

Prologue

The idea that consciousness can exist separate from the body, supported by accounts of the near death experience, are frequently challenged by skeptics who argue that Susan Blackmore proved scientifically, in *Dying to Live*, that NDE's are hallucinations caused by brain activity.

After reading Blackmore's *Dying to Live*, however, I was left puzzled at the claims of skeptics. *Dying to Live* failed to provide scientific support for a "brain only" hypothesis. The work was primarily conjecture and speculation.

In response, I wrote the following critique of *Dying to Live*.

Over the following years, I received many letters of appreciation for the critique, which filled in a missing part of the discussion. Dr. Blackmore also responded and confirmed my observation that the work was based on conjecture and speculation.

If you have not read *Dying to Live*, I highly recommend the book, though I disagree with the conjecture presented therein. Nonetheless, the book presents a worthwhile introduction to NDEs and sets the stage for a fruitful discussion regarding the nature of the phenomenon.

In my book, *Under the Tree*, the same issues are taken up in more detail, providing a broader understanding of "the Afterlife hypothesis."

The following is a recently-edited version of the critique of the first eight chapters.

***Dying to Live* by Susan Blackmore: Critique by Gregory Stone**

Introduction

I often encounter the claim that Susan Blackmore, in *Dying to Live*, provides scientific proof the Near Death Experience results from a "dying brain." Skeptics argue the work disproves the existence of spirit and the afterlife.

A close reading of *Dying to Live*, however, shows otherwise. The following raises questions about the assumptions advanced in the book.

The Preface

Though skeptics claim Dr. Susan Blackmore is an unbiased researcher, in the preface, she makes her prejudices known and assumes the viewpoint of the biased skeptic. She writes:

"It is no wonder that we like to deny death. Whole religions are based on that denial. Turn to religion and you may be assured of eternal life."

And,

"Of course, this comforting thought conflicts with science. Science tells us that death is the end and, as so often, finds itself opposing religion."

This misrepresents both religion and science. Consider the comment, *"whole religions are based upon a denial of death."* Religion addresses the spirit and its relationship to the universe. The basic premise of most religion (or spirituality) is the existence of spirit. Religion posits we are a spiritual being and, as spirit or soul, we live beyond body death.

The belief one is a spiritual being is not a denial of death, but rather a focus on the life of the spirit. No one denies the existence of death—the body dies. The spirit, however, has different properties than the body is not equivalent to the body. Thus, body death does not mean death of the spirit.

Blackmore, by denying the existence of the spirit, cynically reduces religion to a denial of body death. If, however, we exist as spirit and we transcend body death (one of two hypotheses in *Dying to Live*), then it is Blackmore who is in denial, not religion.

It is clear, starting on the first page that she does not intend to explore the hypothesis of survival of the spirit (the Afterlife hypothesis) with an unbiased scientific approach. Her prejudice, not the research, will dictate the conclusions.

Further evidence of bias is found in her statement that belief in life after death conflicts with science. This treats science as a monolithic authority that decrees "what is," rather than being a method of inquiry. Blackmore incorrectly states "science tells us" death is the end. Though she may personally believe death is the end, "science" makes no such pronouncement.

In *Dying to Live*, she cites researchers with scientific credentials who take the opposite position—spirit survives body death—which contradicts her statement that “science tells us” death is the end. A scientist may express their personal belief that spirit does not exist and thus does not survive body death, but when Blackmore presumes to speak for “science” she diminishes her credibility.

“Dying to Live” turns out to be a statement of personal opinion in support of the views of skeptical materialism, not a presentation of scientific evidence or proof.

Later in the preface, another illogical statement clarifies her agenda:

“The problem with evolution is, and has always been, that it leaves little room either for a grand purpose to life or for an individual soul.”

