PRACTICING DEATH: ALTERNATE VIEWS

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ABSTRACT: The author provides a personal account in which he shares his feelings and thoughts as he confronts his own death. Formulating a hedging philosophy of death based on alternate views of death as extinction or transition, he shows how he is able to reconcile himself to either one and reach a peaceful acceptance of death by using an obituary exercise for the extinction view and by analyzing the mind-body relationship for the transition view. Observing that there are two parties to death and concerned about the grief his death will cause his surviving spouse, he develops a method to console her after his death.

PERSONAL DEATH ACCOUNTS

The writings of people who have described their feelings and thoughts as they tried to confront their own deaths, whether fascinating for some or morbid for others, remain poignant. They move us as we learn about the emotions, the fears, hopes, regrets, anger, denial or acceptance people experience as they prepare to die. There are many genres of these personal accounts: diaries, letters, and suicide notes. They may take the form of a passionate poem such as Ted Rosenthal’s How Could I Not Be Among You? (Rosenthal, 1973) where the young terminally ill poet, writing of pain, anger and agony, cries out to his readers, before “the wind sweeps over everyone,” to live each day as if it were their last.

In contrast, there is the essay, a reflective and objective composition, such as the one by Lauren E. Trombley, a psychiatrist dying of leukemia. In a coolly dispassionate way, he describes the psychological processes that went on within him and then writes, “I wish that other people in my position would also write subjectively about this. Perhaps this paper may encourage it” (Trombley, 1976, p.506). In line with his wishes, I provide in this paper a similarly dispassionate personal account about what has gone on inside of me as I confront my own mortality.

Following Socrates for whom philosophy was the practice of death and the facilitator of its acceptance, my aim in this writing is to clarify my feelings and write out my thoughts in an effort to formulate consciously what I will call a “hedging” philosophy that will prepare me for the arrival of death. This essay, of course, contains my intimate thoughts and personal philosophy but I publish them anyway, subjective as they are, because I want to share themes, insights and strategies that ultimately may be of value and benefit to others as they face their own deaths. People trying to come to grips with their own deaths may welcome guidance from someone who has faced his own death just...
as a person lost in a wilderness will welcome and follow a light in the distance. For some readers, my personal story can be that light.

It begins when I was nine years old and was awakened from my sleep by a piercing scream. It came from my parents’ bedroom next to mine. My mother had just seen my father jump from the window of our apartment and fall seven stories to his death on the pavement below.

His suicide was my first experience with death. But it was the death of my father; it never occurred to my child mind that I, too, would die. That realization came later in my young adulthood, a realization that I would die eventually but surely at some time in the far-off future. Now the realization is radically different not because I am dying and in my final days or months. Neither am I in a situation so dangerous that it is probable that I will not survive it. Nevertheless, I am preparing to meet my end.

The English poet, Walter Savage Landor, wrote these lines in his poem “On His Seventy-Fifth Birthday”:

I warm’d both hands before the fire of life;
It sinks, and I am ready to depart. (Colvin, 1902)

When he was seventy-five, Landor believed he would have to seek a new hearth. It took me a little longer but now that I am on the threshold of my ninth decade, I realize that my death must be imminent. For many years, I gave courses to try to help people see their deaths as less awful than originally thought and to accept death peacefully. Now I have to try to help myself.

**Philosophy of Death**

Since I am in the winter of my life, I need to ready myself for death. I have undergone many losses in my life before now, such as the deaths of my mother and father, the deaths of my father-in-law, my mother-in-law, my brother-in-law. I was taken from civilian life and placed in the Army during World War II and snatched from my budding law practice when recalled a few years later to serve in the Korean War. These losses are little deaths, the ends of relationships or of important phases of my life. Shneidman calls them “partial deaths” or “deaths-in-life” (Shneidman, 1973). But the death for which I need to prepare is not death-in-life; it is the cessation of life, it is real death, full death, physical death. But how? It is not as if I can train for death as one would warm up before a tennis match. The only way that I can see is to follow the counsel of wise men like Montaigne and Socrates. Montaigne believed that death is less frightening and more easily accepted if one has thought about it and prepared for it. In his *Phaedo*, Plato’s Socrates tells Simmias and Cebes “those who tackle philosophy aright are simply and solely practicing dying, practicing death…then it would be surely unreasonable that…they should object to what they had been so long earnestly practicing” (Gallop, 1988. p. 12). So, without being morbid but only to
clear my mind so that I can be ready for death without objection, I have tried to practice death by constructing a philosophy of death.

