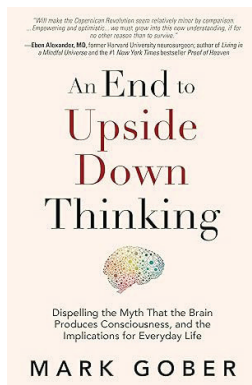


BOOK REVIEW

# An End to Upside Down Thinking: Dispelling the Myth That the Brain Produces Consciousness, and the Implications for Everyday Life

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In the last three decades, research in consciousness has greatly expanded. Investigations into anomalies related to consciousness and, more broadly, parapsychology, have revealed that materialistic explanations consistently fail to explain well-established anomalous phenomena. It is clear that if we want to understand such anomalies, we need to expand science in new ways that can deal with realities beyond the laboratory. There is a wide variety of parapsychological anomalies awaiting such an expanded science, far more than enough to justify new lines of inquiry. These anomalistic data cry out for a new way of thinking and a reconceptualization of the standard scientific method.

A major case in point is a theory that has emerged from the field of near-death studies, which focuses on near-death experiences (NDEs): their phenomena, their triggers, their after-effects, and theories meant to explain the origins/causes of NDEs and under what conditions and to what kinds of persons NDEs occur. As the years passed, the favored theory changed many times. The current popular theory is dubbed “non-local consciousness” (NLC). Several well-known researchers in near-death studies have adopted this view, including a group of distinguished NDE experts. In my view, this development is most unfortunate. It is the result of seriously flawed thinking, and it appears to be gaining power and momentum. If this trend continues, the fields of NDE studies and of anomalistics in general, are in danger of veering sharply away from the pathway to better understanding. Incredibly important data are at risk of fading from view.

Therefore, spurious theories like NLC need to be debunked as soon as possible in order for the current research course to be corrected. It is impossible for a critique to include all the literature in the relevant areas, but it is quite possible to find books that can be considered as summaries of literature on the topics of interest. Such books are much easier to critique. One example is *The End of Materialism* by Charles Tart (2009). A more recent example, and the subject of this critique, is *An End to Upside Down Thinking* by Mark Gober (2018). This is a representative publication that meets my criteria for a critique. While the book is a bit dated, not much in the consciousness research world has changed since its publication; and, Gober’s book is much more recent than Tart’s. Although the following analysis takes the form of a book review, I actually go much deeper, identifying errors in Gober’s reasoning and data interpretation and explaining why they are errors. It is my goal in this work to begin the process of deconstructing NLC.

In *An End to Upside Down Thinking*, Gober explores the multiple forms of paranormal experience in humans—and also sometimes in animals—and the implications for understanding consciousness. He catalogs a large number of phenomena, each in its own chapter, with copious quotations from a group of experts on these phenomena.



As Gober says in his dedication, “(a)ll I did was collect and organize the pieces.” After reading the book, I realize that this is exactly right. Gober has quoted—from roughly two dozen main sources—the results of various research studies demonstrating the validity of each of these paranormal concepts and phenomena and does not venture very far beyond what has been stated by others. Thus, this book truly is a cataloging of paranormal experiences. Such a catalog can be very useful and reflects a large amount of research. For this, I commend Gober. But given the above description, one familiar with this field should not expect to find very much new thinking at all in this book; such non-expectations would be fully supported by reading the book.

In the preface, Gober actually makes most of his main points. He begins by describing the current status-quo paradigm in science, psychology, and philosophy—that being *materialism*. However, he makes a very basic error even on the first page of the preface: of the status-quo paradigm, he says that “matter is the basis of all reality. Everything is comprised of matter, and everything can be reduced to matter.” This is not right. Relativity teaches us that matter is a form of condensed energy. Thus, the status quo paradigm actually claims that everything is made of *energy* fundamentally. Unfortunately, this book is rife with such mistakes. For readers schooled in these areas, these mistakes undercut Gober’s basic argument and credibility. For those new to these phenomena, this book can be quite misleading at times.

The preface goes on to state that materialism cannot be proven, and questions the logic of holding matter as fundamental. Gober further criticizes materialism on the basis of the claim that matter *generates* consciousness. This, he claims, is unprovable and is equivalent to a form of religion. He states that one must put faith in materialism in order to believe it. I agree with these claims against materialism, and in fact, I agree with large portions of this book. However, as we shall see, there are many problems that go along with the positive aspects. Finally, in the remainder of the preface, Gober makes an argument regarding a theoretical concept that has been proposed by some researchers in these parapsychological fields: Gober claims that the concept of non-local consciousness (NLC) explains all of the phenomena discussed in this book much better than materialism ever could. To explain NLC, Gober cites philosopher Bernardo Kastrup’s analogy between consciousness and water. If we let a stream of water represent consciousness in general, then the individual consciousness is like a “localized whirlpool” within the stream—a “self-localization of water”: “(a)nd when a whirlpool dissipates, the water simply flows into the broader stream (think: consciousness continues when

the physical body dies)” (p. xxv). This concept of NLC is by far the most important one to examine and challenge, for Gober supplies the very data needed to disprove his hypothesis, even while claiming that these data support it.

Perhaps this book has the nature it does because of the nature of the writer. In the first chapter, which is an introduction, Gober includes a section about himself. Here, he says that he is neither a scientist nor a philosopher but rather a businessman. He is a former Wall Street investment banker who earned a degree in psychology at Princeton University, with a focus on behavioral economics. He also reveals that he “dabbled in physics” at Princeton. However, he states (p. 7) that studying physics was a hobby for him. It is true in some cases that an educated person can approach a new field with fresh eyes and see things that experts in that field have not. Unfortunately, this is not one of those cases. It is quite obvious to the person schooled in these phenomena that the majority of the book consists of quotations from other people strung together with a few words from Gober himself in between. Overall, his commentary indicates a less-than-critical attitude towards the material he presents, and an insufficient amount of critical thinking on his part. This is demonstrated by multiple mistakes and assumptions made in each chapter, so much so that I will be unable to address them all in this critique. Thus, I must pick and choose in order to demonstrate my point in a finite number of pages.