In this assertion, she reveals a desire to defend evolution theory, which is not in play if one of her two hypotheses (the Afterlife hypothesis) is supported, demonstrating the existence of both spirit and body. She adopts an *a priori* premise—that “man is only a biological organism” —from the field of evolutionary psychology at the outset. She uses a biological argument to dismiss a non-biological hypothesis (the existence of spirit). When it comes to questions of a spirit or soul that lives beyond body death (the Afterlife hypothesis), biology is irrelevant.

Those who claim *Dying to Live* is a non-biased work are proven wrong in the preface. Given the author’s own admission of bias in the preface, we should view the following chapters with mild skepticism.

Chapter One

Two competing hypotheses are advanced in *Dying to Live*: “The Afterlife Hypothesis” and “The Dying Brain Hypothesis.”

The Afterlife Hypothesis states spirit survives body death. In this case, the NDE results from spirit separating from the body.

The Dying Brain Hypothesis states the NDE is an artifact of brain chemistry. According to the dying brain hypothesis, there is no spirit which survives body death.

She sets out to examine arguments for these two conflicting hypotheses—then fails to do so. Susan Blackmore never presents an actual Afterlife Hypothesis. She presents a “straw man” version for the purpose of erecting a position that is easy to refute.

In her list of four arguments for the Afterlife Hypothesis, the most important argument is entirely omitted. This basic tenet of the Afterlife Hypothesis—that spirit (and consciousness) separate from the body—deserves primary attention. Instead, Blackmore addresses tangential arguments. Only later in the book does she address the foundation of the Afterlife Hypothesis, and she does so in passing.

She neglects to formulate a clear and concise statement of what must be demonstrated to support each hypothesis, and fails to test clear assumptions. She ends up concluding **neither hypothesis has proof**, after which she expresses her *feeling* the Dying Brain Hypothesis must be right. This is opinion, and far short of scientific proof.

In this first chapter, in quotes provided by those who have experienced the NDE, specific references are made to “being outside his/her body.” NDEs, we learn, sometimes include the observation of actual proceedings, such as operations, viewed from unusual vantage points. This important evidence, *the very essence of the Afterlife Hypothesis*, is ignored.

Particularly offensive is a brief passage regarding Tibetan Buddhism:

"The difference between these teachings and the folk-tales we have been considering—and it is a very big difference—is that in Buddhism these experiences are not meant to be taken literally..."

Dr. Blackmore could not be more wrong. Tibetan Buddhism fully endorses the Afterlife Hypothesis. Tibetan Buddhists take life beyond death *quite literally*. The practice is based upon recognition of the Afterlife, spiritual leaders are reinstated upon reincarnation, specially trained monks guide the deceased through the Bardos (the between lives states), and the Buddha himself spoke at length about his own multiple reincarnations. This radical misrepresentation of Tibetan Buddhism is disingenuous in the extreme—the fact is that the practices of Tibetan Buddhism

disprove Blackmore's Dying Brain Hypothesis.

In *Dying to Live*, one quote compares convincing NDE stories in Buddhist and Native American circles with modern day NDE's.

"Zaleski sums up the similarities and differences she found between modern and medieval accounts of people who died and were revived again. In both, the first step is a kind of dualistic parting of body and soul, with the separated spirit looking down on its former dwelling place..."

In this quote, *Dying to Live* stumbles upon the essence of the Afterlife Hypothesis, the separation of spirit and body, then ignores its significance. This dismissal of the key issue at hand casts doubt on the integrity of the work, which is placed further in doubt by the following:

"Western philosophers and scientists have long argued cogently and powerfully against this dualist view and the few who still defend it.... are in a tiny minority amongst academics."

Blackmore argues we should accept the *opinion* of a few academicians (who are not experts on the subject) at the same time she dismisses the fact that over seventy percent of people surveyed believe in life after death, saying "popularity" is not a scientific criterion. She would have us believe popular opinion among academics is valid while the public's views are not.

She offers her personal opinion:

"The dualist temptation is so great. Just as we do not like to imagine that we will one day die, so we do not like to think of ourselves as just an ever-changing and perishable body..."

