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The John Edward Phenomenon—"I *Want* To Believe"

SUE-ELLEN KJELDAL

Abstract: Much international interest has been generated by psychics such as John Edward who purport to communicate with the deceased. In this article, contemporary decision theory is used as a possible explanatory factor in determining why individuals unquestioningly believe this notion, whilst empirical support against the theory appears overwhelmingly negative at this stage in research into this phenomenon.

INTRODUCTION

It's no secret that John Edward, the self-styled 'psychic medium', has enjoyed phenomenal success since he began stating publicly that he could act as an intermediary between the living and the dead. His website refers to him as an 'internationally acclaimed psychic medium'.[1] The Macquarie Dictionary refers to psychic ability as 'pertaining to super- or extra-sensory mental functioning, such as clairvoyance, telepathy' (1990, p. 762). Edward purports to be able to communicate, in some way, with the deceased, and has received widespread support for his contentions from an uninformed public. According to his website, "John Edward has brought a fresh, honest and thought-provoking attitude to the world of psychic phenomena. As a psychic medium, author and lecturer, he has, over the last fifteen years, helped thousands with his uncanny ability to predict future events and communicate with those who have crossed over to the Other Side."

Such claims as these are indeed "larger than life", and through such media as television shows, newsletters and books, Edward has

[1] John Edward website: www.johnedward.net/after_life_.htm

convinced many that there is, in fact, life after death. He freely asserts that he is communicating with the deceased and this assertion and the behaviour he exhibits publicly, ipso facto, demonstrate his belief that he is, in fact, communicating with the deceased. This claim is taken seriously by those who seek to investigate the notion of the survival of some form of consciousness after death, such as Susan Blackmore (1993), who has written a comprehensive and well-researched book on the subject entitled *Dying to live* in which she explores the many theories that have been put forward to explain the near-death experience. The near-death experience has been reported by many individuals who, on the verge of death (but who subsequently live through the experience), purport to experience such things as lights at the ends of tunnels, a life review (which is a rapid "scan" through the events of one's life), and being able to tell doctors performing emergency surgery on their bodies about things they could not have known unless their soul had somehow left their body. Many discuss the fact that they seem to have a "bird's-eye" view of the emergency procedures, as though they were actually floating near the ceiling. After an exhaustive review of studies conducted in this area, Blackmore has been forced to conclude that the data best fit a "dying brain" hypothesis rather than the more publicly accepted "after life" hypothesis. That is to say, consciousness (what some might call the soul) does not continue after death.

This evidence has been seriously challenged by a series of studies conducted by Schwartz (2002) which were subsequently the subject of a book entitled *The afterlife experiments* (Schwartz, Simon, & Chopra, 2003). The book describes a series of research studies conducted with famous mediums such as Edward and George Anderson. The results of these studies, which *may* be counted as evidence in support of the afterlife hypothesis, have been strenuously debated by those scientists who place themselves on one side of the argument or the other. An article entitled "How not to review mediumship research: Understanding the ultimate reviewer's mistake" (Schwartz, 2003) provides a very suitable example of the type of debate that is ongoing. A critique of the work of Schwartz by Wiseman and O'Keefe (2001, cited in Hyman, 2003) stating that his work is not compelling evidence to support the afterlife hypothesis has increased the controversy surrounding this topic. Schwartz contends, however, that his studies *are* supportive of the afterlife hypothesis, and he further asserts that Wiseman and O'Keefe, who critique his work, have a duty to practice what they preach: even-handed skepticism (Schwartz, 2002). Hyman (2003a,b) also critiques the work of Schwartz, and so it goes on (e.g., Wiseman, 2002)—claims for paranormal phenomena by distinguished academics critiqued by researchers with a wealth of research expertise.