This philosophy, like my death, is private and for me alone. I frankly describe it as a hedging one. It consists of two alternate views. I am betting on one and if it wins, I will be satisfied (although I may not know it); but I am also betting against it and on another. So if I lose on the first, I win on the second.

I feel justified in using two conflicting approaches to death because the concept of death is itself conflicted. Legal and medical definitions differ as we find “cardiac death,” “clinical death,” and “brain death.” There are those who claim immortality and their opponents who argue that we have only this life to live. They cite Epictetus, the Greek philosopher born in 341 B.C, who maintained that while we exist, death is not and when death is, we do not. Then there is the overriding mind-body issue. Dualism holds that mind is separate from the body and can continue after death while monism counters with its view that mind and body are indissolubly bound and that mind dies with the body. As I teach myself about my own death and take these conflicts into account, I developed two different views of death on the assumption that one will be right.

**View 1: Death as Extinction**

We fear death as an enemy bent on our total annihilation. But I see reasons for not fearing it and for accepting death as extinction.

I can accept the finality of death because it is part of the bargain I made with Nature for giving me life. Death may be Nature’s law mandating a replacement of the old and weak with the new and strong. It is “survival of the fittest.” (The phrase, by the way, comes from Herbert Spencer not Charles Darwin.) Another reason for acceptance may be that death is Nature’s method for making room for others as others have made room for me.

But for me these arguments based on some natural process are too intellectual and impersonal. It will be my death so I seek to find personal reasons for accepting it.

I begin by noting that my life is bracketed by a beginning and an end. Before the beginning, I was not. I do not care about that. After death I will be nothing. I should not care about that, either. So my first reason for accepting death is that my post-death state will be the same as my pre-life state. I will be no worse off then as I was before.

Before my birth, the world went its way without me. It did not need me or want me. Do I care about that? No. Similarly, after I cease to exist, the world will get along without me. It will not need or want me. I should not care about that, either.

Consider this reason. Before my birth, I was without consciousness. It was a peaceful nonexistence. Nothing troubled me. Then suddenly came an uninvited
birth and the fitful, frenzied, frustrating, sometimes unhappy and painful, period called life. When that violent interruption of my former peaceful state ends with death, I will return to the same untroubled state I knew before. I will have regained what was taken from me. I will be back in the void out of which I came. I will have returned home.

Landor, quoted earlier, also wrote these lines in “On Death”:

Death stands above me, whispering low
I know not what into my ear;
Of his strange language all I know
Is, there is not one word of fear. (Colvin, 1902)

Epictetus, mentioned earlier, offered a good reason that allows me also to face death without fear. He taught that “death is nothing to us. For all good and evil consists in sensation, but death is deprivation of sensation…Death, the most terrifying of ills, is nothing to us, since so long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, then we do not exist. It does not concern either the living or the dead, since for the former, it is not, and the latter are no more” (Oates, 1940, p. 30).

One of the strongest motivations for wishing for postmortem survival is premature death. The deaths of children or young adults from accidents, diseases, or wars before they can live their lives or fulfill their dreams creates the desire in the human breast for another life for them to compensate for the one they have lost. But this motivation is gradually losing its power as life expectancy continues to increase. I am one of those who have lived to a ripe old age. I can accept death because I have no reason or even justification to be motivated by the hope of survival after death.

But for me, of all the reasons for not objecting to death, by far the most cogent is based on how fully and meaningfully my life has been lived. Therefore, it was important for me to review my life and what it meant to be me. The review process began with writing my obituary, really two obituaries. One is the real obituary, the cursory one that appears in the obituary section of a newspaper. The other is the imagined obituary, how I imagine my past and present.

REAL OBITUARY

Arthur S. Berger died yesterday. He was ( ) years old. He was a World War Two and Korean War veteran, a lawyer, author and former Commissioner of the City of Aventura, Florida. He is survived by his wife, Joyce.

