My reply to my commentators requested “just one *direct quotation* of a single instance where I explicitly attributed a position to a BICS essay contest winner that the winner did not advocate” (Augustine, 2022b, p. 430). Nahm evidently misreads this as expressing grandiose unawareness of “easily demonstrable misrepresentations of content according to [my] bias.” Is it theoretically possible that, somewhere in my BICS critique, I criticized empirical survivalists for making “unstated and undefended assumptions” that I’ve made myself? (Braude et al., 2022, p. 406) Certainly. That’s why I responded *and supported* that “here at least, it’s clearly false” that I did the specific thing that I was accused of doing (Augustine, 2022b, p. 423). My point was to urge survivalist authors to *back up* their accusations rather than simply make them. Otherwise, without fact-checking every unsupported statement, how can readers gauge the reliability of one’s accusations compared to those just made up out of thin air by 2020 US presidential election deniers?

We live at a time when too many people feel entitled to claim whatever they want without even *attempting* to justify their claims. But to maintain a *functioning* society with a diversity of views, we have to *demand* that people back up their claims. This is as necessary in survival research as anywhere else. And it is particularly obligatory for those mandated to meet an evidential standard as high as “proof beyond a reasonable doubt.”²¹ Disputants are expected to present evidence for their claims in a court of law (and judges are expected to hear both sides). My challenge was nothing more than a request of survival researchers to do the bare minimum and present (good) evidence for their claims. One cannot advance the debate doing any less, and treating with respect an issue as important to humanity as the perennial question of life after death outweighs preserving the ego of *any* individual or group.

Nahm characterizes me as “a fervid skeptic who styled himself as a guardian angel of objectivity, impartiality, honesty and scientific integrity,”²² when in fact his styling—not mine—simply represents Nahm’s attempt to shirk his responsibility to meet the basic standards of scientific rigor. He relentlessly **shifts the burden of proof**, attributing to me “the various means that Augustine considered to be sufficient for a mundane explanation for CORT.” In matter of fact, I’ve *never* said that the standard criticisms of CORT *found in the extant survival literature* among both skeptics *and* proponents were sufficient to explain all CORT, either collectively or individually, and in

fact I explicitly *admitted* that they were not (Augustine, 2015, p. 24, 39n31; 2022a, p. 379). Nahm does not provide a formal inductive argument—a *structured* argument with a recognized logical form, premises, and derivations from combining those premises—that generates the logical implication that reincarnation probably occurs, or best explains various features of CORT. To distract from *his* absence of an argument, he invents “[Augustine’s] allegation according to which all before-case reports are decidedly flawed.” But that **straw man** is nowhere to be found in anything that I argued. Talk about “diversionary tactics and immunization strategies”!

While Nahm’s preference for an assessment of the “differences in [survival researchers’] methodological approaches, the rationales behind them, [and] some of their strengths and weaknesses” is understandable, addressing these finer points is only appropriate when their more basic flaws have been addressed *and fixed*. Failing to weigh contrary evidence in an evidential assessment, relying on tired fallacies that are a mark of pseudoscience, addressing matters that one lacks the knowledge to speak on intelligibly (like the mind-body problem or free will issue),²³ etc., are far more basic and therefore more serious deficiencies. If survival researchers are unable or unwilling to avoid making rudimentary errors in reasoning, how will they ever be willing or able to avoid making more subtle mistakes?

One must acknowledge the disrepair of a structure before it can be fixed, and I merely *identified* the poor argumentation persistently undergirding empirical survivalists’ statements. It’s up to them to *fix* their arguments since they are the ones constructing them. Until they are *fixed*, getting into the nuances of different authors’ methodological differences is superfluous. Focusing on these particulars is only warranted *after* the more basic deficiencies have been *resolved*—and the summer exchange merely routed them out.

