

# InPresence 0031: The Super ESP Hypothesis with Jeffrey Mishlove

Video Transcript - *New Thinking Allowed* with Jeffrey Mishlove  
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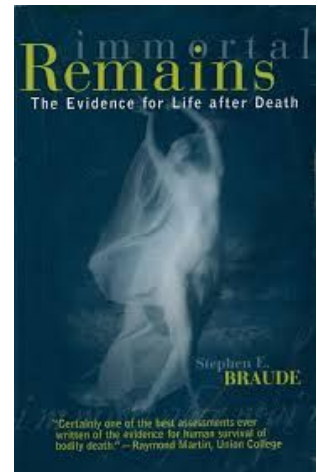


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(00:39) Hello, I'm Jeffrey Mishlove, and today I'd like to talk about what is known as the "Super ESP Hypothesis", sometimes called the "Living Agent Psi Hypothesis." It's a hypothesis in this sense: it's used as an alternative way of explaining data that otherwise would seem to support the notion of survival of the human personality after death, including mediumistic communications and reincarnation evidence. The philosopher Stephen Braude, in his book *Immortal Remains* and in other publications, tends to favor this hypothesis every other day of the week. He thinks that psychical researchers and parapsychologists need to do more to develop evidence which is so strong that even the Super ESP Hypothesis can't explain away the data. Of course, some people would say that the data is already far too strong.



(01:47) People in the psychical research field have strong opinions one way or the other about this. There are those who would say the reincarnation data, the cross-correspondences – which I hope to talk about in another segment – are so strong that the Super ESP Hypothesis simply doesn't work, that normal "Living Agent Psi" is never strong enough to explain these cases. Braude counters by saying, "Well, actually, even those cases seem to involve ESP between a deceased agent and a medium, or a young child, or whoever". So I'm going to give you some examples and I want you to think about it for yourself.

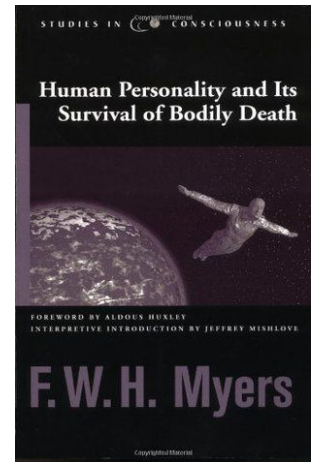
(02:33) The first example – and I'm linking to it right now – is an interview I conducted with Vernon Neppe, a chess master himself, who describes a case known as "the chess game from beyond the grave," in which a trance medium in Sweden played a game of chess with the Grandmaster Viktor Korchnoi of Russia, and played a very credible game. Now, Neppe argues that the Living Agent Psi Hypothesis is never strong enough to explain how somebody could play chess at the level of a Grandmaster.

(03:12) The other case that I'm going to link to – and I think it's an especially important, valuable case – it's not one of my own cases. It's a documentary produced by a British psychologist and psychical researcher, Dr. Keith Parsons. He describes very eloquently a famous case from the 19th century,

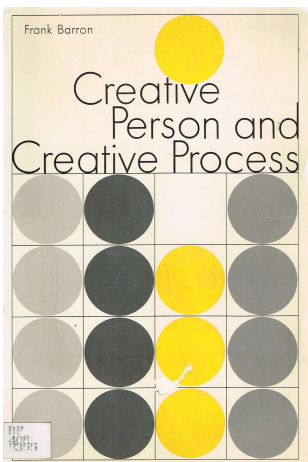
known as the case of the “Watseka Wonder”. It occurred in Watseka, Illinois, and appears to be the best, most full-blown case of possession in the literature itself, and I’m talking about a young child apparently possessed by the spirit of another child who died 10 years prior.

(03:58) So, take a look at that video especially, and – if you have time – at both of these videos, to decide and you’ll see. With regard to the Watseka Wonder case, it’s quite interesting, because back in the 19th century it was researched by Richard Hodgson, a researcher who tended to be quite skeptical about the “Survival Hypothesis.” His evaluation was that the case itself lent itself better to the Spiritualist interpretation than to other interpretations.

(04:35) Yet, F.W.H. Myers, the great author of *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*, also reviewed that case, and his conclusion was just the opposite. Even though Myers was generally inclined toward a spiritualistic hypothesis, he felt that the case is best interpreted as an example of suggestibility, a young hysterical child, lots of social pressure, and not enough evidence of a direct nature to be 100% sure. He said it’s better to interpret this as what we would call “Living Agent Psi” or “Super ESP.”



(05:22) So you can see there’s a lot of ambiguity even amongst skilled researchers with proclivities in one or another direction in this matter. Now, I’d also like to bring up the research of a great psychologist whom I knew – who was one of my professors in my very early years as a graduate student at Berkeley – and I’m talking about Dr. Frank X. Barron. He was a researcher in personality and creativity, but he also had an interest in parapsychology.



(06:00) He told me, incidentally, a fascinating story when I met with him. He encouraged me to study parapsychology, and he said in his case he knew a woman who claimed to be a witch. One day he was sitting and thinking, “OK, witch! If you’re real, show me your power,” and at that very moment a stone struck the window of the room in which he was sitting. I don’t think it broke the window, but it made a loud crack, and it convinced him that there was more to this business of psychic functioning than psychologists normally assume.

(06:39) But the important work that Barron did in creativity that I want to share with you is what he called “tolerance of ambiguity.” He did a lot of research with creative people. He worked with many very creative people – like Norman Mailer – and gave them personality tests. The one criteria he discovered that separated people who were highly creative from those who had, maybe, normal creativity or less, is what he called “tolerance of ambiguity”: the ability to say, “well, I just don’t know,”

to be in doubt. In the mystical literature it's sometimes called the "Cloud of Unknowing." Let go of your certainties. It's a healthy thing to do, and I encourage all of my viewers to do that.

(07:32) Because with regard to the controversy, whether we're talking about Super ESP or survival after death, it may well be that the best explanation is none of these. It may well be that reality is far more complex than either hypothesis can accommodate. So, what I hope is that you will take the time, minimally, to view the Dr. Keith Parsons video about the Watseka Wonder, and see how you feel. Does it lend itself, in your mind, more readily to the hypothesis of possession by the spirit of a deceased girl? Does it lend itself to some other hypothesis? Or are you willing to just accept the ambiguity that we don't know for sure?

(08:22) Now sometimes, of course, it is better to draw a definite conclusion when the evidence is overwhelming. There are many researchers who have looked at the survival evidence, and they do feel that the evidence is overwhelming. And of course, there are many people who don't look at the evidence and are convinced that the truth is so clear to them that there can't possibly be survival that they don't even need to look at the evidence. I'd like to suggest that you open your mind, open your heart, and let's see what you conclude. Thank you for being with me. (09:05)

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