IMAGINED OBITUARY

Arthur S. Berger died yesterday. He was ( ) years old. On his tombstone will appear three elements: his date of birth, a dash, then his date of death. He had no
control over his birth and none over his death, but he did control what went on between. During that interval, he served this country as an officer in the U.S. Army during World War II. During World War II, as a prisoner of war commander, he developed an operation that put many hundreds of prisoners of war to work in labor battalions. It grew into a massive operation called Italian Service Units. It not only helped the prisoners by relieving their boredom in captivity and by paying them for their work; most importantly, it freed our soldiers from work enemy soldiers could do and so helped us win the War. He served again during the Korean War, this time in the Pentagon where he evaluated the appeals of soldiers who had been court-martialed. After the wars, he served as a lawyer when the law profession was a proud one and he practiced his profession with skill, honor and dignity. As the first Commissioner elected to the City Commission of Aventura, Florida, he served his community again with honor and dignity. He served as an Ombudsman for the State of Florida to protect the rights and quality of life of the elderly who reside in long-term care facilities, such as nursing homes, assisted living and adult family care homes. He published seven books, one of which was selected by Choice out of six thousand books published that year as “an outstanding scholarly publication.” He was the co-author of four more books, co-edited two, contributed to nine books and published forty articles in journals and other publications. His bibliography is attached. His books for the health profession were intended to familiarize it with the laws, forms and procedures relating to death and dying. His other books were written to provide people with data providing a reasonable basis for a comforting belief in human survival after death. He gave lectures in England, Europe, Japan, Korea, India and, of course, in our country. Sometimes he lectured for the fees, sometimes because of commitments. These lectures brought him no real satisfaction. But lectures that helped people did. He would have given these lectures for no money, not as a job but as a calling because of the sense of fulfillment they gave him. For example, there were the lectures he gave on survival after death to help people confront death with less fear and more hope. There were also the lectures he gave to help older people regain their lost self-esteem by finding meaning in their lives. To do this, he guided them in composing their autobiographies, a process of discovering what it meant to be them His life took a new turn when he became a playwright. He wrote and acted in a one-man play about Edgar Allan Poe that, to his surprise and delight, received standing ovations. Throughout his life, he was sustained by Joyce, his treasure beyond measure, his constant, loyal and loving bride of ( ) years. She survives him.

In this imagined obituary, I deliberately suspended the rule of modesty because I wanted to recall and document every accomplishment in my life that seemed important to me so that I might judge whether my life had worth, meaning and purpose. The imagined obituary tells me that since adulthood (my early life was confused and unhappy) all my activities have benefited others – service to my country, to my clients, to my constituents, to the elderly, helping health professionals understand end-of-life care, helping others understand that death is not as frightening as is supposed and helping them find that their lives had meaning. When my life ends, I can die in the comforting knowledge that I did not waste my life and that it has been a full and fulfilled one. These memories comfort and support me. I have no regrets as I prepare for death. When my life
ends, I will be able to face it with more ease and greater acceptance than I thought possible. Adapting something William Cullen Bryant wrote in “Thanatosis,” when I approach the grave, were it not for the pain of separation from Joyce, the love of my life, I would wrap myself in these memories and lie down to pleasant dreams.

**View 2. Death as Transition**

I survived all my little deaths-in-life mentioned before. But can I survive the termination of my life? It seems clear that we can live on after physical death in many naturalistic and indirect ways: (a) plasmic or biological continuance as our genes and characteristics are transmitted through our children and their descendants, (b) persist as a force among the living by the art we create, the literature we write, the influence of our social, scientific, philosophic or spiritual work or thought, (c) being remembered by family, friends, community or nation and (d) even through such procedures as organ transplants, cryonics and mummification. The only one applicable to me and that promises my postmortem continuance is the literature I created – books of which I am the author or coauthor and chapters and papers contributed to other books or periodicals.