NOTES

¹ I did mistakenly attribute *more* weight to Nahm’s ranking than he explicitly indicated. How *much* more we don’t know since Nahm doesn’t tell us now where he *would* rank the Leininger CORT among his “important” before-cases. But correcting my “second-best” misattribution in brackets now makes clear how little difference the error makes: “Braude only expressed his change of heart about the evidential value of CORT recently, in his contemporaneous prize-winning essay itself, and largely due to the then-unpublished findings of Sudduth, which exposed the sloppiness of the investigation of a long-overhyped CORT (one [listed

among 15 “important”] “before case[s]” by Nahm). . . . Could the absence of credible conventional explanations of CORT be an artifact of the fact that they were not investigated deeply enough? This is not some mere possibility; Sudduth has already demonstrated an example of it in what Nahm deems to be [one of his 15 “important”] before-case[s], which Nahm characterizes as ‘impressive,’ indeed ‘quite remarkable,’ and even ‘well-documented’” (Augustine, 2022a, p. 379). Notice that the general points, even when they secondarily apply to Nahm specifically, are unchanged by the correction. Moreover, Nahm’s before-cases were presented as among the most evidential CORT around, so the *particular* numerical ranking of that one before-case made little difference to his case. Mentioning Nahm’s *particular ranking* was an afterthought (in my section about “Ranking the Survival Evidence”); what’s important about the Leininger before-case is that it’s the only one so thoroughly *independently* checked by an investigator who is not a reincarnation apologist, that it didn’t even meet the most basic requirements to show that reincarnation best explains the evidence in that case, and that Nahm held it in high regard anyway.

² I’ve said this explicitly and publicly online, if Nahm is going to cite private electronic communications.

³ For the record, my own *instinct* (not certainty) is that there is a qualitative aspect of the mind (*qualia*) that is *not* capturable by the concepts found in contemporary physics (or even a future physics). These *qualia* might be regarded as nonphysical *properties* of functioning brains—or they might be understood as intrinsic features/categorical bases of matter (quiddities/inscrutables, particularly those of functioning brains) that are not captured by the exclusively extrinsic/dispositional/relational/structural features found in explanations from physics (cf. Alter & Coleman, 2021).

⁴ Attributing reductive physicalism to survival skeptics is part of a long psychical research tradition of clinging to a rhetorically useful **talking point** come what may—namely that dogmatic adherence to a quasi-religious “physicalism” is what generates skepticism about discarnate personal survival (e.g., Grossman, 2008). Contemporary empirical survivalists seem incredibly reluctant to drop this talking point even when it is explicitly denied. Consider what this sophomore-level philosophy of religion textbook has to say about the matter: “The problem is that whatever our minds have to do with souls, they pretty clearly have an enormous amount to do with our brains. Damage to the brain can take away our memories or mobility or speech. At least some mental illnesses seem to depend on the balance of chemicals in the brain. The idea that we need a soul

to think and feel is speculation. The idea that our minds depend on our brains is difficult to deny. This makes it doubtful that your soul by itself could be you” (Stairs & Bernard, 2007, p. 301). Even if *you have a soul*, then, “it might not provide for life after death in the way people sometimes think it would” (2007, p. 301)—no physicalism required.

⁵ Their terminology is imperfect in part because C. D. Broad, Richard Swinburne, and E. J. Lowe have defended versions of substance dualism that permit or take for granted mind–brain dependence, so the quoted objections wouldn’t apply to those versions; and the objections might *also* apply to nondualist theories like Berkeleyan idealism (at least when such an idealist denies mind–brain dependence). That’s why it’s better to go straight to the heart of the matter—whether or not individual consciousness can exist/occur absent a functioning brain.

⁶ “Physicalist” is a label that I prefer to avoid because it grossly neglects the nuances raised by a genuine interest in solving the mind–body problem, but sometimes writers intentionally oversimplify for uninitiated readers by comparing just two mind–body theories—reductive physicalism and Cartesian dualism—as if they were the only two. If another author *forced* that false dichotomy, I would perhaps be closer to the former than to the latter since I don’t believe in traditional “souls.” But then the sorts of arguments that Nahm raises against physicalism, such as “nothing in physics and chemistry predicts that protons, electrons, atoms, or molecules will produce something like consciousness” (2021*, p. 3), would not apply to my view and thus would **straw man** it. Johnson (2018) illustrates how Christian apologists use the same tactic.

⁷ Just as one does not need an “explanatory model” to understand that certain features of apparently gratuitous suffering in the human and animal world are inconsistent with (or at least in tension with) the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly loving God, one does not need an “explanatory model” to see that certain features of CORT and other survival evidence are inconsistent with (or at least in tension with) survivalist interpretations. And valid biological explanations for pain do not render the suffering that we encounter any less *prima facie* incompatible with the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, and perfectly good God.