At this point it is timely to define the purpose of those such as Michael Shermer (2003) who takes the debate very seriously and strenuously denies that skeptics are engaging in selective perception in finding evidence to use against paranormal experiences. As is stated in every issue of Skeptic magazine (2003), "With regard to its procedure of examination of all claims, the Skeptics Society uses the scientific method first developed in the 16th and 17th centuries. While it recognises the limitations and socio-cultural influences on science, it adopts the philosophy of Albert Einstein:

> "All our science, measured against reality, is primitive and childlike—and yet it is the most precious thing we have." (Skeptic, 2003, p. 4)

The point here is that those members of the Skeptics Society in the US and abroad have no other tools to measure paranormal phenomena apart from the scientific method, and it is their intention to honestly evaluate any claims of paranormal experiences by utilising the scientific method. The appearance of the Schwartz experiments appear to be "muddying the waters" in this regard. It is the intention of the present author to use contemporary decision theory in an attempt to understand why Edward's ideas are so easily accepted amongst the general public and, perhaps too, to understand some of the controversy surrounding the phenomena. This approach is not unlike that taken by Blackmore in attempting to find a parsimonious explanation for paranormal phenomena. In this instance, purely psychological theories are advanced to explain why some individuals wholeheartedly believe in the afterlife, which is arguably an irrational act. The Macquarie Dictionary defines rationality as: "agreeable to reason; reasonable, sensible; having or exercising reason, sound judgement, or good sense" (p. 786) and its definition of reason: is "sound judgement or good sense", or "to draw conclusions or inferences from facts or premises" (p. 790). Hammond states that rationality is similar to analysis, and analysis is defined by Macquarie as: "the ascertainment of the kind or amount of one or more of the constituents of a substance, whether actually obtained in separate form or not" (p. 29). It can be argued from these definitions, therefore, that rational analysis of belief in a claim (such as the existence of life after death) that has to date, a great deal of empirical support against it and very little research, or data, to support it leads one to the compelling conclusion that, at this point, the data supports the former rather than the

latter view.[1] If the evidence is weighed, it can be stated that, on balance, a belief such as life after death is not entirely rational in nature. It must be restated however, that the author believes that paranormal research is in an embryonic stage and that, although it would appear that there is overwhelming evidence that all constituents of the self cease to be at the moment of death, the present article is not primarily concerned with joining the debate. It is the simple wish of the author to attempt to explain why individuals might believe in a phenomenon that has, to date, so little research to support it. Interestingly, and as alluded to above, the theories discussed below can be extrapolated to understand more fully the above-mentioned debate by those on either side of the "paranormal fence" (that is to say, an attempt at rational analysis of the data is being overwhelmed by a more intuitive decision process. This will be discussed at length below).

CONTEMPORARY DECISION THEORY

Contemporary decision theorists stress the need to view the decision process in a holistic manner. The work of these researchers points to the importance of a wide range of information that impacts on decisions, including a complex array of sensory stimuli as well as information from memory. Many cognitive psychologists discuss the notion of the interaction of rational and intuitive cognitive processes in a decision mode (see Hammond, 1996, for a review of research in this area). They posit that information relevant to a decision is likely to include, on the one hand, knowledge that is semantic/analytic/factual in nature and, on the other hand, knowledge that is episodic/experiential or personally meaningful to the individual decision maker. There is a need to embrace decision models that are cognisant of the complex array of "information gathered using their five major senses as well as upon information reconstructed from their memory systems" (Cooksey, 1996, p. xi).

The work of neuropsychologists and cognitive psychologists is leading to the construction of a template of the brain structures implicated in these processes, as well as a general theory of the way that knowledge is cognitively stored. It is only through a thorough investigation of these cognitive processes that researchers can begin to unpack the complexity of

[1] For another evaluation of the survival hypothesis, see Stephen E. Braude (2003), *Immortal remains. The evidence for life after death.* Lanham, MD: Bowman & Littlefield. This book is reviewed in the current issue of the Journal. —*Ed.*

the decision-making process, a process that is no less relevant to an understanding of why Edward is so readily accepted than to why the space shuttle Challenger was launched under the circumstances that it was.

HAMMOND'S IDEAS

The work of decision theorists such as Hammond (1996) is relevant to the above ideas on dual–processing memory structures, in the following way. It appears that both decision theorists and cognitive psychologists are cognisant of the need to treat the information-processing mechanisms of humans other than in a unitary fashion, as was the case for much of the twentieth century. Rather, these theorists are beginning to understand the complexity of the cognitive system, with its concomitant dependence on several types of information, including factual and episodic data. It would seem that researchers such as Tulving (Tulving & Schacter, 1990) and Paivio (1983) are concentrating upon the specific mechanisms of information processing, including storage of, and access to qualitatively distinct knowledge. Decision theorists such as Hammond (1996) and Epstein (1994), on the other hand, focus on the cognitive system in a more global manner, and attempt to understand how the brain uses this qualitatively distinct information to make decisions.