These forms of continuance, however, bring mere drops of satisfaction compared to the flood of comfort that follows the realization that there may be direct and personal survival after death – by which I mean the continuance of consciousness after physical death with its memories, my personality, my skills, so that I will wake up after death as I awaken every morning with the realization that I am still the same person I was before I died. But if Epictetus is right, personal survival is impossible because when death is, we are not. If the monists and materialists are right, mind or consciousness is united with and is a function of the brain and dies with it. I know a lot about research in parapsychology. Can it be used to challenge Epictetus and the monistic materialist view? How can I use my knowledge to help me confront my own death? Can I use it to make it less painful to part with life and convert death into an adventure?

The knowledge I have that seems most relevant concerns what I described before as the “overriding issue”: the mind-body or brain-consciousness relationship. Materialists or monists maintain brain mechanisms account for the mind or consciousness. Thought is identical with the chemical and electrical processes of the brain. Consciousness and the mind are just the brain in action. This is the theory of brain-mind or brain-consciousness identity and, if valid, makes continuance of consciousness logically and empirically impossible. This theory is not totally unreasonable. On the other hand, although reasonable, it may be wrong. The theory is only a hypothesis, a supposition, which needs to be tested and confirmed by evidence. It can also be shown to be false by the evidence, specifically, four kinds of factual evidence: ESP, nonlocality, a certain kind of near-death experiences; and my own mediumistic experiment.
ESP. Under the materialistic-physicalistic scheme, everything we know of the outside world comes to us as information brought to the brain by our five senses: our eyes, ears, touch, taste and smell. Physical stimuli affect our sense organs and then our nervous systems and brains. My senses are the sources of my brain’s awareness of objects, people and events. This concept should make it impossible for ESP - knowing about something without use of the sensory channels - to exist. But laboratory research shows that ESP is possible. In telepathy experiments where the experimenter is in one building and the subject in another, or if you place a barrier or distance between two people so that they can’t see one another or make any sound each can hear, and they cannot communicate in any way, and then you ask one of them to send his thoughts of a target picture to the other, the materialistic scheme says that this experiment cannot succeed. But we know that experimenters are able to send their thoughts to subjects over a course of many experiments, such as Ganzfeld experiments. In many of these, there was no normal means of communications between experimenters and subjects. They were in different buildings and separated by walls and distance. Successful experiments like these compel us to admit that the mind has powers of acquiring information the brain does not have. Mind is not identical to brain; materialism is an unsound theory.

Nonlocality. The assumption we all make is that mind or consciousness is located in the head, right behind the forehead. But four examples of nonlocality show that at times it is not locked up in the brain. First, are successful intercessory prayers. The consciousness of the prayers has gone out over hundreds of miles to heal sick patients. A second illustration is remote viewing in which the consciousness of a person in one geographical location travels to another unknown faraway place to get information. A third example is the out-of-body experience, one reported since antiquity, in which consciousness leaves the physical body and goes to a location apart from the physical body, perhaps near the ceiling in the same room with the body or perhaps to locations beyond the room. Finally, there is psychokinesis demonstrated by controlled experiments in the Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research (PEAR) program in which human consciousness interacts with machines to influence the workings and output of physical processes (Jahn, 1995). All these examples suggest that mind is independent of the brain and free to roam though unlimited space beyond the brain or affect matter.

Near-Death Experience (NDE). I believe that the NDE is real but I do not think that it supports the belief in survival after death. Moody called the experiences he described in his book “near death” experiences (Moody, 1975). I am satisfied that that these experiences occur but I am not satisfied with Moody’s description of them. It is misleading because, although these people may undergo these experiences, they may do so under circumstances having nothing to do with death or with the survival of death. For example, fighter pilots trained in a centrifuge and subjected to gravity forces that drained blood from their brains report “near-death experiences.” People ill but not dying have also reported them. But I do not mean to diminish the importance and relevance of the NDE in connection with survival after bodily death when it is combined with the out-of-body experience. If the brain-consciousness identity
theory were true, then, if the brain is dead, consciousness is dead and can not continue. If it were possible to discover clear-cut cases where patients have cognitive functions after their brains have stopped functioning, these cases would refute the theory and be evidence that consciousness can continue after death. Medical studies of cardiac patients who had been resuscitated after their near-death experiences, one Dutch (van Lommel, 2001) and one English (Parnia, 2001), are those clear-cut cases. All the patients in these cases were in those physiologic states in which they were clinically dead and their brains were not functioning yet they had conscious experiences and memories of their experiences. Another such example is the American case of Pam Reynolds, also resuscitated after clinical death, who was able to remember and identify an electric bone saw used by her surgeon that she observed from a point outside her physical body and at a time when she had no brain activity (Sabom, 1998).