⁸ Somehow Braude’s legitimate concern that “many cases also require the services of translators whose own biases, inadequacies, and needs might influence the direction or accuracy of the testimony obtained” (Braude, 2021*, p. 32), originally raised by prolific paranormal author Ian Wilson (1982, p. 50), becomes transformed

into “Edwards and Augustine’s argument” (Nahm, 2021*, p. 46) or “the conjecture of Edwards, Augustine, or Murray and Rea” (Nahm, 2021*, p. 57) in Nahm’s **guilt by association ad hominem**. Even if the skeptical literature contains “a disconcerting amount of scorn, sweeping generalizations, and misinformation,” that’s not an indictment of anything that I have written.

⁹ Nahm’s reliance on **spin** forces me to state the obvious: When I cite any particular author on a specific point, the act of citing that author on that point does not commit me to affirming all, many, or even any other things that that author has said before. Indeed, I cite *psychical researchers* raising my surveyed criticisms far more often than I cite parapsychological skeptics. For instance, in my Introduction on CORT, I merely cite *two points* from “Murray and Rea’s distorted critique” (Nahm, 2021*, p. 39) (‘laudably’ omitting all of their other ‘distortions’). By contrast, I cite Ian Stevenson 16 times, D. Scott Rogo 16 times, Leonard Angel 10 times, Ian Wilson 6 times, Champe Ransom 5 times, C. T. K. Chari 4 times, Satwant Pasricha 3 times, Jim Tucker 3 times, Antonia Mills 2 times, John Beloff and Stephen Braude once, and—excluding instances where Paul Edward quotes Champe Ransom verbatim—I do not cite Paul Edwards at all!

¹⁰ As Nahm seems to want when he writes: “Given that authors misrepresent the work of their interlocutors . . . are we entitled to believe that their lines of reasoning are objective and impartial even where they do not misrepresent the material they discuss? I strongly doubt that.” Not to mention that Nahm’s commentary does not fare well by that standard.

¹¹ After mischaracterizing me as a type-identity physicalist, Nahm goes on to derive what he (mistakenly) believes are substantial implications of that view, writing: “These deductions are consequential.”

¹² Even here Nahm cavils, writing: “I wrote specifically about the *production hypothesis* but not about a more general ‘dependence thesis’ as Augustine mistakenly claimed.” True, but as I pointed out in the BICS critique, the issue of contention was “the dependence thesis, Nahm’s Jamesian ‘production hypothesis’ being one version of it” (Augustine, 2022a, p. 385). So my *correction* was no mistake, but simply being more accurate: *any* functional or existential dependence in general, including but not limited to James’ “productive function,” would rule out discarnate personal survival. Since the broader dependence thesis is what is the more basic impediment to discarnate personal survival, not James’ narrower “productive hypothesis,” the former is the more appropriate concept. For even if James’ specific production hypothesis were refuted, the dependence thesis would not be—and discarnate personal survival

would therefore remain blocked, as Swinburne (1997, p. 310) noted. (The brain does not *produce* consciousness on Swinburne’s interactionist substance dualism, but nevertheless his immaterial mind cannot sustain individual conscious awareness absent a functioning brain.)

¹³ Nahm (and other empirical survivalists) would do well to follow survivalist David Lund, who once also regurgitated the superficial Jamesian argument (in Lund, 1985), but has since come to realize that it’s best left at the end of the 19th century where it belongs (cf. Lund, 2009, pp. 23–25, 83–85).

¹⁴ To wit: “The data of neuroscience will always be neutral with respect to the hypotheses. . . . Neuroscience cannot in principle distinguish between these two hypotheses” (Grossman, 2008, p. 228). Neuroscientific arguments against discarnate personal survival, we are assured, therefore “carry no weight whatsoever” (Carter, 2010, p. 16).

¹⁵ Kellehear’s clarification that “perhaps a darkness” could be read into minimally culturally contaminated non-Western NDE accounts is telling.