In the introduction, Gober spends several more pages in an autobiographical mode, describing how his interests developed over time and his search for answers posed by the anomalous phenomena he describes. Following the autobiography, he then begins to examine the two sides of the consciousness debate, as he sees it. One side is the materialistic view, which claims that consciousness is a product of the brain, and thus of matter; the other side consists of researchers proposing non-local consciousness as the paradigm supported by the data. Unfortunately, Gober sees only two possibilities here. I will argue below that there is at least one more possibility that is far superior to the two that Gober describes in this book.

For the reader who has studied paranormal phenomena, the phenomena that Gober catalogs will be quite familiar—as will be the authors that Gober cites. Many of these authors are extremely familiar to me, because they tend to be involved with four organizations I know well: the Society for Scientific Exploration (SSE), the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS), the biannual Science of Consciousness Conference (TSC; held in Tucson, AZ), and the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS). I have heard many of Gober’s main sources speak multiple times at these venues; I have spoken at many of

these as well. I, therefore, have a strong familiarity with most of the research Gober describes.

Chapter 2 begins the preparation for the examination of paranormal phenomena individually. This chapter starts by addressing the definition and nature of consciousness—including the so-called hard problem of consciousness, first put forth by David Chalmers. Gober debates the nature of the hard problem, the role of the brain, and what he sees as the best hypothesis to explain consciousness (i.e., NLC). Gober says: “(p)erhaps consciousness exists independently of the brain (and the body) and the brain is merely a filtering mechanism—a localization process—for consciousness” (p. 37). In this regard, he quotes Larry Dossey regarding what is considered to be *filter theory*: the idea that the brain merely filters consciousness from a non-local realm into the individual, similar to a television. Dossey is quoted as saying that “the picture is due to electromagnetic signals originating outside the set itself and that the TV set receives, amplifies, and displays the signals; It does not produce them” (p. 37). Gober goes on to quote Gary Schwartz, Diane Powell, Eben Alexander, and Cyril Burt in an effort to support this idea. Gober’s summary sentence is this: “(t)he brain is an antenna/receiver for the mind, like a sophisticated television or cell phone” (p. 38). This is a good example of what is to come in the book: Gober selects writers who support NLC and quotes them extensively and often. He then summarizes in a sentence or two what he takes from these authors—and it is almost always support for NLC that he sees. The NLC claim, apparently, is that a brain is needed to individuate, localize, personalize, and internalize consciousness—which is otherwise general, non-local, impersonal, and external to the brain and body.

He also says that “the brain is an organ for selecting and transmitting consciousness rather than for generating it” (p. 39). Further, Gober explores in this chapter some anomalies of consciousness such as the effects of psychedelic drugs and, briefly, Near-Death Experiences (NDEs). He proposes that reduced brain activity allows an unconstrained cognition that accounts for part or all of anomalous experiences. He considers psychedelic drugs to be unleashing our consciousness by virtue of reducing the activity of the brain that limits our perceptions and experiences. He then discusses other anomalies of consciousness, such as terminal lucidity, savant syndrome, experiments with animal brains, and memories transferred as a result of organ transplant operations. All of these topics are seen as challenges to materialism, according to Gober. I can find no reason to question that conclusion. I do, however, reject NLC.

The second and final preparatory chapter, Chapter

Three, explores the fields of quantum mechanics and general relativity, with a brief mention of chaos theory at the end. It is with this chapter that my objections begin to accumulate rapidly. Gober claims at the start that quantum mechanics (QM) “is the underpinning of our reality and needs to be considered first” (p. 52). This statement is so debatable that I have no problem calling it wrong. A unified field theory—a “theory of everything” that unites QM with general relativity (GR)—would be the underpinning of reality in a much more real sense, but remains unrealized. In the next paragraph, Gober says that “our perceptions can lead us astray because we live in a reality far more mysterious than our everyday senses show us” (p. 52). This statement can be interpreted in various ways, but Gober takes unwarranted license with this vague principle to cast doubt improperly on other mainstream ideas. I will point out examples as I proceed.

Regarding QM, Gober says in Chapter Three that “since large objects, including our bodies, are made from lots and lots of small particles, it is important to study how small particles behave” (p. 55). It is here that Gober’s status as a physics hobbyist is glaringly clear. The statement quoted just above is false, as is its cousin, the first quote in the previous paragraph. Many people have huge misconceptions about QM, and this one permits—in the minds of some—the use of QM for anything they cannot otherwise explain. In truth, QM is valid on the molecular, atomic, and sub-atomic size scales. For macroscopic systems, QM is inadequate. For example, QM cannot even begin to describe collisions between macroscopic objects—think billiard balls. QM descriptions of collisions between billiard balls are inconceivable and impossible. Newtonian (classical) mechanics, however, does the job exceedingly well. Thus, QM works only in a restricted size realm; beyond this realm one must use classical mechanics—which has not been and cannot be replaced by QM, even though a ball is composed of a very large number of very small particles.