Mediumistic Experiment. I designed and published in my book Aristocracy of the Dead (Berger, 1987) an experiment with a medium in an attempt to communicate with a man named Lee Petty who had died in an automobile accident. My design of and methodology for conducting the experiment have been described in the book. Of all the forms of evidence that falsify the brain-consciousness identity theory, this experiment stands out for me as the most forceful because I was personally involved in it and, more importantly, because it was so successful at showing the survival of the man’s consciousness that it attracted the attention of the noted philosopher and authority, Professor Robert Almeder.

He devoted more than ten pages of his book Death and Personal Survival (Almeder, 1992) to a discussion of the experiment and made numerous comments attesting to its success, such as “Arthur Berger presents empirical evidence from trance mediumship for postmortem survival. Berger’s work is unlike any other piece of evidence based on mediumship” (p. 238); “the best available explanation [for the experiment] seems to be that some form of survival is established by the experiment” (p. 246); and “there is good reason to think that the Berger experiment as evidence of establishing contact with a postmortem discarnate person was a success, and that alternative explanations in terms of chance, fraud…or telepathy on the part of the mediums involved are unconvincing” (p. 247).

UNDERSTANDING CONSCIOUSNESS

I have always been Arthur Berger and thought of myself as a normal man born by chance in a certain culture at a certain time. I never had any reason to change my understanding of what and who I was: a physical body with a name.

Some people who have mystical experiences such as “cosmic consciousness” or other altered states of consciousness such as meditation or those brought on by psychedelic drugs discover that they are more than their bodies. An example is Ram Dass (nee Richard Alpert) who had such experiences after ingesting psilocybin mushrooms or listening to his guru Maharajji. He described experiencing an aspect of himself “that was not the Richard I’d known myself
to be, and this awakened me into my Soul consciousness. I realized first hand that although my Ego was certainly going to die one day, and Richard would not longer exist, my Soul would continue its evolution in another form” (Dass, Matousek & Roeder 2000, p. 149).

I had always identified myself with my body. I have never had a mystical experience or entered into an altered state of consciousness and so had no reason to change my sense of identity. I had assimilated the beliefs of my materialist culture that the human person is just a physical body - a combination of physiochemical elements. I accepted the monist-materialist view that conceives of consciousness as a biological function and of death as the termination of consciousness. But with my study of ESP, nonlocal mind, cases of conscious experiencing when the brain is not functioning, and with my successful mediumistic contact with a surviving consciousness, I saw clearly that the materialistic picture of the human being was wrong because we are more complicated than monists and materialists believe. We are more than our bodies. So I stopped identifying myself with my body. I identified myself with my consciousness. Descartes with his *Cogito ergo sum* reached the same conclusion. Everything else might be questioned but not his conscious mind which did the questioning. He was his consciousness. Arthur Berger will die but I will not because as consciousness, I am not dependent on my brain and I am not merely a physical entity. The philosopher Peter Koestenbaum says, “Understanding consciousness may be the answer to death” (Koestenbaum, 1976, p. 2). He is right. I can answer my death because the brain-consciousness theory has been falsified. I now understand that, after the death of my body, the survival of the same consciousness I had before my death is a real possibility.

At the age of seventy-one and after a series of strokes, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross found herself confronting death. “Perhaps the biggest obstacle anyone faces in the effort to understand death,” she wrote, “is that it’s impossible for the unconscious mind to imagine an end to its own life” (Kubler-Ross, 1997, p. 141). She was only repeating almost word for word what Freud had said. But this obstacle does not exist for me. I do not need to try to imagine such an end because all the factual evidence has provided me with a rational basis for understanding that my conscious and unconscious life may survive Arthur Berger’s death. I spoke earlier about definitions of death. Kubler-Ross said, “Death does not exist – not in its traditional definition…any new definition had to go beyond the death of the physical body” (Kubler-Ross, 1997, p. 189). I am in agreement. Present definitions need to be changed. A new definition must incorporate the evidence suggesting that the human being is more than a body and that consciousness may survive physical death.

