

Oscar from a nursing home in Providence, Rhode Island, made the pages of the *New England Journal of Medicine* because of his habit of hopping on the bed of those about to die.

How can we explain these fascinating encounters? Telepathy, clairvoyance, psychokinesis, Jung's synchronicity have not passed the test of evidence: *The roots of coincidence* (1972) a lively enquiry by polymath and euthanasiast Arthur Koestler could have been written today. Science may recognise the brain's part in consciousness of the world around us but has little to say about the origin of our thoughts, feelings and beliefs. The Fenwicks may have hit on a clue in their study of near-death experiences. These happen during a cardiac arrest when the individual characteristically looks down

on their body as it enters a tunnel on a journey, from which it is turned back. At this time there is no brain activity, no 'consciousness', as judged by the electroencephalogram. The tantalising thought occurs that such experiences are driven by something else that we lamely call 'soul' or 'mind'. Tim Bayne, one of the editors of the forthcoming *Oxford companion to consciousness* has written:

*...the pressing problem of consciousness research concerns our inability to grasp, even in the faintest outlines, how conscious states of any kind emerge from the grey porridge found between the ears.*

ALEX PATON

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