What is not understood by those without special training (and some with it) is that on the macroscopic level, most quantum effects are “averaged out” due to the unimaginably large number of particles involved. Regarding energy and thermodynamics, the field of statistical mechanics demonstrates that this averaging of quantum states reveals macroscopic, measurable thermodynamic entities. So, just because a system is composed of very small particles does not mean that QM must be considered first, or that QM is applicable to the problem at hand *at all*. And further, on very large size scales, classical mechanics breaks down, and GR comes into play. Then Gober’s statement that QM “is the theory basic to all physics, and thus to all science” (p. 55) is demonstra-

bly false. But this assumption undergirds the remainder of the book's speculation as to NLC and its role in paranormal phenomena and consciousness. In other words, the error is propagated such that the book's claims and conclusions are rendered highly questionable, at best. This illustrates the potential damage this book could do.

To make this comment specific, one need look no further than the next section of Chapter Three, wherein Gober takes the QM path to ever-higher levels of absurdity. Taking the QM view allows some researchers—and Gober uncritically accepts this—to make a connection between consciousness and a very strange phenomenon called *quantum entanglement* (QE; pp. 56-58). This is the foundation upon which NLC rests, so it is important to address this head-on. Gober says that QE is “(o)ne of the primary tenets” (p. 56) of QM, but this is not so. It is both an experimental result and a prediction that comes out of the mathematics of QM, but it is *not* one of the fundamental postulates that form the foundation of QM. Of greater importance is the fact that QE is observable only under very carefully controlled conditions and usually involves interactions between two very tiny particles—small enough to be on the QM size scale. No one has ever explained how such an effect could possibly apply to anything as large and complex as a brain (or even a cell), and especially to consciousness. Instead, NLC theory has arisen from QE without any kind of demonstration, but rather through a perceived conceptual similarity. This is an inadequate explanation, shedding no light on how NLC arises from QM or QE. NLC is a failure even at this point in the analysis, but there are more theoretical and empirical objections to come.

Gober then worsens the situation by invoking the so-called observer effect in QM. The claim here is that in the quantum world, nothing exists until it is observed by a conscious entity. The wavefunction, the solution to the wave equation of QM, is a probability distribution of the location ( $x, y, z$ ) at time  $t$  of a particle in a system. The claim is that the particle is actually nowhere until observed; this observation “collapses the wavefunction” such that the particle now exists, and in a specific location in space and time, thus eliminating the probabilistic description given by the wavefunction. This claim originates from the founders of QM, to whom Gober repeatedly refers, and thus has been coronated by *authorities* to its credit. Gober is *arguing from authority*, as though the reader must believe the writer due to the authoritative nature of his sources. This is known in the field of logic as an *informal fallacy*—that is, such an argument is not logical and is rejected on that ground alone. There will be further grounds ahead. I note here that Gober always stresses the qualifications of those he cites, and after the

first citation always refers to those cited as “Dr.” and thus is constantly beating the drum of authority.

But at this point, it is important to critically examine the observer idea. The observer effect is a terrible misnomer. It comes from this: a model system, such as a single proton and a single electron (a hydrogen atom), exists in a quantum state determined by the energy of the electron. In order to understand the system, an observer must perform a *measurement*—and this typically involves introducing a *photon* of appropriate energy into the system. Then, necessarily, the system changes. Thus, in the act of *measurement*, the observer changes the system. This is part of the basis for Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle. But, “observer effect” mischaracterizes this situation, implying to the inexperienced reader that merely looking at something will change it. Gober takes this view, but it is false. Visual perception is a passive process when viewed from outside the mind. Observing involves passively taking in photons through the eyes and processing that information. Nothing outside the mind is affected by this, so it is unlike echolocation—used by bats and dolphins—which is an active form of perception.

On the other hand, an observer making a measurement *must* affect the system as described above. Here, however, is the most important point: the introduction of a photon into the system need not have its origin with *any conscious observer*. Matter-matter and energy-matter interactions on the atomic size scale are the province of chemistry, and chemistry happens. It happens whether the system is observed or not. A photon can come from an instrument, or from somewhere else, or not be needed at all for a chemical reaction—a QM process. Chemistry happens in unobserved and unobservable places, such as beneath the surface of the earth, or on a distant, uninhabited planet. Further, if one takes the developmental view of the universe, then it is clear that there were no conscious entities in the universe for at least several hundred million years following the beginning of the universe. Yet, chemistry was happening all the while; indeed, it was necessary so that conscious lifeforms could develop. So, what of the observer effect in these cases I have highlighted? The hypothesis cannot withstand the data and logic. There is no *observer* effect, but only a *measurement* effect (when applicable). But Gober further complicates the issue by referring to the famous double-slit experiment and claiming that “the particle behaves like a particle or a wave depending on whether it is observed” (p. 59). No, the same interference pattern is obtained with or without human observation.

Gober unfortunately fails to entertain these counterexamples and challenges to his logic. He cites a few physicists who do not support a link between consciousness

and any kind of physics. Gober then responds with a list of experts with the opposite opinion, in line with Gober's. This list includes Eugene Wigner, Amit Goswami, John von Neumann, Henry Stapp, Roger Penrose, Stuart Hameroff, Max Planck, Lucien Hardy, Dean Radin, and Nicolas Gisin. Thus, the fallacious argument from authority continues and even intensifies. Gober concludes this section with: "(a)n inference one might make from these findings is that consciousness is somehow *creating* particles of matter from waves of probability" (p. 63). If one indeed makes such an unsupported inference, then one does not understand probability, wavefunctions, QM, or matter. And that, in fact, is the matter.