To elaborate on the ideas of contemporary decision theorists, Hammond suggests that humans process information on a "Cognitive Continuum" (1996) anchored at one end by pure intuition and at the other by analysis. Depending upon the task to be performed and the conditions surrounding the decision maker, an individual will use a cognitive process along this continuum. Hammond explains the Cognitive Continuum thus:

> Consider the behaviour of persons attempting to cope with a highly structured task, a problem in physics, say, or mathematics, that they expect to solve by analytical means. It is common to observe that problem–solvers proceed by trying an analytically derived solution, discovering failure, and, at that point, making a new attempt. When all analytically derived efforts fail, the subject's cognitive activity moves away from analysis to quasirationality; that is, the subject's cognitive activity begins to acquire elements of intuitive cognition. "Hunches" begin to guide behaviour; undefended, perhaps indefensible, ideas spontaneously appear and affect decisions about what to do. If the problem is so difficult that "hunches" refined by analysis fail to provide a solution, then the subject's cognitive activity will move far enough along the cognitive continuum to

> become predominantly intuitive; cognition may consist almost entirely of pictorial imagery. . . . But if the problem–solver finds that intuition provides an idea to be tested and is therefore sufficient to move him or her to an analytical mode . . . , the subject may be said to move, not necessarily continuously or smoothly, from analysis through quasirationality to intuition and then back again to analysis. The path from the context of discovery to the context of verification is a cyclical one. (Hammond, 1996, p. 193)

Elements of the information environment that influence cognition along the continuum include time pressure, confusing circumstances and information overload. Thus, an intuitive mode of cognition is likely to be induced whenever there is limited time to make a decision, the circumstances surrounding the decision are confusing (such as attempting to determine the death experience, a process wherein there lies little consensus) and there is a great deal of information to be processed (Hammond, 1996). Hammond further suggests that information presented in pictorial form (such as Edward being broadcast through television as well as appearing live in some instances) will induce intuition, whereas verbal or numerical information induces analysis. His ideas are supported by research findings reviewed by Epstein (1994).

At this point, it is also timely to discuss the fact that Hammond's (1996) notion of quasirationality might be useful in explaining the ongoing and sometimes heated debate between those who are skeptical of paranormal phenomena and those who are not. It was stated above that confusing circumstances and information overload can move an individual towards the intuitive end of the continuum and it is suggested by the present author that these two criteria are most definitely in existence with regard to paranormal research. Might it be the case that skeptics and non-skeptics alike find themselves shifting along the Cognitive Continuum as more information appears? In addition, the circumstances surrounding life after death are certainly one of the more confusing questions posed by individuals throughout history. Hammond's theory (1996) would seem to suggest that this (shifting along the Continuum) is indeed the case.

Hammond's ideas are valuable in understanding the ability of humans to process information both analytically and intuitively. Historical attempts to understand these processes have assumed an either/or view of intuition and analysis; that is, that when an individual is faced with a decision situation, they will behave either rationally or intuitively. These researchers have, furthermore, attached value judgements to these two forms of cognitive activity. Some have stated that intuition is best, whereas

others have argued forcefully for the superiority of analysis (see Hammond [1996] for a comprehensive discussion of this debate).

Hammond refutes the superiority of one form of cognition over another, stating that, given sufficient time, individuals will "oscillate" between analysis and intuition when making a single decision, and that both of these forms of information processing are necessary in everyday problem–solving. He states that 'quasirationality', which includes elements of both intuition and analysis is the predominant mode of information processing, and that it combines the best of both worlds: relative precision is gained from analysis, and generalisability (of the solution) occurs from intuition. It is argued that this notion of 'quasirationality' is responsible for the widespread support that Edward enjoys. That is to say, many factors coalesce to induce a less-than-rational analysis of Edward's ability. That is, our rational minds question his ability; however, our intuition "takes over" and we're left thinking that interacting with deceased persons is a reality. This phenomenon may also assist in an explanation of why investigators in this area of research are not able to reach any degree of consensus. It may be the case that some of their attempts to analyse data relating to life after death are quasirational in nature.

