LIFE and DEATH
Making Sense of It

Answering big questions we don't like to talk about

Francis O’Neill
Life and Death
making sense of it

A thought-provoking spiritual perspective on our lives

Francis O'Neill
Praise for Life and Death: Making Sense of It

*This book has the potential to change the world view of its readers. It offers a broad yet very detailed sweep across the whole spectrum of the subject matter, which makes the book wide-ranging and inclusive.*

*I am pretty cynical when it comes to believing in the supernatural in any form, but I found myself having to stop short and really think about the possibility of life after death here. I particularly liked how it touches on the fact that people who believe in life after death are happier than those who don’t. Food for thought, indeed.*

*This is a very individual and readable book which is written from the heart, and which reaches out with great warmth to its readers.*

Joanne Harrington, Editor
(via PublishNation UK)
Life and Death: Making Sense of It
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I’d like to also thank the medium, Colin Fry (also, from 2015, on the *Other Side*), for permitting me to use his one-to-one reading example for the *Fringe Benefits* chapter.

Books have played a very important part in my life and journey. I owe a huge gratitude of thanks to all of the writers whose works have tested, or helped to influence, the direction and metal of my beliefs – and subsequently helped my own writing. These are the writers of books across a spectrum of topics from the sciences and psychology out to the fringes, the spiritual and downright esoteric. A number of these wonderful souls get a mention, or more, in the following pages.
**Dedication**

This book is dedicated to my mother, and also to my partner, Annie.

To my mother, Margaret, not only for the obvious of bringing me into this world but for all the love and support she gave me as a child and young adult. And particularly – in context with this work – her tireless help on getting me to improve on my reading, writing and spelling all those years ago. Thank you mother, I’m so grateful to be able to apply the skills you helped me with, in this way.

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Introduction

What is life all about and what happens when we die? Does it all just end there, at that point, or do we go to somewhere else, to what is often called the Other Side? If we do go to the Other Side what is it like when we get there? More importantly what is the point of it all? Is there actually a point to our lives or is it simply the outpouring of what we call nature and evolution – needing no willing participation on our part?

This book examines and proposes answers to these questions, and more… It proposes an overriding vision intended to aid a better understanding of life and death. This is presented from a spiritual and evolutionary perspective, that ultimately includes all of life, not just ourselves.

Our new Constitution is now established, and has an appearance that promises permanency; but in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.

Benjamin Franklin, a Founding Father of the USA

Apart from taxes all of us face death, whether we want to or not. I think it fair to say that it is really beholden upon us to make sense of what this life process is about while there is time to do so. I would go a lot further too, and say that when we come to entertain, and, even further, come to accept the possibility of there being life after death, then it is absolutely imperative that we begin to make sense of life
Life and Death: Making Sense of It
during our time. Not only is this important in order to better understand who we are, why we are here on this journey and adventure, but also to consider that how we live this life could well affect what happens to us after we die. The two states could be inextricably linked together. Indeed I would suggest they most certainly are.

In context, we need, in our busy lives, to be able to take time out to explore the matters and issues behind life in order to gain clarity and wisdom. Preferably this needs to be done under our own steam. It is okay to allow ourselves to be guided by cultural and conventional wisdom, but in order to arrive at our own take on things we would be advised to also explore the less conventional route too. This book, one of many such books I hope you will be exploring, or may have already explored, does offer the less conventional in abundance – so you’ve come to a good place to help you meet this need.

The book's content in brief

To give you a flavour of what is to come, let us look briefly at what each chapter is offering:

The book kicks off with The Good Life chapter, which contemplates, if we are secure, with all or most of our sociocultural, material needs and ambitions being met, are we living the good life. I’ve started here because, I believe, for a great many of us, achieving the good life, as we commonly perceive it, is what we interpret life as being all about. So are we living the dream or perhaps living in a dream, if we see it this way?

In Are you ready for this? I raise the serious matter of death, and later head into asking a series of ten questions linked to it. I’d say, from a spiritual perspective, these are imperative questions. You can decide if you think they are. These questions serve to set things up to give focus for the book.
Faith in there being an afterlife is important but what a growing number of us need is evidence, whether circumstantial, anecdotal or via research, that may help convince us our chances of surviving death are better than fifty-fifty. In the Fringe Benefits chapter I draw on a range of such evidence to suggest our chances of survival may indeed be a great deal better than fifty-fifty.