In the remainder of Chapter Three, Gober goes on—on the basis of the development I have traced so far—to question the existence of matter, time, space, and reality. He says that, rather than being "*linear, Newtonian, and fixed*", reality is "*nonlinear, quantum, and relativistic*" (p. 69). As I have explained, the reality of our everyday lives is *neither* quantum nor relativistic and *is* Newtonian—leaving aside electromagnetism for the moment. So, Gober ends his preparatory work here and moves on to Section III, which addresses anomalous abilities in humans and some animals. I give him great credit for including animals in the discussion, as animals are typically and wrongly portrayed as lacking consciousness. But I remind the reader that from this point forward, Gober bases his assessments, interpretations, and conclusions on the broken and wrongly constructed foundation I have described above.

Before I go on to describe Section III, I must first make a comment about wavefunctions in general. Gober, along with many other writers, seems to believe that wavefunctions have some mysterious or even magical properties that distinguish them from other mathematical functions. However, wavefunctions are simply solutions to the QM wave equation and are thus merely mathematical entities. While some treat wavefunctions as physically existing—and one person's manuscript that I reviewed even claimed that wavefunctions were *themselves* conscious—the truth is that wave functions are not only simply mathematical entities, but are not even unique. There is another system in QM called matrix mechanics, invented by Heisenberg, wherein there are no wavefunctions and no wave equation, but rather everything is described in terms of matrices. The wave mechanics and matrix mechanics approaches are equally valid, but the wave mechanics approach is typically used because it is easier to work with. Therefore, there is nothing special about wavefunctions, and they are not unique. So, in conclusion, one should not pretend that wavefunctions physically exist or that they have any special prop-

erties other than their mathematical properties. I hope this puts an end to what I have seen in several submitted manuscripts, which I have called "wavefunction worship." Gober seems to have this tendency.

Section III includes five chapters, each addressing a different parapsychological phenomenon. These five are: remote viewing, telepathy, precognition, animal psychic abilities, and psychokinesis. The uniting factor in these five chapters is an unusual ability in a living, conscious being that resists a materialistic explanation. I will summarize each of the five chapters very briefly while highlighting the important statements made with regard to each one. Remote viewing is addressed in Chapter Four. This is the ability to see objects, situations, and environments that are far from and not visible to the remote viewer. Gober reviews the evidence for this phenomenon and finds the weight of the evidence to be overwhelmingly in favor of the reality of remote viewing. I agree with this. His examination of this phenomenon leads him again to cite the analogy from Kastrup: "if consciousness is like a stream of water and an individual brain is a localized whirlpool, then having access to other parts of the stream (i.e., remote viewing) is possible" (p. 76). This is an alternative way to phrase NLC, but a rather vague phrasing that leaves many questions unanswered.

The next topic is telepathy, which is direct communication between two minds without verbal or visible means of communicating (Chapter Five). Gober states early in the chapter that "if consciousness is not localized to an individual's body, then telepathy certainly is possible" (p. 93). Note that in the previous paragraph, I quoted Gober as saying that consciousness is like a localized whirlpool of water. So, Gober contradicts himself on localization in these two statements. He goes on to discuss statistics and the nature of statistical significance and effect size. This discussion is important because the empirical data show a small but very statistically significant effect size, confirming that telepathy is real, but subtle. This is convincing to me. Gober goes on to discuss telepathy in dreams, telephone telepathy, telepathy between twins, and telepathy in autistic savants. Concluding that telepathy is real, Gober offers this: "in the context of an interconnected reality—a nonlocally entangled universe—in which consciousness is not confined to the brain, the stories seem plausible and worthy of investigation" (p. 104). What I think is worthy of investigation is the meaning of the term *nonlocally entangled universe*, and what the evidence is for this. In what lies ahead, I will try to find an answer to these questions.

Chapter Six addresses precognition: knowledge of events before they occur. This chapter, like most of the book, begins with statements from several of Gober's fa-

vorite sources, which are, in this case, pro-precognition. Each of these sources has already been cited multiple times. Before beginning to present evidence, Gober says: “(i)f consciousness is indeed fundamental, perhaps it exists beyond space and time. That would allow for precognition” (p. 110). The meaning of this statement is not clear to me, but it goes unexplained. Gober then traces the history of this research area. He then discusses the research of Dean Radin, Daryl Bem, Julia Mossbridge, Larry Dossey, Diane Powell, and a few others. Overall, the research is convincing. But Gober is more than convinced—he proceeds to interpret an unrelated event as support. He cites the fact (from Powell’s study) that the airplanes hijacked on 9/11 were unusually low in their occupancy rates. He asks: “(d)id certain people have a sense something bad would happen?” (p. 120).

The historical truth regarding this incident is that the hijackers themselves chose the flights they would take and selected the flights according to two criteria: (1) long-distance flights to maximize the amount of fuel onboard; and (2) low occupancy so that there would be fewer people to resist the hijacking. Far from certain people having a precognitive warning, this event and the conditions pertaining to it had been arranged to provide the optimal scenario. This shows a very significant deficit in Gober’s thinking, and apparently Powell’s as well. If Powell is responsible for the speculation ending the paragraph above, then she is guilty of shoddy thinking and research. And, if Gober accepted this blindly from Powell, or if this is Gober’s own idea, then he is similarly guilty. This kind of mistake leads me to question the authenticity and veracity of many things Gober presents in this book. He closes with another research study that he finds suggestive of group precognition but has no explanation for it beyond the above quote (p. 110).