Hammond's ideas present a solid framework into which can be comfortably placed many current ideas relating to knowledge systems (presented below), such as those of Epstein (1994), Loewenstein (1996) and Damasio (1994) (who postulate the existence of two interacting forms of cognition, one rational, the other experiential or intuitive). As discussed below, although the terminology used by these authors differs, similarities in the ideas presented point towards a consensus relating to the relative actions of intuitive and rational cognitive processes. As is discussed in the following section, the work of these authors provides a holistic approach to human decision making which is compatible with the ideas of cognitive psychologists, such as Tulving (Tulving & Schacter, 1990) and Paivio (1983), who are interested in these processes at a finer level of analysis.

The complexity of human information-processing has only recently begun to be fully appreciated, and the onus now is on researchers to be cognisant of the dual–code perspective and Hammond's (1996) notion of a Cognitive Continuum, and to begin to research cognitive structures in more depth. If it is the case that humans utilise multiple information processing systems, and that the information contained therein has differential effects on behaviour, it is important for researchers to attempt to tap into these, and to measure, more precisely, their relative behavioural impacts.

EPSTEIN'S IDEAS

Epstein (1994) has reviewed multiple-memory theory and decision theory and has, in addition, discussed supporting evidence for these views in his seminal article. Epstein (1994) discusses the notion of interactive modes of cognitive processing, the rational (a verbal–analytical, deliberative, rational process) and the experiential (a largely preconscious, nonverbal, automatic process based on experience and which is emotionally–laden). According to Epstein, individuals possess three conceptual systems: namely, a rational, an experiential, and an associationistic system (1991). These systems constitute levels of awareness, and these, in turn, affect our feelings, behaviour and conscious thinking. The rational system operates primarily at a conscious level, and its actions are governed by socially prescribed rules of inference. The associationistic system is similar to Freud's unconscious system, and the experiential system is a relatively old system, due to its long evolutionary history (evolving over at least 7 million years), its direct link to emotions suggesting a strong biological component, and its intractability relating to moderation by cultural training.

Epstein (1991) states that, by contrast, the rational system has been developed over a mere 5000 years, and that it has a lesser effect on everyday decisions and behaviours because "it would be inefficient to be conscious of all of one's interpretive and decision making processes" (p. 7). That is, much behaviour is determined by preconscious cognitions that allow individuals to manoeuvre through life's course without continually bringing thoughts (cognitions) to awareness, thus allowing rapid assessment and decisive action.

An advantage of the rational system is that it is well suited to analysis and for evaluating long-term consequences of particular decisions. The experiential system, by contrast, takes into account emotional consequences of decisions (thereby attending to possibly significant "emotive" sources of data that are not considered by the rational system). This system appraises a situation according to certain feelings aroused (e.g., emotions surrounding the grieving process) — if the feelings are positive, behaviours are enlisted to enhance this state. However, if feelings are negative, behaviours will act to terminate it. That is, individuals will attempt to counteract their negative emotions surrounding a loved one who is deceased by terminating these feelings, perhaps via consulting a psychic. Thus, these feelings influence both thoughts and behaviours in specific ways. Loewenstein (1996) discusses human decision-making, and takes particular note of so–called visceral factors (emotionally-driven ideas) that affect our behaviour. Loewenstein's ideas are described later.

According to Epstein (1991), the experiential system also affects conscious thoughts. The rational system can override the experiential system when there is a perceived conflict between the two. However, the experiential system will win out when the individual is not aware of any such conflict and also when the individual is under stress. Epstein states that "it is important to note that the consideration here is of a distinction between two cognitive systems that operate in parallel, and not between a cognitive system and a presumably noncognitive emotional system, which I do not believe exist" (p. 14). These two cognitive systems, the experiential and the rational, have been associated with left– and right–hemispheric functions, respectively (Fox, 1995). That is, the functions of these two systems appear to mimic the actions of the two hemispheres of the brain.