But what is meant by “survival,” what kind of transition will it be? Unless we have some conception of it, “survival” has no real meaning. How will my disembodied consciousness exist in an environment with no sensory organs to enable it to react to what is happening around it? I answer these questions with speculations. One is that the world my consciousness will inhabit will be a psychic or spiritual world in which I will interact telepathically with others I
find there, and may communicate with those living in the world I left behind who have psi abilities. Another is a world akin to the dream world I create every night while sleeping and where, without the use of any sensory channels, I will interact easily with people and objects, find myself in many situations and have a variety of experiences.

ATTITUDE TOWARD DEATH

How does seeing death as a transition affect my attitude toward my coming death? I think of the case of Frederic W.H. Myers, one of the founders of psychical research, whose research, climaxed by his classic *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* (Meyers, 1903), led him also to the belief in a postmortem existence. So convinced was he that, when he was dying after a series of attacks of influenza, pneumonia, Bright’s Disease and Cheyne-Stokes breathing, he was not only ready to die, he recited poetry as he welcomed death: “His serenity, in fact his eagerness to go, and his extraordinary intellectual vitality up to the very time that the death agony began, and even in the middle of it, were a superb spectacle and deeply impressed the doctors as well as ourselves. It was a demonstration of the ad oculos of the practical influence of a living belief in a future existence.” So wrote William James (Gauld, 1968, pp. 333–334). I cite the case of Myers to show its sharp contrast with my own case and to make clearer how I face death.

I do not welcome it as he did; I am not eager to die because of the prospect of transition to another existence. I want my life to go on, my creative energies to flourish as they always have and my extraordinarily long and happy marriage to continue. But, when the time comes and I must die, it will be easier for me to say goodbye to life because of my belief that approaching death may be a transition. The belief also has a therapeutic effect. To use Jung’s word, this understanding of death is “hygienic.” He was convinced that it was hygienic and healthy to see in death a goal at which to aim and so he believed the “religious teaching of a life hereafter consonant with the standpoint of psychic hygiene...It would therefore be desirable to think of death as only a transition – one part of a life-process whose extent and duration escape our knowledge” (Jung, 1933, p. 112). The prospect of continuation in some form – for me not a religious teaching but warranted by factual evidence - provides me in my old age with some light-hearted anticipation. It is not a goal as Jung suggests; it is more a kind of mystery game, a new adventure. I am about to enter into the unknown. Will I find the psychic or dream world I anticipate or will it be radically different? Will the transition be beautiful or ugly, pleasant or unpleasant?

Wise men have told us how to face death. Montaigne said that we should confront death with equanimity. Socrates said that the real philosopher is one who, when he is about to die, is of good cheer. I am facing death with a hedging philosophy of death that embraces alternative views of death. If the first view, that of extinction, is the correct one, I will never know it or that the second view of transition was wrong. But if the second view turns out to be right, I will
know it and will congratulate myself for having used it to face death. It turns out that these opposing views have had another therapeutic effect. Jung would have called my hedging philosophy “hygienic.” Since the opposing views are equal, I am reconciled to either one; I am a man in equilibrium.

Except for one great heart-rending fact: How can I, or anyone, accept death with equanimity, good cheer or in equilibrium when he knows that his death will tear apart the bond that has tied him to his love and that doing so will cause her inconsolable grief? Arnold Toynbee points out that there are two parties to death. Even if death gives me the peace of nonexistence, or the continuance of consciousness, it will give sorrow to her who survives me. So my question is the same as Toynbee’s: “Supposing that I am really reconciled to the prospect of my own death and a ripe old age, am I also reconciled to the prospect of the sorrow and loneliness that death is going to give my wife if she survives me?” (Toynbee, et al. 1968, p. 270). No, I am not.