The psychic abilities of animals are the topic of Chapter Seven. Gober starts with the question: “(i)f humans can do it, what about animals?” (p. 123). He suggests that anything with a brain should have psychic abilities because NLC is available to any brain. This brief chapter focuses mainly on the work of Rupert Sheldrake, a biologist, who has produced some incredible results involving dogs—who appear to know when their owners *decide* to return home. Sheldrake’s observations have led him to propose *morphic field theory*, which Gober does not mention. I have seen Sheldrake present multiple times and have been strongly persuaded by his data; I do not agree with his theory, but that is not the point. The data are convincing that a psychic effect is occurring. Gober goes on to discuss “entangled horses”, thus putting his theory directly in the name of the effect he describes. He ends this brief section with the question: “(i)f human twins are

telepathic, why wouldn’t horses be telepathic?” (p. 128). Gober goes on to describe other situations offered by Sheldrake, including lost pets finding their owners, animals reacting before natural disasters occur, a cat named Oscar, who knew when nursing home residents were about to die, and “psychokinetic chickens and rabbits.”

Chapter Eight is again very brief and concerns psychokinesis, the ability to move or influence objects with the mind alone. Gober focuses primarily on the work of the Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research Laboratory (PEAR), mainly involving Robert Jahn, Brenda Dunn, Roger Nelson, and Claude Swanson. The main result of interest here is strong evidence that humans can influence random number generators (RNGs) using only their minds. I have seen this evidence previously and find it very strong, as does Gober. He then addresses group consciousness and invokes the work of Roger Nelson and the Global Consciousness Project, again involving RNGs. As before, Gober and I agree that the evidence is quite strong. Then Gober considers spoon-bending and its most famous adherent, Uri Gellar. Gober supports the reality of this effect by citing the opinions of William Tiller and Russell Targ. I have no personal position on this front, but I have yet to see such abilities demonstrated. Gober closes the chapter with a very short discussion of energy healing. There is a vast literature on this topic, but Gober’s treatment of it is very shallow and insufficient to allow the reader to form a truly informed opinion. This is one of a few places where Gober’s discussion is woefully inadequate.

These five chapters (Four through Eight) involving unusual abilities of living beings are portrayed by Gober as evidence of NLC and as supportive of the independence of consciousness from biology. Such an interpretation of these phenomena may or may not be accurate. To my mind, the picture is muddled by the fact that, as I said, all the beings involved are *living*. This leaves open the possibility—however remote—that there could be materialistic explanations for these phenomena. Thus, I believe that Section III of this book is less pertinent to the questions of the origin and survival of consciousness than is the material yet to come in Section IV, which involves death-related phenomena. While Gober sees Section III as strong evidence of NLC, I hold that these phenomena only demonstrate non-local properties, abilities, effects, and/or aspects of consciousness. *Nothing in Section III suggests that consciousness has a non-local origin or that the individual consciousness returns to general consciousness with the death of the individual.* We need death-related data for that demonstration, and such data are considered next.

Section IV deals with the data that I find most important and have dubbed death-related anomalous experiences (DR-AEs). I believe these experiences are the most

useful in demonstrating the nature of consciousness, the survival of personal consciousness after physical death, and the properties of consciousness when not bound to a body. It is especially noteworthy that Gober entitles this section as “Surviving death? Scientific Evidence.” As I will explain at the end of this section, the survival of personal consciousness is ruled out by filter theory/NLC; thus, this entire section constitutes an argument as to why the view that Gober pushes is *wrong*: it violates the data that are claimed to support it.

Chapter Nine is, in my opinion, the most important one in the book. It is also the longest chapter, save the final one in which Gober engages in extended speculation. This chapter involves NDEs—one of the most important DR-AEs, in my view—and thus deserves the length it receives. Even so, Gober ignores some major figures in the field and their work. He begins again with a long section of quotations from some of his favorite sources, attesting to the fact that NDEs are severe challenges to materialism. At the end of this introduction, Gober says: “(t)he most logical explanation of NDEs doesn’t include the brain at all. Instead, the evidence suggests that consciousness exists independently of the brain” (p. 153). Again, this statement is sufficiently vague that it may or may not be true, depending on what Gober means by “exists independently.” He then goes into the history of NDE research and some of the basic facts about NDEs, mostly consisting of quotes from his sources.

Next, Gober discusses the aftereffects of NDEs, which are very important. His discussion is restricted mainly to the experience of a single person; he completely ignores the work of P. M. H. Atwater, a major and early figure in this area. Following is a fairly detailed description of an NDE’s typical elements. He includes out-of-body experiences (OBEs) as an aspect of NDEs, but in fact, there are important differences between the two, and OBEs should have their own chapter. Gober has oversimplified things here, and left out important and relevant information. He also includes encounters with deceased loved ones in NDEs; this has important implications for his theory, which I will discuss below.

The next portion addresses proposed materialist theories of NDEs and identifies problems with each one. I agree with his general conclusion that none of these theories explain NDEs at all. Gober considers expectations, physiological explanations, anoxia/hypoxia, a total or partial lack of oxygen in the brain, increased carbon dioxide levels in the brain, endorphins, ketamine, DMT, REM intrusion, and delusions. In the process of addressing these theories, Gober leaves out the fact that ketamine does not occur naturally in the human body, and the vast majority of NDE cases involve no ketamine at all. He also

says, “DMT is naturally produced by the body, and it can also be taken as a psychedelic drug” (p. 165). The first part of this statement is false. DMT has been found in the brains of non-human animals, but never in the human brain. And, as with ketamine, very few cases of NDEs can be attributed to the person taking DMT. This again represents shoddy research.

Gober then gets to the heart of the matter, yet here he falls short again. He discusses veridical experiences of NDErs—that is, observations made by near-death experiencers that can be independently verified and could not have been made from the experiencer’s bodily location. Veridical perception (VP) is perhaps the most important aspect of any phenomenon discussed in this book because VPs are strong evidence of consciousness existing outside the body, even when the body is dead and must be revived. I find the VP data totally convincing. Gober gives it an extensive treatment, mostly consisting of long quotes from NDErs. However, he completely neglects the pioneering work of Michael Sabom in this area. This again reflects poor research skills, for Sabom’s book was what brought VPs to the forefront of near-death studies. Similarly, in the preceding section, Gober briefly discusses childhood NDEs—which again is a very important area given a very light treatment by Gober. Again, he fails to mention the first and most important researcher in this area, Melvin Morse.