Evidence for the existence of these two primary systems comes from a number of sources. Fazio (1986) and Bargh, Chaiken, Governer and Pratto (1992) have posited two ways of processing information, one that is purposeful and deliberative, the other being relatively automatic and heuristic. Fazio (1986) and Bargh et al. (1992) propose a system whereby attitudes can be automatically activated. These authors state that, furthermore, "attitudes can affect behaviour without any effort or intention on the part of the individual, that is, in a spontaneous, automatic manner" (Bargh et al., 1992, 893–894). There exists much research support for this contention, namely through sequential priming experiments (Bargh, 1992; Bargh et al., 1992; Fazio, 1986, 1993a,b).

In addition, Fazio has conducted a number of studies showing that there is a stronger attitude–behaviour relationship when a subject has had *direct experience* with the attitude object (in this case, Edward himself), which might be an instance of experiential knowledge affecting behaviour. For example, in a study involving campus housing (Regan & Fazio, 1977; cited in Fazio & Zanna, 1981) it was found that the attitudes of students having direct experience with a housing shortage (which resulted in these students experiencing temporary housing before being moved into permanent housing) were more predictive of behaviour than the attitudes of students not having personally experienced the campus housing crisis. Furthermore, it has been shown that attitudes based upon direct experience with the attitude object are more accessible from memory (Fazio, Powell & Williams, 1989). Sappington et al. (reported in Epstein, 1994) also conducted experiments, the results of which showed that emotionally–based beliefs predicted subsequent behaviour more strongly than intellective beliefs. Reber (1993) also discusses implicit and explicit knowledge systems, which equate to experiential and rational systems, respectively.

The use of vignettes to determine when subjects will make irrational judgements (Miller, Tversky & Kahneman, cited in Epstein, 1994;

and Epstein et al., cited in Epstein, 1994) shows that when subjects are asked specifically to make rational judgements, they can, but that these conflict with more emotionally–laden judgements. That is, when asked about the proper response, they admit that the intellectual one is more rational, but that they still prefer the experiential one.

DAMASIO'S IDEAS

This discussion about two interacting, parallel systems of information-processing is directly relevant to the ideas of Damasio (1994), Vogel (1997) and Bechara et al. (1997), who posit the existence of two systems of knowledge, one that is largely factual, and which proposes response options and possible outcomes relating to these and applies reasoning strategies to the activated facts and options; and another, which contains information related to past, emotional experiences and the rewards and punishments attached to these behaviours. When faced with a sensory representation of a particular situation or object, it is thought that the latter (experiential) system is accessed prior to the former (factual) system, and that the information contained therein biases, or influences how information in the factual system is dealt with. The authors suggest that the ventromedial frontal cortices of the central nervous system are involved in the storage of experiential information.

These conclusions were reached after extensive research with brain–damaged patients who experienced difficulty in making decisions. These patients appeared to lack the ability to trigger, in the decision process, the "nonconscious emotional responses that normal people may register as intuition or a 'hunch' " (Vogel, 1997, p. 1269). In other words, a nonconscious, emotionally–oriented central nervous system mechanism, possibly processed in the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for guiding reasoning, is dysfunctional in some individuals, so that, when faced with several options in a decision task, they have no emotional guide as to which options would be better. Wrangham and Peterson (1996), in explaining why some individuals have difficulty in deciding which option is best, paraphrase Damasio's ideas thus:

> their brains are unable to connect an emotional value to the intellectual menu of possible options. Without being able to feel which solution they like, they have no way to choose. These patients seem to demonstrate that pure reason is inadequate for reaching a decision, a hypothesis that Damasio applies to all of us.

> Reason generates the list of possibilities. Emotion chooses from that list. (Wrangham & Peterson, 1996, p. 189)

The work of Damasio and his colleagues provides support for the existence of multiple memory systems, namely an emotional, intuitive system, and another that is factually–oriented, and that involves rational/analytic cognitive processes. The interaction of these two systems appears to mediate decision processes and, as the research of Vogel (1997) and Bechara et al. (1997) demonstrates, failure of the emotionally–oriented system to influence the actions of the factual system leads to sub–optimal decisions.