The Out of the Garden chapter broadly explores the evolution of consciousness. It asks if there is more going on with life than the product of blind evolution; if there is indeed a plan, an intelligence, an intention operating behind it? In context it considers what might have happened, around fifty thousand years ago, that made us humans what we are today.

Do we have a soul? Given that we do, what is it, what does it look like, and where is it? In The Soul Question, this exploration is conducted in context with Christian and esoteric beliefs, and also draws on Eastern traditions of karma and reincarnation.

What is, and where is, The Other Side that we speak of? Is it for real? For a number of people who have had a NDE, or, who are practicing mediums, or psychic, the Other Side definitely exists. This chapter looks at some of the growing evidence for believing in it. It explores what and where it is, what it is like being there and how it arguably fits into our situation here.

After all that has been covered in the book, the concluding Life and Death: Making sense of it chapter asks if we have made any sense of life and death from what we have explored. It also considers how we may move forward with what we may have discovered.

The Six Months to Live appendix leaves us with some thoughts on what we might consider doing now to get our spiritual act together and be able to say, on the Other Side, we made some headway in our time on the earth.

Writing this book

Let me tell you a bit about my writing this book. I should kick off by saying this book represents the outcome of years of exploration,
learning and contemplation. I began drafting a book of this nature during the Nineties when I started to resource ideas and make copious notes for it. However the book you are holding isn't that book. This book has taken on a form of its own and I have sometimes wondered who was writing it. What I mean is that I've had a sense of being pushed along with this. Almost all of what I had written previously fell by the wayside, although it still provided nourishment, *grist to the mill*, for the general direction in which the present work has headed.

Making sense of life and death is, on the face of it, a tall order but I've come to rest in the knowledge that it is equally important to speak up, or *report back*, as I prefer to see it, when one has something to say on such important matters. You can, and no doubt will, make up your own mind regarding how valuable what I have to say is to you. It is important that you do. All I would ask, particularly if you are new to the information presented, that you give it all serious consideration. The following pages focus on providing insight and clarification on what life and death is, as I have come to understand it. If I have a further agenda it is this: that it is my intention to remind you of, and, if need be, awaken you to, the adventure you are already on. It is, more than anything, that of finding and regaining your soul. Okay one can just as easily say it is about climbing an inner mountain, finding one's higher self, seeking higher consciousness or nirvana, being on a quest for the Holy Grail. It makes little difference in essence. The book offers an overview and starting point by which to set sail on such a voyage while having a clearer destination in mind. Hopefully it will help inspire you to grasp this wonderful moment while you are here, and here now.

What has contributed to my writing the book

It may also help to share some of my own background experience. This is experience that brought me to begin questioning my beliefs regarding what life is about. When I think back my interest to understand life and death began in earnest during the Seventies, but
actually the process started much earlier, way back to when I began to question my religious upbringing.

Given my Irish roots, being raised as a Roman Catholic may come as no surprise. My family moved to England, from County Waterford, when I was less than two-years-old. At that time my father was mostly away at sea in the Merchant Navy, and meanwhile my mother took to housekeeping for a group of priests, at a presbytery, in Leicestershire. You could say I became inducted into Catholicism in more ways than one. Growing up it was normal practice for the family (which later included my three sisters) to attend church regularly on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation; and probably every three weeks or so we would also attend Confession to seek forgiveness for our sins. To add to this mix, I also attended a Roman Catholic school (Corpus Christi SM in Leicester) for my secondary education. So, as you can gather, I had back then every opportunity for turning into a good Catholic and indeed I was heading that way.

It was while I was in my first year of secondary education that I became most inspired with my faith. I got completely sold on my religion, and, at that time, I seriously – as any eleven-year-old child could be serious – had designs on becoming a priest when I grew up. After talking to my mother, and the local priest, about it, I decided I would begin this quest by serving on the altar of my local church. I recall pressuring my mother to get the necessary vestments made for me – for which, regretfully, she made financial sacrifices in order for me to do so.