The argument cuts both ways. People also do not like to think of themselves as anything but a body. She presents amateur psychology in lieu of scientific reasoning. Her opinion does not support the non-existence of the spirit, it only serves to explain her personal psychology.

Later in the chapter, once again, she misses the crux of the issue:

"Some have argued that there is a kind of core experience that is common to all

people and to all cultures but which is overlaid with cultural differences. It is tempting to think that if we could somehow delve beneath the surface of the accounts people give we would find the invariant, true NDE underneath. But this is a vain hope."

Again, she expresses personal opinion. There *is* an invariant core to the Afterlife Hypothesis: the separation of spirit from body. It is the very hypothesis under consideration.

What spirit perceives while it is separate from the body is a different (and worthwhile) question. Unfortunately, *Dying to Live* loses its way and is distracted by differences in perceptual or experiential content, and fails to inspect the core hypothesis.

To illustrate the point, consider the following thought experiment. Ask people in various lands to take a Sunday afternoon stroll. Have them report their experience. There will be similarities, for example, reports regarding the mobility of the body through the environment. They will all report various senses at work as they took in the environment. We will not be surprised, however, to discover a walk through Manhattan produces very different *content* from that produced by a stroll through the bush country of Kenya. When one investigates the NDE, it is important to distinguish core invariants (separation from the body) from the varied perceptual content.

When the critical difference between perceptual variety and the core invariant is overlooked, as in "*Dying to Live*," the work falls short. Blackmore sets up a "straw man" argument in which the variable nature of perceptions is used to discount the core invariant of separation.

Chapter Two

In this chapter, drugs are entered into the equation. Blackmore reveals her personal experience with the NDE under the effects of controlled substances. She notes differences that occur when an NDE results from drug use. She uses these differences to "disprove" the invariance hypothesis (the hypothesis that these experiences should have commonality):

"My own interpretation is that the invariance hypothesis is not supported. The NDE varies according to the conditions that set it off and the person having it."

Blackmore makes the error of looking at those variables which can be expected to differ, while ignoring that which is invariant. In the thought experiment, it was demonstrated that reports which varied due to varied scenery in Kenya and Manhattan did not mean the subjects did not take a walk. If we argue the subject in Kenya could not have taken a walk because he reported different scenery from the person in Manhattan, we would be wrong. Likewise, if the person strolling in Manhattan ingests drugs and then turns in a report containing different content, we cannot conclude that he did not take the stroll as instructed. It simply means his perceptions differed due to his drugged condition.

Blackmore misapplies the invariance hypothesis. She fails to take into account: 1) varying conditions of spirits when they separate (to varying degrees) from the body and, 2) the varied perceptual and cognitive content that depends upon the circumstances of separation. She makes the error we would make if we said the subject in Kenya could not possibly have taken a walk because he did not report the same thing as subjects in Manhattan.

This error underlies the theoretical turn she takes which colors the remainder of the book:

"Do you have to be near death to have an NDE? One motivation for asking this question is the 'just like hallucinations' argument. According to this view, NDE's, drug-induced hallucinations, out-of-body experiences occurring under normal conditions and other kinds of hallucinations are all related."

She recognizes a commonality, but does not recognize the core invariant factor. The common link between NDE and the other experiences is release of the spirit, to a greater or lesser extent, from the body.

The question should not be, *"Do you have to be near death to have an NDE?"* but rather ***do you have to be near death for the spirit to separate from the body?*** Evidence tells us the answer is no. We find separation from the body in a number of situations. In other words, the NDE is not an isolated phenomenon. There is something more basic at work. And that is the dual nature of spirit and body.

The correct approach would be to recognize that the spirit separates from the body in a number of situations, including those that occur without drugs or trauma. This is *exactly* what one would

expect to find if the Afterlife Hypothesis is accurate. If one postulates spirit surviving body death, one also postulates spirit being something different and separate from the body it inhabits. The Afterlife Hypothesis predicts the spirit should be capable of separation under conditions other than impending death. Thus, the evidence Blackmore cites directly *supports* the Afterlife Hypothesis.