Finally, Gober addresses four prospective studies by NDE researchers involving cardiac arrest. This kind of study is potentially more powerful than retrospective studies, and definitely deserves a mention in this book. These studies mainly replicate the results of prior, retrospective ones, but also allow a better estimation of the times at which patients’ NDEs occurred—and the findings are that the NDEs occurred *during* cardiac arrest. This is critical to answering skeptics who claim that the patients were not actually in danger when their NDEs occurred. Gober appreciates the inference. He then assesses the impact NDE studies have for consciousness—that it continues after physical death, at least for as long as the duration of the NDE. Information as to a person’s fate upon irreversible death must come from other sources, discussed below. Gober then provides additional supporting evidence for survival of consciousness, including: visual perceptions during NDEs by NDErs who are *blind*; shared-death experiences, wherein a *healthy* bystander experiences the NDE of another who is dying; and fear-death experiences, occurring to some who believe they are about to die, but are *physically unharmed*. At the end of the chapter, Gober again invokes Kastrup’s whirlpool analogy to explain NDEs: “(i)f the whirlpool were to dissipate and delocalize, other parts of the stream would suddenly be-

come accessible. Perhaps a temporary delocalization process is what happens in the experiences described in this chapter” (p. 182). This statement is highly problematic, to the point of being internally inconsistent: e.g., other parts of the stream become available to *what?* Gober does not understand that he has just presented one of the strongest arguments *against* NLC. I will discuss this below.

If NDEs represent one side of a coin, wherein a living person makes a temporary visit to another realm, then Chapter Ten represents the other side of that coin: disincarnated, conscious beings making a temporary visit to the earthly realm. This side of the coin is represented in this chapter by two phenomena: after-death communications (ADCs) and mediumship. In the opening barrage of quotations, Gober quotes philosopher Stephen Braude as saying that this category of evidence supports “some form of *personal* postmortem survival” (p. 185; emphasis added); yet, this is exactly what Gober has been arguing against in this book. I am on Braude’s side on this question, as I will explain. ADCs are in my opinion just as important as NDEs to the questions at hand. There is a considerable literature on this topic, published mostly in the last 30 years. But Gober gives this crucial topic a very light treatment. Mediumship is an important addition here, for it represents a kind of ADC, but indirect due to the presence of the medium as the basis for communication. Gober begins this chapter with a discussion of mediumship.

In the lead-up to his discussion of mediumship, Gober says: “(i)f consciousness is fundamental, then one’s consciousness would remain even if the body dies” (p. 187). This statement is wrong even within NLC/filter theory. I will explain this below. Before launching into a series of case studies, Gober again quotes Braude: “the evidence provides a reasonable basis for believing in *personal* postmortem survival” (p. 187; emphasis added). Here again, is the conclusion Gober seeks to avoid, yet he presents it to the reader as supportive of his theory. He then presents three case studies of mediums, providing evidence that a disincarnate loved one can indeed return to our realm and speak through a medium to a loved one. The person receiving the reading recognizes the identity of the disincarnate spirit, usually by the spirit providing information that only the deceased person and the receiver could know. Braude, Gober, and I all recognize that this would be impossible unless an individual’s consciousness maintained its integrity and cohesion long after physical death. Again, this violates the tenets of NLC.

Gober then turns his attention to ongoing mediumship research. Here, he focuses briefly on the work of Julie Beischel; he also includes a short section on how to confirm that the medium is actually in contact with a dead

person. The chapter then moves on to ADCs, but this section is incredibly short (less than three pages) and does no justice to this hugely important topic. This is perhaps the most glaring mistake committed in this book. ADC reports are rich in information and detail that completely defeat any materialist explanation and go a long way in cementing the survival of personal consciousness. Of course, this could be the very reason for Gober’s token treatment of ADCs. They are hostile to his theory. He finishes the chapter with a half-page discussion of deathbed visions, another important topic that is glossed over here. Gober closes the chapter with: “if consciousness is the fundamental medium of reality, survival of bodily death not only makes sense, but is expected” (p. 199). Note how Gober’s tone has changed here. He does not use the whirlpool analogy, and in fact seems to endorse personal survival, but makes his statement typically vague. Together, NDEs, ADCs, and mediumship have exposed gigantic holes in NLC/filter theory, and the final blow comes in the next chapter.

Chapter Eleven is the final one containing empirical evidence. This evidence is for reincarnation, focusing on the work of Ian Stevenson and Jim Tucker—prominent researchers in the field of reincarnation. Most of the evidence consists of children who remember past lives, and of birthmarks or physical defects present at birth that can be connected with a previous life. This reincarnation research has long impressed me as strong evidence of personal survival of death—indeed, reincarnation could work in no other conceivable way—and Gober appears to accept this conclusion. His closing summary statement is: “if consciousness is more fundamental than matter and does not arise from brain activity, then the evidence discussed in this chapter is truly plausible” (p. 213). Again here, Gober avoids the whirlpool analogy and issues another typically vague summary. The trend displayed is that when the evidence for personal survival is overwhelming, Gober goes quiet on the whirlpool front—as though he knows that his theory cannot withstand his own data. And this is the case in reality.