¹⁶ Given how often today’s survival researchers traffic in soundbites and slogans, it’s not surprising that Nahm thinks of a prediction as a mere “prominent scientific catchword.” But just because survival researchers habitually use a term in an ambiguous way does not mean that others cannot give it a more precise meaning: “Nahm presumes that the birthmark evidence supports the reincarnation hypothesis, but never shows us *how* that hypothesis . . . leads us to expect ‘physical features such as birthmarks or birth defects that can contribute to the identification of a matching previous personality’” (Augustine, 2022a, p. 381). What’s important here is *why* Nahm thinks that his reincarnation hypothesis would lead us to expect to find said birthmarks, whatever term he uses to denote that expectation.

¹⁷ Hypothetico-deductive (H-D) confirmation is necessary but not sufficient for providing evidential support for a hypothesis (Tennant, 2002, p. 417). Philosophers of science have improved upon simple H-D method since the early 20th century, but their improvements—such as inference to the best explanation, likelihoodism, and Bayesian confirmation theory—are simply variations on the general H-D theme introduced in middle school as “the scientific method” and discussed above. Because Bayesian confirmation theory is merely *probabilized* hypothesis-testing, Nahm’s distaste for it is unwarranted. Contra Edward F. Kelly (2016, p. 590), backed in Nahm (2021*, pp. 59–60), it is something of a gold standard: “Of contemporary accounts of a single scientific method, the clear front runner is Bayesianism” (Bird, 2011, p.

19; cf. Earman, 1992, p. 2; Gustason, 1994, pp. 119–127, 282–291; Hawthorne, 2018; Howson & Urbach, 1993). All that Bayesianism (and likelihoodism) adds to the scientific method is a sense of the *degree* to which a particular observation supports a hypothesis. Grades of evidential strength are based on the simple assumption that one’s degrees of belief ought to satisfy the axioms of probability theory—that is, that a rational bettor ought not make bets that he is *guaranteed* to lose. Blithely dismissing Bayesianism—the scientific method probabilized—as “looking through the wrong end of a telescope” (Nahm, 2021*, p. 60) because “neither I nor any other of the working scientists I’ve consulted had ever heard of it before” (Kelly, 2016, p. 590) is small-minded (e.g., there are [online Bayesian calculators](https://www.socscistatistics.com/bayes/default.aspx) for medical students to solve the probability of the hypothesis that one has COVID-19 given the evidence that one has lost one’s sense of smell; <https://www.socscistatistics.com/bayes/default.aspx>). And indicting a standard procedure because different authors using it might produce “antipodal results” (Nahm, 2021*, p. 60) is like blaming algebra because different students might present different formulaic solutions. Even those wary of Bayesian (or other) measures of *degrees of probability* for hypotheses hold that a successful (use-novel) prediction peculiar to a hypothesis increases its probability, whereas a failed one decreases it. (For a non-Bayesian sketch of how general relativity is probabilistically supported by its successful predictions, for example, see Earman, 1992, p. 132).

¹⁸ Nahm cavils that he also said that the qualitative strength of mental mediumship is “only ‘relatively high’” (2021*, p. 13), but that’s like saying that we should tentatively accept the “best” explanation even when it’s undoubtedly only the best of a very bad lot.

¹⁹ The cross-correspondences are *incredibly* intricate by Nahm’s *quantitative* strength criterion, for example, but their degree of evidential support for survival may well be *inversely* related to their intricacy (Braude, 2003, p. 99). So too for the inordinate amount of twaddle that investigators are forced to sift through to find any potential signs of communication with the dead. Researchers have repeatedly attempted direct tests of survival (or of mind–body separation) precisely because their straightforward *simplicity* is what would render any successful results from them so evidential.

²⁰ And if Sudduth once begrudgingly used a then-standard but **loaded term** so that others who had never thought twice about it would understand his meaning, but *stopped* using it since for undeniably valid reasons long emphasized in the literature, that’s altogether different from acknowledging that a term should no longer be

used for the reasons cited, but then continuing to use it anyway. I’ve similarly used *falsify* and *disconfirm* interchangeably because I don’t expect the average JSE reader to know the difference between Popperian *absolute* falsification and the sounder concept of *degrees of disconfirmation* (since all observations are theory-laden, one can reasonably reject a theory’s auxiliaries rather than the core theory itself, and so on). But presumably the average JSE reader *does* know that failed predictions count as evidence against the theories that make them, and likely associates the term *falsification* with *that* idea rather than the more specific concept that Karl Popper had in mind.