Instead of recognizing a common link that supports the Afterlife Hypothesis, she opines:

"This might lend support to theories trying to explain the features of the NDE in medical, psychological, or physiological terms and go against theories involving a spirit or soul or heavenly realm."

When Blackmore fails to see the common element between the different situations, she offers an unwarranted and unsupported assumption. How she arrives at her conjecture is unclear, as she does not make a case for her argument; her reasoning is unsupported. She merely assumes (incorrectly) that NDE phenomena must be a purely medical, psychological, or physiological phenomenon with no spiritual component.

Throughout *Dying to Live*, one finds this pattern repeated. Evidence that clearly supports the Afterlife Hypothesis is presented, then, without any explanation, Blackmore advances the opposite conclusion.

The sentences that follow lend further support to the Afterlife Hypothesis:

"There is lots of evidence for NDE-type experiences in people who are not close to dying. The experience of leaving the body has a long history and surveys show that something like 10-20 per cent of people have this experience at some time during their life."

The Afterlife Hypothesis is clearly supported by the statement, "The experience of leaving the body has a long history." In other words, the Afterlife Hypothesis has lots of evidence.

This evidence bothers Susan Blackmore, so she seeks to explain it away. For example, she raises the issue of drugs and labels their effect to be "medical phenomena." This labeling is supposed to convince us we are dealing with something entirely different. However, Blackmore fails to ask the obvious question: How do drugs affect the spirit's connection to the body? How do hallucinogens and anesthetics affect a spirit's ability to remain connected to the body? Do the

toxic effects of such drugs mimic death?

As she presents these “medical phenomena,” she fails to relate them to the Afterlife Hypothesis. Her bias prevents her from asking common sense questions.

She goes on to discuss the effects of drugs, including her own experience:

"Under conditions of extreme tiredness and smoking hashish I had an NDE-type experience complete with the tunnel and light, out-of-body travels, expansion and contraction of size, timelessness, a mystical experience and the decision to return..."

If we are to understand the relevance of Blackmore's drug experience to our study, we must inquire how drugs affect the interface between spirit, mind, and body. The effects of drugs are a major source of confusion within NDE research simply because their effect on spirit and body is not understood. We must ask, how do drugs affect the condition of the spirit when it separates and when it returns?

Blackmore cites research that suggests the spirit separates from the body in other than death situations, which supports the Afterlife hypothesis. She writes:

"The argument used by others reporting on this research goes like this: if the brain is responsible for thinking, then when it is dying one would expect thinking to become disordered or less clear. The evidence that it becomes clearer therefore implies that the brain is not responsible; that the soul or spirit is experiencing the clarity and may go on doing so after death."

Once again, we find the Afterlife Hypothesis is consistent with the evidence reported.

Blackmore, however, stands before the evidence and engages in denial:

"This is one possible interpretation of the evidence, but it is not the only one. It is not obvious that the dying brain must produce either more or less clear perceptions and thoughts. An alternative is that as the brain dies, less thoughts are possible and so the few that remain seem clearer and simpler by comparison."

The idea that a brain showing little or no activity should therefore exhibit clarity is absurd, and totally unsupported by research. If it was true that we became more lucid and our thinking was

clearer as a result of minimal brain activity, we should all seek to have our brains put to sleep.

The author of *Dying to Live* reviews the literature, inadvertently presents a well-supported case for the Afterlife Hypothesis, and then advances unsubstantiated conjecture. She is forced to make absurd statements in order to maintain her bias in the face of contradictory evidence.

The chapter ends with an unwarranted conclusion:

"Our next step is now clear, if not easy; to try to understand what happens in the dying brain."

This is *not* the next step. The evidence she has cited points to a spiritual being that separates from the body. Understanding the details of how this happens *is* our logical next step.