Here, I summarize the results given in Section IV and their implications for NLC/filter theory and for consciousness. I have already hinted at or even stated my viewpoint on these issues, so I will now flesh out my perspective. In Section III, Gober gave important discussions on what are usually considered to be psychic abilities or parapsychological phenomena in living beings. I found these data and Gober’s discussion convincing on the issue of whether consciousness can have non-local properties, but no evidence for Gober’s general claims about NLC and filter theory. Section IV foreclosed on the possibility of NLC as the origin of consciousness because the four phenome-



na discussed—NDEs, ADCs, mediumship, and reincarnation—all *require* that a person's consciousness remain as an integrated and individuated whole following the death of the body. Yes, Gober, his sources, and I agree that consciousness continues after death, but the data are clear that it survives in a *personal form* that NLC theory cannot explain and, in fact, seems to deny. I note here some other phenomena that lead to the same conclusion vis-à-vis survival, but are either ignored or misportrayed by Gober: channeling, OBEs, life between lives (the work of Michael Newton), and ghosts or spirits.

The television analogy now needs to be addressed and destroyed. In NLC theory, the brain is absolutely necessary for the individuation, personalization, internalization, and localization of general, free-flowing consciousness. A brain is required for all this, and Gober says so as well. So, let us now consider the logical implication and end for this theory. It implies that if there is no brain, there is no way to detect and filter the "TV signal", and thus, there is no personal consciousness. The "I" to which I refer is completely dependent on this filtered signal resulting from the brain's work. Then, if the brain (TV) dies (is turned off), that is the end of the filtering device and the end of my personal consciousness. No personal experience is possible beyond this point, according to NLC theory. Yet, the four phenomena discussed in Section IV (plus those left out by Gober) all firmly *oppose* the requirements of NLC theory. The very data whence sprang NLC theory contradict that theory. In science, data are king and always trump any conflicting theory. Thus, NLC is a failed theory, one inadequate to the vast amount of data at hand. So, Gober provides the very data needed to disprove his favorite explanation for all things paranormal. And in the process of doing that, Gober believes he is enhancing his position.

To go a step further, consider the NDE data. Each and every NDE account is a personal narrative of the experience. The NDEr consistently uses the first-person narrative form, employing the words "I", "me", "my/mine", and "myself" while describing the experience. This strongly suggests that the self continues to exist in a disembodied form. And when one examines NDE accounts, one finds that these accounts are predominantly local in their character. That is, the NDEr describes the environment around the body and the body itself; describes the process of leaving, and sometimes re-entering, the body; describes moving through walls, ceilings, and other local, solid objects; and describes exploring locations on the other side of those walls and ceilings. While many accounts do indeed display features that can be described as non-local, the point is that the "I" persists. NLC theory would forbid all this, and especially accounts of leaving or re-entering

the body—according to NLC, such things are impossible for personal consciousness to do. But, the data embraced by NLC theorists demonstrate the opposite.

The book closes with Section V, containing two chapters. Chapter Twelve addresses the question of how science could have gotten everything so wrong (materialism, or "upside down thinking", in Gober's parlance) given the contradictory data presented in the book. He structures this chapter and the next as a conversation, wherein he asks questions that he imagines the reader to be asking, and provides his answers. So this chapter consists of speculation based on Gober's analysis in the previous chapters. These comments also apply to the final chapter. Chapter Twelve begins with a summary; early in the chapter, Gober says: "(t)he brain is simply a self-localization of consciousness" (p. 217). Well, Gober has already proven that this is false. He later says: "the universe is interconnected ('entanglement'); the act of observing impacts the physical world; matter isn't solid, and we aren't sure what it is..." (p. 218). I have addressed the invalidity of applying entanglement to the brain, much less the universe, and the absurdity of the observer effect. I have not commented on Gober's view of matter, but that is immaterial here.

Gober does make a very important, in fact crucial, point in this chapter (p. 221). Here, I state the point in my own words: the evidence presented represents a convergence of empirical findings from a large variety of independent sources, all of which combine to form a powerful argument against materialism. Any one piece of evidence may be attacked by skeptics, but when taken as a whole, the case for *personal* (my term) survival is overwhelmingly solid and formidable. Indeed, this is the way science should work, and has worked in the past. The questions addressed in this book are not immune from this kind of scientific investigation. The results of the investigation condemn materialism to retirement in the near future. Late in the chapter, Gober makes an important admission. He asks himself how the filtering process works. His response is: "I don't know" (p. 232). This is because NLC theorists themselves do not know, and do not even admit that there is a severe problem here. And since Gober is not an independent thinker, he has no clue as to how NLC could actually work. So, he again falls back onto the authority angle, citing the work of Hameroff and Roger Penrose and their theory involving microtubules as a way to dissipate the heat generated by this problem. But, this theory is widely rejected; I have attended a workshop by Hameroff wherein he admitted that his theory has no bearing at all on the hard problem of consciousness. I find his theory to be absolutely implausible.

The final chapter entertains Gober's musings about what his book means for everyday life. As the reader will

by now understand, I find little value in Gober's musings, polluted as they are by incorrect physics and his incomplete understanding of the data. This is the longest chapter by far, and so I will make short work of it. Gober quotes Rupert Spira as saying: "we cannot legitimately claim the existence of anything outside of consciousness. To do so would require a leap of faith" (p. 257) and supports this claim. But this is borrowing from the observer effect and is vulnerable to the same criticisms I issued in that case. Gober here is working towards an incredible conclusion that has been lurking just beneath the surface from the very inception of this book. That conclusion follows closely on the heels of the previous quote: "(m)atter is an experience within consciousness. Using philosophical lingo, the metaphysical picture of reality I'm advocating is known as 'monistic idealism'" (p. 258).