I say regretfully as, to cut a long story short, my altar boy excursion didn't work out. Within three months I discovered it was not for me. I wasn't as committed as I thought I was. I also found I needed more help with serving the mass, and in Latin, than I recall I was being offered at the time. Things culminated in one very embarrassing mass where I was the only altar boy available and I made a pig’s ear of it to put it mildly. This experience provided what was to be the first big chink in my proposed priesthood plan. Outside, peer group pressure also played a part in this. I was in the
school first eleven football team for my year (and also involved in athletics), and admittedly I was getting more fun out of sports than my religion. It wasn't all that long after ending my altar boy career, some months, that I opened a second chink in my plan; I decided to pull out of attending regular catechism on Sundays. I was by now becoming restless and rebellious against what I was being expected to learn by rote, and after being ticked-off a number of times by one of the nuns – for not doing my studies, and speaking out of turn – I decided to move on. I hasten to add it was not the nun's fault that I decided upon this action, rather, on reflection, I was looking for any excuse to drop out.

Depending on one's viewpoint, fortunately or unfortunately for me, my Christian faith came in for serious questioning starting from that period – possibly for all the wrong reasons. The priesthood plan was shelved. My decisions had left me with an underlying sense of failure too. I felt I had let myself and the family down. I was still, after all, a member of a devout Roman Catholic family. Even so a month or two down the road, having now near disconnected from going to church altogether, I could be found doing a paper-round on Sunday mornings instead – and no doubt sporting black marks all over my soul.³ This was much to the chagrin of my father who, while away at sea during most of my rebellion, had, as I recall, held my mother responsible for not keeping a tighter rein on me.

But it wasn't just my learning issues and rebellion that had sparked my questioning. Around that time I got talking to a man I met on a park bench. Well let me say here that it wasn't quite such a no-no for children to speak to strangers back then – we're talking the late Fifties. What might have been considered odd, especially with regard to the direction of our conversation, was that this person was from the Church of England, a protestant no less, and, although it was never verbalised publicly, folk attending the C of E were considered to be, not of the true faith by us Catholics. So talking to a person with supposedly inferior beliefs, and touching on religion to boot, was breaking unspoken rules and not really on.
As I recall I quizzed him on his sadness and he told me something of his story. It transpired he had been the organist for his local church, and had played there consistently for the last thirty-three years. But then tragedy struck. Not long before I met him he had sadly lost his wife, and then shortly afterwards had suffered a stroke which left him disabled in one arm. He was clearly in pain and very unhappy – still grieving at his huge loss. I remember asking him if he was angry with God and he told me he was. He couldn’t play the organ anymore due to his stroke, and had decided to leave his church – with the upshot being that now, from his perspective, no one seemingly cared whether he lived or died. He was asking why God could have done this to him, after all the service he had given to the Church. Back then I had no answer. He was in a miserable state and hearing his story had only aided and abetted my decision to drop out of attending catechism and further question my faith.

It was all very sad and I commiserated as much as a child could do. I saw him once again before we went separate ways. His plight however had carried a message that was probably ripe for me to hear. It was this that led me, some years later, to descend into hell, as some might see it, by becoming, what I’d describe as a fully signed-up atheist and existentialist, with attitude.

The matter, of what I now believed in, however, was still raw. My growing perspective had to make sense, provide arguments (to myself as much as anyone) against the influences of my upbringing, and I was driven to better understand existence, more as a means to counter religious argument than anything more profound. This led to my asking questions about life and death in the broader sense – which in turn took me on a quest into reading up on topics notably involving philosophy, psychology and animal behaviour. Once I got started I developed quite a thirst for it. This was in my twenties. I was seeking to fully endorse my new found beliefs, and I have to say I was getting well into my version of existentialism by that point. It was a godless meaningless world I existed in for the most part. That is not to say I was unhappy in it though as it was providing the drive, the passion to read, to study and explore. Besides I was now
feeling fully vindicated in my decision to leave my religion behind. Subsequently I could find nothing in my explorations, discussions and challenges with others to dissuade me from that position. At least it was looking that way…