Blackmore's claim that the agenda is to understand the dying brain is not motivated by evidence, but rather by bias. The Dying Brain Hypothesis has not supported by the evidence. The evidence supports the Afterlife Hypothesis.

It is bias that takes *Dying to Live* on a mad journey.

Chapter Three

Blackmore presents a claim that a person under the effects of nitrous oxide was able to view from outside his body. Her non-sequitur conclusion reads:

"I think this illustrates the reluctance we have to accept that our experience, especially profound and personally meaningful experience, comes from our brain's activity and nothing else."

In other words, when someone reports an out-of-body experience, his report of being out of body demonstrates a reluctance to admit it was his brain at work. Blackmore asserts that because she knows it is the "brain at work," anyone who reports actually being out of the body must be fabricating their story to deny her theory. Blackmore concludes the person made up the account because saying he was out of his body "*made a better story.*" There is no investigation of the facts, not a shred of data to contradict the account as given. Yet, because the account differs from

the theory Blackmore prefers, the person must be fabricating. She states evidence for A, and concludes B.

Later in the chapter, she states:

*"Are these profound experiences a direct correlate of changes in the brain's activity and nothing more, or are they experiences of a separate mind, soul, astral body, or spirit? ...The general **assumption** of today's science says one thing yet people...say another—especially people who have had NDE's. Scientists for the most part **assume** some form of materialism; that mental phenomena depend upon, or are an aspect of, brain events." (Emphasis added)*

She favors scientists' **assumptions** over firsthand accounts. The unsupported assumptions of scientists does not rise to the level of "science."

Blackmore writes,

"As we have seen, the very occurrence of NDEs is not proof either way."

She dismisses evidence she previously presented, evidence that supports the Afterlife Hypothesis, and asks us to accept a non-sequitur conjecture. The fact is the NDE—with its out-of-body component—goes a long way toward proving the spirit exists separate from the body.

Later, she writes,

"If the Afterlife Hypothesis can answer them best then I shall accept that and work with that as well as I can. If the dying brain hypothesis does better than I shall work with that."

However, as we have already seen, she has no intention of considering the Afterlife Hypothesis. The Afterlife Hypothesis best fits with the evidence presented in *Dying to Live*, however, the evidence is blatantly ignored. There is a protest of fairness, but the bias is apparent.

The reader is asked to consider the popular "cerebral anoxia" (loss-of-oxygen-to-the-brain) explanation for the NDE. She presents four reasons researchers argue anoxia cannot be responsible for the NDE. It is only necessary for us to consider the first:

"1. NDEs can occur in people who obviously do not have anoxia."

Her response reads:

"This is certainly true but is not a sound argument at all. As we have seen, there is clearly no one cause of the NDE. The fact that NDEs can occur without anoxia is no argument against it sometimes being responsible for them."

Blackmore agrees anoxia does not provide "the" explanation for the NDE. It is one among many possible factors. So the obvious question is, *What do ALL the factors have in common?*

The answer includes:

1) Trauma to the body interrupts the connection between the spirit and the body—drugs, lack of oxygen, injury, even the anticipation of great bodily harm or death are all factors which serve to disconnect the functioning of spirit and body. Research will explain *how* spirit interfaces with the body and *what* causes an interruption or severance of this connection.

2) Experiences not involving drugs or trauma but rather the result of acquired skill, for example, Tibetan Buddhism.

Thus, we have "accidental" separation and "intentional" separation. The key factor is separation. In her book, Blackmore recounts the story of a volunteer in high G force experiments, who, while outside his body, *"went home and saw his mother and brother."* Throughout the book there are examples that fit the Afterlife Hypothesis, but Blackmore refuses to even consider the Afterlife Hypothesis.

She states evidence, then dodges:

"The invariance hypothesis is not sustainable. The NDE is not always the same and we need to try to understand its different elements in different ways."

As noted previously, she overlooks the basis of the Afterlife Hypothesis—spirit separates from body—and uses variety of content as an excuse to ignore the profound, consistent core of the NDE.