The only way to prevent my wife’s grief would be for me to survive her and to suffer her loss instead of her suffering her loss of me. But since I am older than she, it is likely that I will not survive her. I can only hope that time and one more thing I must prepare will heal her grief. I have always tried to motivate people to arrange posthumous experiments to show that they have survived death to console family members who survive them. These include a cipher experiment developed by Robert H. Thouless (1948) whom I remember with great affection and whom I consider to be the “father” of these experiments, a combination lock experiment developed by Ian Stevenson (1968) and a dictionary experiment I devised called the “By the Numbers Test.” It was published in my book *Aristocracy of the Dead* (Berger, 1987) and in numerous other of my writings. Now, in the hope that it will bring my wife consolation, I intend to arrange my own posthumous dictionary experiment to show that I have survived death. In order to prepare the experiment, I began by opening a dictionary at random. With my eyes closed, I placed my finger on the page that was opened. When I looked, my finger rested on a vocabulary entry. That would be my secret key word. If I found that this key word had been entered and defined once, and the same word had been entered a second time because it had another meaning and redefined, I will choose the first definition. Having now selected a key word, I counted consecutively each letter of the alphabet in the key word, and in all that followed it: the pronunciation, the etymology and in the definition or definitions. As I counted, I excluded pronunciation symbols, punctuation marks, symbols of any kind, spaces, brackets, parentheses and numbers – anything except letters of the alphabet. I planned to use these counted letters to make up a test message. I counted until I felt that I had sufficient resource of letters to compose a message. Such a message is only a test; it need not be wise, clever or important. Having composed a test message, I proceeded to encipher it by substituting for the letters in my message the numbers assigned to the letters. This is the enciphered message: 12, 3, 17, 42, 27, 62, 52. I will deliver it to my wife. Before my death, I will deliver to my wife and advise her of the title, edition, publisher and year of the dictionary I used: *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary, Unabridged*, published by Encyclopedia Britannica, 1986. Now my aim will be to keep the key word secret and not to reveal it to anyone. In order to be sure that no psychic or
anyone else will discover my verbal key, I will not write it down. No living mind and no document, therefore, will exist as a target for a psychic’s ESP. My intention also will be to ingrain my key in my memory, and then, after my death, to communicate it to my wife. Without my key, the enciphered test message I leave with her cannot be deciphered. It will just be a jumble of seven numbers, all meaningless to her. It will remain that way until, after my death, I communicate to her my key word. If the key I communicate makes sense out of the numbers, she will know that it is the right key. To find out if it is the right key, my wife will use the same dictionary I used and will locate the key word I communicated to her. Just as I counted all the alphabet letters in the entry and excluded symbols and so on, she will do the same. Just as I substituted numbers for the letters of the alphabet to encipher my message, she will do the reverse and substitute letters for the numbers to decipher it. If the letters result in a readable message, the key that did it is correct. It is by my supplying the one key known only to me that decipherers the test message I prepared and deposited with my wife that my identity will be verified as the person who left the message originally. Professor Antony Flew, one of the keenest of skeptics, always vigorously denied the logical possibility of postmortem existence because of the apparently insuperable difficulty of establishing that a disembodied postmortem entity was the same as the premortem flesh and blood one. My supplying the correct key after my death would be strong evidence of my survival and identity after death. The possibility that my test might bring about such a result so raised his eyebrows that Professor Flew wrote a Foreword to my book in which he described it as “a significant step forward” (Flew, 1987, p. ii). Instructions for preparing the test and the methodology to prevent a physic from using telepathy or clairvoyance to discover the secret key are given in my book.

This is May, 2010. I end my essay here as I wait to see what the future holds.

References


The Author

After serving as a commissioned officer during World War Two and the Korean War, Arthur S. Berger was educated at New York University School of Law where he was a member of Law Review, received a Juris Doctor *cum laude* and went on to practice law for 25 years. After retiring from the law, he became a narrator for the Library of Congress program of talking books for the blind, a playwright, the author of over 60 publications including six books and numerous papers in professional journals and was selected for inclusion in *Contemporary Authors* and Who’s *Who in the World.* He has served as Commissioner and Vice Mayor of the City of Aventura, Florida, and is an instructor at university lifelong learning centers.