So here we finally have it: Gober's confession that he is a monistic idealist. The proper term is "idealistic monist," as opposed to "materialistic monist." This is the philosophy of Lord Berkeley, who claimed that nothing we can see is real, and all the things we cannot see are real. The physical world, our bodies, our actions and their effects in the world, causality, matter—none of these things are real. Reality is completely *mental*, so souls, heaven, hell, spirits, God, Satan, and the like *are* real. Berkeley apparently never attained object permanence. Berkeley dealt with the problem of the apparent continuation of existence without observation by claiming that God is always watching. Berkeley's position has been rejected by nearly all of the philosophical community, as well as by common sense.

In contemporary terms, this position is essentially the same as the position called *anti-realism*. But in science, the opposing position is absolutely necessary: *realism*, the idea that reality is very close to how we perceive it (either directly or with instruments), so close in fact as to allow science to proceed on solid metaphysical grounds. Thus, the results of science can be trusted to have a sufficient amount of grounding. The obvious correlate of this is that if the anti-realist position is true, then science is a foolhardy enterprise that cannot be accomplished and has no meaning, for science, in this case, is studying things that are not real as though they were. Thus, Gober is engaging in a tremendous contradiction: his philosophical position is in complete disagreement and disharmony with the main message of the book—that science tells us surprising, counterintuitive things about the world that should cause us to re-think our common notions about reality. *What reality?*

In the end, NLC shows little difference from materialism in its broad structure and general outline. In both cases, the brain is responsible for our personal consciousness

and sense of self. Both belief systems hold that without a brain, personal consciousness does not exist. NLC holds that impersonal consciousness continues unabated, but this is of little comfort to the individual, who is destroyed by physical death—as is the case with materialism. And, since it is completely unknown as to how the brain functions as an antenna/receiver, there is another similarity: it is also completely unknown how matter could generate consciousness. As Gober says, it requires a leap of faith to accept materialism. And the same is true with NLC. It is materialism in sheep's clothing. Gober is on record for holding that materialism is a form of religion. On the very same grounds, one could say that NLC is a form of religion as well.

After all this, one might well wonder as to what other positions are available that might satisfy my demands that the data be honored, while preserving the result that personal consciousness survives physical death. One might also wonder what my personal position is. The answers to both questions are the same: *interactionist substance dualism* (ISD). This position originated with Plato but is generally credited to René Descartes for its modern formulation. The view is that the body is a substance, i.e., a thing, and that there is a second substance—together the two substances compose the living human being. The second substance, which Descartes called a "thinking substance," is not material and is able to occupy the same space as the body and interact with matter—the body and brain—such that the living person is the result of interactions between the material body and the immaterial substance known variously as the soul, spirit, or—in my terminology—*essence*. In this picture, the essence is the seat of personality, cognition, emotion, memory, and consciousness. It can exist without a body being involved, and in fact pre-exists the body as well as continuing after death. The essence resides *within us*, and the brain and body act as an *interface*, not a receiver, for the source of consciousness—the essence.

The standard objection to ISD, from Descartes' time onward, is that there is no known mechanism of interaction, and that, in fact, such a mechanism is impossible because something material cannot interact with something non-material. I note that materialism and NLC have the analogous problem in each case—a missing mechanism, which I have discussed above. ISD is now different from those two other positions in that I formulated and published an ISD mechanism in the 1990s that is data-driven and scientific but non-reductionist and not materialistic. So, in the absence of a new researcher with a theory that out-performs mine, or who provides accurate and fatal objections to my Theory of Essence, ISD stands as the clear theory of choice. This is a possibility that is

not considered for even one second in Gober's book, yet it sufficiently answers the major questions that the book entertains.

To summarize, I find it difficult to recommend this book for any audience. As I have stated multiple times, the informed reader will see many of the same flaws that I found in Gober's presentation and logic and tend to discredit him on those grounds. The uninitiated reader will be tempted to accept everything Gober says at face value, and so will receive a distorted and self-contradictory view of paranormal phenomena, science, and the relationship between the two. Thus, I absolutely cannot recommend the book to the uneducated lay reader. The educated reader may find some usefulness in the cataloging aspect of the book and may benefit from the bibliographies at the end of each chapter. This reader will know, however, that this is a book by a beginner, for beginners; this reader will then be appropriately skeptical of Gober's understanding of these phenomena and his conclusions regarding them.

To conclude, I return to my starting point. In my introduction, I stated that I intended to begin deconstruction of the NLC explanation for anomalous experiences, such as the NDE. In the course of examining Gober's book, it became evident that the best argument *against* NLC is, in fact, Gober's book. In trying to justify and prove this theory, Gober unwittingly provided the opposite. From the broader view of parapsychology and anomalistics, there

are lessons to learn here. First, materialism must be taken down from its default position status and constrained to areas where materialism is actually relevant. Second, given that we can rule out both materialism and NLC for paranormal studies, researchers need to focus on creating theories that are foundationally different from these two failed attempts. A new paradigm in science is needed.

I contend that ISD is scientifically valid and has great explanatory power, and that this should be exploited by researchers. Third, subjective experience should have a place and a role in the new paradigm. Tart's approach is instructive here. The structure of his book is almost the same as Gober's. But, Tart believes that the data regarding living beings is superior in its explanatory power, because this allows experiments to be conducted in a laboratory setting. Such reflects a limited form of thinking, staying well within the box while the data cry to be released. I recommend that researchers drop their materialistic way of thinking and pay attention to what their data are actually saying. Finally, if all else fails, researchers who insist on invoking QM or any of its affiliates (QE, the observer effect, the double-slit experiment, etc.) should obtain an education about the field of QM and actually understand it instead of invoking it in a hand-waving manner. QM is a mystery, so researchers should be very cautious in trying to explain one mystery (e.g., consciousness) with another (QM).