She fails to ask, *what is the nature of spirit?* What are a spirit's perceptual and cognitive abilities when separate? Without an inquiry into such matters, it is not possible to fully understand all the factors that support the Afterlife Hypothesis. Her bias toward philosophical materialism prevents consideration of the alternative hypothesis.

She argues anoxia is not a common invariant factor of the NDE, and then proceeds to explain the NDE on the basis of anoxia. In her effort to avoid the Afterlife Hypothesis, she runs in circles. The question she should ask is *what condition that anoxia causes is the same as conditions caused by other precipitating factors?* In other words, *what do they have in common?*

Chapter Four

In this chapter, Blackmore discusses drug-induced hallucinations, but fails to explore the question what exactly is a hallucination? What exactly does one view in a hallucination? The assumption is made that the nature of hallucination is known, when this is not the case.

The western study of consciousness, still primitive, does not answer this question. Nonetheless, she works on the premise that a hallucination is a visual or auditory perception that does not coincide with "objective" reality, while failing to establish what it is that one views in a hallucination. It is obvious that in a hallucination *something*, some form of mental imagery, is perceived. *What is it?*

She fails to ask how a spirit, detached from a body, might perceive mental pictures or imagery. Do such perceptions correlate with "objective" reality or do they include an additional "subjective" reality that is, nonetheless, real? She fails to consider a model of the mind that would accompany the Afterlife Hypothesis. She confines her speculation to brain theory.

An unbiased researcher would investigate the phenomena reported within the paradigms of each hypothesis. In other words, there would need to be a model of the mind that was unique to the Afterlife Hypothesis and another that was unique to the Dying Brain Hypothesis. Only with these comparative models, can one begin to make sense of the reported experiences. If one applies the model of the mind that applies to the Dying Brain Hypotheses to the Afterlife Hypothesis, one is mixing apples and oranges.

Writing about the NDEer passing through a tunnel of mental energy, she states:

"There are many serious problems with such a theory. If the other worlds are a part of this world then they cannot really account for the afterlife."

It is not clear how she arrives at this conclusion. In the NDE reports we find both ethereal “other world” perceptions and perceptions of the “objective world.” The NDE subject may see ethereal beings, but they also see the mundane, such as hospital operating rooms or other settings. The NDE reports tell us “this world” is intermingled with a “mental energy world.” This is co-mingling is common in mundane experience as well—people are perfectly capable of managing the world of mental images while going about their business in the “real world.” Mixing subjective and objective reality is a common experience. Blackmore does not make it clear why this should not continue after death. In fact, the question is not even considered.

She continues:

"Something should be seen leaving the body and going into the tunnel. The tunnel itself would be present in physical space and we should be able to measure it or in some way detect its presence."

The NDE reports do include such perceptions. In other words, those who experience the state do observe as she says they should. The question Blackmore does not ask is, “how does perception change when the spirit separates from the body?” In other words, what is the possible range of conscious perception when it comes to the spirit? Is there more to consciousness than the senses of the body? If one considers the Afterlife Hypothesis seriously, this question would need to be considered.

The literature contains reports of NDE subjects perceiving other disembodied spirits while they are out-of-body, mediums claim to perceive disembodied spirits. death-bed patients report seeing disembodied spirits. If one is seriously considering the Afterlife Hypothesis, this would be expected and one would explore the nature of such perception. If the hypothesis includes a spirit separated from the body, then one has to consider what will be the perceptual abilities of that being.

As for the second part of Blackmore’s question—will there be a way to measure such subtle phenomena—the answer is “yes.” A mental image picture exists. We can bring subjects into the lab and we can repeatedly have them view mental image pictures—memories and objects of imagination. The question for the technological aspect of science merely concerns the type of instruments needed to measure such subtle phenomena. There is no reason to assume such will

not be developed.

Blackmore comments:

"Still we should not reject such theories out of hand just because they seem senseless. It is better to apply some criteria to them and see how they fare. Is this theory specific? No, not at all. The tunnels described are all different in precise form and this theory can say nothing about what forms they should or should not take."