JAYNES'S IDEAS

In a similar vein, Jaynes (1990) suggests that the conscious mind is a relatively recent development in human history and that, prior to this, mental language did not exist, and initiation of action occurred via cognitive, or internal voices, believed by the individual to be externally–generated, instructing the individual on how to behave. These voices were interpreted by earlier civilisations as religious entities speaking to the individual. Jaynes interprets humans' predisposition towards introspection and problem solving, on the one hand, and intuitive, action–based cognitive processes in terms of influences of the right– and left–hemisphere of the central nervous system, and suggests that the right hemisphere, which is involved with creativity, non–verbal ideation, and spatial and pattern construction was dominant in earlier civilisations. The left–hemisphere, specialised for language, has only become an important influence on behaviour in more recent times and may be compromised by an intuitive thought process in certain circumstances. Jaynes' ideas are compatible with the ideas of Epstein (1994), Hammond (1996), Damasio (1996) and others in postulating the existence of multiple cognitive systems which underlie particular behaviours, and whose processes are not available for conscious consideration.

Jaynes marshals an impressive array of support for his theory, including a discussion of the notion that ideas, intellectual insights, and suchlike are not arrived at through conscious deliberation. Jaynes suggests that consciousness is not the seat of reason. That is, when individuals find a solution to a problem, it tends to burst into consciousness and we are at a loss to explain how this conclusion was reached. Jaynes (1990) describes the well–known anecdotes of: (a) Einstein's greatest ideas coming to him so suddenly while he was shaving that he was forced to move the razor blade

carefully each morning lest he cut himself, (b) a well–known British physicist stating that "we often talk about the three B's, the Bus, the Bath, and the Bed. That is where the great discoveries are made in our science", and (c) Poincaré (reported in Jaynes, 1990) describing how his mathematical theories suddenly erupted into consciousness during a geological excursion. Similar examples are provided by Hammond (1996), who describes the cognitive styles of both Einstein and Richard Feynman, demonstrating their use of both intuition and analysis. It would appear that these great thinkers used both pictorial and analytical modes of cognition and that they were at a loss to explain the mechanisms of the former. This discussion relates to the present argument in highlighting the notion that humans may, in fact, possess multiple processing capabilities, and that the system responsible for some of the most brilliant ideas is not conscious, and not capable of being made conscious.

LOEWENSTEIN'S IDEAS

Loewenstein (1996) discusses the area of decision behaviour, and suggests that visceral factors influence behaviour. His theory relates to the observation that individuals frequently behave in a manner that runs counter to their self–interest. An example of this phenomenon is the fact that individuals will follow religious "rules" even to the detriment of their personal financial circumstances. Some church-goers regularly pay sometimes quite substantial sums to their particular denominational church. The more extreme of "suicide bombers" also attests to this phenomenon.

Loewenstein (1996) suggests that, when individuals behave in a manner that is counter to their self–interest (addictions, and so on), that *visceral factors,* such as the craving for chemical substances to which they have become addicted, or the craving for food when hungry and liquid when thirsty, are at least partially responsible. He states that visceral factors entail:

> a direct hedonic impact, ... and an influence on the relative desirability of different goods and actions. Hunger, for example, is an aversive sensation that affects the desirability of eating. (Loewenstein, 1996, p. 273)

Loewenstein (1996) states that, furthermore, when the intensity of a visceral factor reaches a certain threshold, this will lead individuals to behave in a manner that is counter to their self–interest, even though they may be aware, at a conscious level, of behaving thus. For example, in many cases the

craving for overindulging in alcohol consumption will override rational, analytic considerations relating to the utility of this (self–defeating) behaviour, and the individual will find themselves participating in such activities despite their awareness of the negative consequences that will follow. An example that is more pertinent to the present article relates to individuals engaging in the act of adultery despite the reservations of society (and perhaps the individual) that this behaviour is irrational.

This theory might help to explain the finding that traditional decision theories flounder in predicting behaviour from attitudes because they assume rational deliberation (that is, they emphasise 'cool' behaviour), rather than examining the effects of 'hot', emotionally–driven behaviour (Loewenstein, 1996, p. 274). That is, while individuals know at an "intellectual" and rational level that continuing to take drugs will harm them, or that having unsafe sex has the potential for serious health risks, perhaps death, their behaviour in these contexts is driven by less rational, emotionally driven visceral factors.