²¹ It’s odd for Nahm to voluntarily enter projects to convince *others* of his views using *evidence* with the attitude that “For those who made solid first-hand experiences demonstrating the contrary, [skeptical] authors are simply not on a level playing field. They do not know what they are talking about.” If you already “know” that psi or discarnate personal survival occurs, then of course nothing that anyone else can say will ever convince *you* otherwise. But this doesn’t apply to most of us, who are not among the chosen people. And it’s entirely possible that Nahm is one of the select few with first-hand access to clear-cut information that settles these issues for him beyond any doubt. But his argument from revelation has no bearing on the debate at hand: “It is revelation to the first person only, and hearsay to every other, and, consequently, they are not obliged to believe it. . . . [T]hough he may find himself obliged to believe it, it cannot be incumbent on me to believe it in the same manner; for it was not a revelation made to me, and I have only his word for it that it was made to him” (Paine, 1794/2010, p. 21). Surely even Nahm is unpersuaded of the occurrence of *some* events that others seemingly of good character swear up and down to having witnessed first-hand. There’s good reason, for example, why the testimonial “spectral evidence” propping up the Salem witch trials is no longer admissible in a court of law.

²² This **ad hominem** is also a **red herring** that attempts to move the spotlight off of the arguments presented in the BICS competition and on to the motivations of their evaluator. Does producing a commentary on the BICS exchange thereby render Nahm a “fervid” reincarnationist “who styled himself as a guardian angel of objectivity, impartiality, honesty and scientific integrity”?

²³ According to Nahm, physicalists maintain that human beings “are causally closed entities” and therefore, if they are consistent, are committed to holding “that there is no free will and that 1) we never had any chance to act differently than how we acted in the past and

that 2) our futures are likewise fixed already except for quantum events we cannot influence.” Nahm’s (1) is true of what (hard or soft) *determinists* hold (whereas physicalism allows for uncaused quantum events and thus, debatably, for libertarian free will), and determinism is not avoided by simply rejecting physicalism anyway. If you have a reason for acting, then that reason *caused* (determined) your act. Under determinism, whether the causes of acts are entirely physical, both physical and mental, or entirely mental makes no difference so long as the acts are *caused*. Any act that happened *because* of its cause was determined by it—“because he made me mad” is no less causal than “because my aggression neurons fired”—and so out of one’s control. If any of one’s acts happened uncaused, on the other hand, then they happened for no reason whatsoever since nothing caused them to happen, and they are no less out of one’s control. Uncaused acts that happen *to me* are no more in my control than fixed caused acts “since I have nothing to do with them” (Taylor, 1974, p. 47). So if Nahm’s (2) is true, it’s true for *everyone* (physicalist or otherwise) (cf. Shafer-Landau, 2018, p. 187). Ever since 20th-century Frankfurt-style cases, though, philosophers specializing in metaphysics have moved toward decoupling *causal* responsibility for an act (which determinism entails) from *moral* responsibility for it, which might (or might not) warrant holding people morally responsible for their actions. And there would be practical societal (e.g., legal) reasons to hold people accountable even if we had no moral responsibility anyway. While Nahm may “marvel” at how even ardent determinists can call out bad behavior or reasoning, there’s no mystery in this at all: “You do not excuse a man for doing a wrong act because, knowing his character, you felt certain beforehand that he would do it. . . . The punishment of a man for doing a wrong act is justified, either on the ground that it will correct his own character, or that it will deter other people from doing similar acts. . . . [Y]ou hope that a few treatments of this kind [e.g., calling out his bad behavior] will condition him to the habit of truth-telling, so that he will come to tell the truth without the infliction of pain [or embarrassment]. You assume that his actions are determined by causes, but that the usual causes of truth-telling do not in him produce their usual effects. You therefore supply him with an artificially injected motive . . . which you think will in the future cause him to speak truthfully” (Stace, 1952, pp. 289–291). A quick Internet search might’ve answered Nahm’s gotcha question, but he would have needed a genuine interest in the underlying issues to have conducted one. Nahm’s contentment with simply assuming without argument that we have

free will notwithstanding: “What is wanted is not the will-to-believe, but *the wish to find out*, which is the exact opposite” [emphasis mine] (Russell, 1922, p. 19).

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