She again focuses on content, not underlying phenomena. The structure of specific tunnels is not in question; as has been stated, they are mental constructs, mental energy patterns. As such they take many malleable forms. Such mental energy is not confined to a brain, but rather is patterned energy that makes up the mind, which is not the brain. A view of the mind consistent with the Afterlife Hypothesis and NDE reports includes patterned energy that can be viewed by spirit.

When the spirit separates from the body in the Afterlife Hypothesis, it remains "cloaked" in its mind. Individual spirits exist within patterned energy masses when they leave the body. The content of this mind varies from individual to individual, which explains why we find varying content, but invariant mechanics.

This collection of patterned energy can best be imagined by comparing it to the pilot wave concept in quantum mechanics, in which a less substantial, information-bearing, quantum wave pattern is entangled with a denser, macroscopic structure. (An analogy borrowed from David Bohm would be a radio signal directing the motions of a large super tanker.) The patterned energy of the mind entangles with the body and brain. The degree to which the spirit disentangles mind from body monitors the degree to which spirit can be out of body.

The invariant factor that precipitates the NDE or OBE is disentanglement of mind and spirit from the body or the disentanglement of subtle energy from coarse energy. The model consistent with the Afterlife Hypothesis includes the spirit moving out of body, surrounded by its energy pattern mind, which also detaches (to a greater or lesser degree) from the body/brain.

In the Afterlife Hypothesis, the spirit's attention, when out of body, shifts from concerns of the body to the subtle energy patterns of the mind. It views old energy patterns and/or creates new ones, either by itself or in concert with other disembodied spirits. One has variety of content, and invariance of mechanics.

In our mundane lives, we are familiar with the mental realm that cloaks the spirit. This is the subjective world, the world of the mind, the world of consciousness. In the Afterlife Hypothesis, the spirit, separated from the body, focuses to varying degrees on subtle mental energy patterns rather than dense physical objects. The variance of perceptual focus accounts for varied content in NDE accounts, content that includes perceptions of physical setting and patterned mental energy.

If one intends to compare the Afterlife Hypothesis to the Dying Brain Hypothesis, one must take the Afterlife Hypothesis model of the mind into account. If one hypothesis includes a disembodied spirit, then the nature of that spirit in its disembodied condition must be considered. Without such understanding, one never really compares the two hypotheses—leading to a failure to determine which model best explains phenomena.

Blackmore fails to conceptualize the assumptions of the Afterlife Hypothesis. She gives these issues no consideration. She fails to weigh the evidence in light of the two opposing hypotheses.

When we obtain mountains of reports from NDE subjects attesting to out of body states, it is incumbent upon us to explore the reports *as they are given*. One must attempt to understand the ways in which the reports might be accurate—as presented—before deciding they are imaginary and lacking in substance. One must attempt to investigate rather than summarily dismiss the phenomena as brain-induced hallucination.

If one seeks to consider the Afterlife Hypothesis as more than a straw man argument, one must look at how the detached spirit interfaces with the body. One must take the basic premise of the Afterlife Hypothesis, the separation of spirit from body, and ask *how might this work?* When one considers the model in detail, a coherent theory emerges which explains the phenomena without the necessity of dismissing the existing evidence—the NDE reports.

The evidence does not fit Blackmore's Dying Brain Hypothesis. She must consider two options, either her theory is wrong or the evidence is wrong. She chooses to discard the evidence as it does not fit her theory. In place of evidence she inserts conjecture. In order to support her conjecture she must avoid actual research. This is a formula for bias, not for science.

If an alternative theory—which was consistent with the evidence—did not exist, one might excuse her choice. But there is an alternative—the Afterlife Hypothesis. Her failure to launch

into a valid inquiry into this hypothesis is unfortunate. Her failure to present the premises of the Afterlife Hypothesis and compare research data with the premises undermines the work.