Loewenstein (1996) states that the action of visceral factors overwhelms individuals temporarily, so that, while they are able, at an intellectual level, to envisage the negative effects of their actions, these ideas lack any visceral factor, and individuals therefore do not experience (in their imaginings) the full emotional impact of behaving in a manner that is congruent with their self–interest. That is, when we imagine how we will feel if we leave a fun party early, this cognitive picture consists of a scenario that is not accompanied by the corresponding emotional state and, when contrasted with the emotion present when the craving for fun and gaiety arrives, the battle between acting in accordance with our self–interest and not acting in this manner is won over by the activation of visceral factors. That is, we decide to over-consume alcohol due to the existence of visceral factors urging us on, and the concurrent lack of emotion relating to how we will feel if we follow our consciences. These ideas closely resemble those of Hammond (1996), as Loewenstein (1996) is clearly alluding to the existence of two cognitive decision styles, one that is analytical and one that is intuitive.

These ideas are readily able to explain the "John Edward phenomenon". When a close relative or friend dies, it is very likely that visceral factors will be active to the detriment of more rational thought processes. The notion that we can communicate in some way with our dearly deceased would naturally elicit strong emotional responses (i.e., visceral factors) that overwhelm our ability to think rationally. It must also be stated at this point that the fear of death, which is almost universal, can be alleviated if visceral factors are readily available to overwhelm our willingness to thoroughly study the evidence of life after death and

therefore, positive outcomes from dealings with those such as John Edward are very likely to block the action of more factual, rational cognitive styles.

As stated, Loewenstein's theory is congruent with that of Hammond (1996) but is also remarkably similar to the ideas of Epstein (1994), Bechara et al. (1997), and other theorists discussed above, in postulating the existence of two information-processing systems, one that is rational, and one in which cognitions are driven by emotional factors (largely derived from past experiences). Specifically, Loewenstein's ideas on visceral factors temporarily overwhelming individuals (1996) are not unlike those of Damasio (1994) and Epstein (1994) in suggesting that an emotional system that is initially triggered in response to a particular stimulus object affects the subsequent functioning of a rational system, leading to certain information and options being explored at the expense of others.

These findings relate to the present article in drawing attention to the notion that researchers investigating parapsychological phenomena cannot continue to use (exclusively) models of individual behaviour that do not encompass these purported multiple systems in their theoretical underpinnings.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion to be drawn from the work of Hammond (1996), Fazio (1986), and Epstein (1994), as well as that of others positing a dual–processing cognitive structure is as follows: human knowledge is not only context-specific, it derives from many sources and there is evidence to suggest that there exist at least two systems for processing this knowledge which, in turn, engender two behavioural outcomes: namely, knowledge which is influenced by emotionally–significant past experience, that is emotionally–laden, and is encoded in the form of concrete exemplars and narratives; and knowledge which is based upon analytical, conscious reasoning and is factual and relatively affect–free in nature. These theories can be of enormous assistance in helping researchers to understand behaviour more fully, such as an individual's willingness to believe that Edward can "communicate" with deceased persons, despite the lack of research findings to support this notion (Skeptic, 2003; see also Blackmore for a comprehensive review of data in this field). A notable exception is the findings by Schwartz (2002) which are at present being vigorously debated by interested parties, the debate of which may also, in fact, be explained using the above ideas on decision theory.

Furthermore, why go to all the trouble of attempting to explain human decision-making in this context? Despite the obvious benefits of

contributing to a body of knowledge that helps us to understand behaviour (such as paranormal beliefs), there is the very real notion that psychics such as Edward are blocking the grieving process, leaving individuals with little or no closure regarding the death of loved ones (Skeptic, 2003). There is a well-established body of research to support the notion that the grieving process is complex and consists of stages through which an individual must move in order to accept the death of a loved one (Kubler-Ross, 1997). Use of mediums to "communicate" with deceased loved ones arguably blocks successful transition through these stages.

Finally, and as alluded to above, the decision theories discussed in this article may be useful in explaining, to some degree at least, the heated debate surrounding paranormal phenomena. Researchers in this area who profess to be entirely analytical in their approach to science may, in fact, find that, like all other humans, they too are capable of moving along the Cognitive Continuum (1996) for various reasons. This last point is certainly worth pondering.

Future research will be conducted by administering to individuals a decision-styles inventory (Epstein's Rational Emotive Inventory) and by asking them to demonstrate their decision-making propensity via properly designed decision vignettes.

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New England School of Business,
University of New England,
Armidale, NSW 2350
Email: skjeldal@une.edu.au