From Freud to Jung – a turning point

One cannot read up on psychology in the general and philosophical sense without taking stock of Sigmund Freud's view on the psyche. The sexual orientation of Freud's model to explain the workings of the psyche and behaviour made complete sense to my take on life. However, taking interest in Freud eventually led me to hearing of one of his close buddies. Initially I was more than a bit sceptical of all this talk of archetypes and mandalas; and even worse, talk of alchemy – he had to be out there with the fairies. I thus avoided looking into his views for quite some time. But as I eventually came to read more books with references to this psychiatrist I decided to get hold of one of his books – and what better than one about the man himself. I came by Memories, Dreams, Reflections. This is an autobiography of Carl G Jung (by his friend and biographer, Aniela Jaffé) and this, with resistance on my part, somehow sparked my interest. Well I know what the "somehow" was. The manner in which it was written was open, refreshing and honest. Jung had also wrestled with his Christian upbringing, being the son of a pastor, and if nothing else this caught my attention and imagination to read on…

Whereas Freud spoke of the psyche being as an iceberg floating in the dangerous seas of the unconscious, Jung viewed the psyche more as an island jutting out of the sea. From his perspective each one of us is like an island that, underneath the waves, joins up with other islands on the seabed. Jung was proposing that at this deep unconscious level our psyches are as a collective whole, all linked together – hence his concept of the Collective unconscious. It is via this collective unconscious that we may tap into material and experience from something deeper and more ancient than our individual selves may muster. Jung linked his archetypes – universal motifs such as the tree of life, the great mother, the child, the shadow, the trickster and many
more – to this concept. These motifs are expressed through our art, our dreams, myths and our religions. Understanding the collective unconscious then helps to link us to something larger, more universal that can percolate up through our lives. It opens a doorway into other possibilities in consciousness, in intuition, and allows the symbolical and the meaningful to become not just valid to our understanding but to be considered at the very root of our existence.

I was kicking against this. On more than one occasion I shelved the book, almost threw it away, but I came to admit to myself that I liked the eloquence of his argument, and particularly his concept of the collective. It was logical, optimistic and had immediate appeal. The notion that we could be all in this together struck an important chord. The difference in Freud and Jung’s perspectives on the psyche gave me a big clue too that they were like chalk and cheese in their worldviews. Jung was interested in such matters as the paranormal, parapsychology and the occult. It was all part of what he was open to and exploring – and it tied in with the unusual, the paranormal, the magical, the spiritual, the profound, also being possible within his overarching collective unconscious concept. Freud, on the other hand, was a complete sceptic regarding such matters – a narrative I was well used to expounding myself. He and Jung were polarised with regard to the matter of what happens at death – with Jung being more open to survival and the notion of our having a soul.

One idea and one acceptance led to another and, to put it mildly, Jung’s book did more than spark my interest. Rather, by the end of it, it had helped me to begin a 180-degree turn from the direction in which I was travelling. It had helped me to begin that turn with gusto and excitement. It started me on a new path no less. It was like a homecoming for me, a quenching of a thirst, and I began to look into his theories on archetypes and yes, even alchemy. Later I got hold of a number of his Collected Works to study more on these topics in depth. His autobiography also introduced me to the Chinese oracle, the I Ching (ye jing), which I have consulted ever since on various important personal matters. Also Jung’s idea of synchronicity interested me greatly – and to some degree tied in with
my later interest in astrology. This was all sparked off as a direct result of reading his autobiography. A door had creaked open to my considering I may truly have been missing some vital component in what I had hitherto believed.

Following exploration of Jung's ideas I began to consider things differently, to focus on a more positive questioning, in search of the spiritually oriented view of life. I might just mention another work that also gave me a bit of a broadside on my old direction of travel at around this time. This was Lyall Watson's book, *Supernature*, a birthday present, from one of my sisters. Oh my, doors were creaking open alright. In Jung I'd found a psychiatrist talking seriously of what could otherwise be called fringe interests, and now here was Watson, a life scientist, treating a whole raft of hitherto taboo subjects – that I had also previously rubbished with venom – with some serious respect and articulation.

Pursuing a growing interest in the I Ching took me almost inevitably into looking at Eastern philosophy and religion – involving reading up on Confucius, Lao Tzu, Zen, Buddhism, Sufism and Hinduism. My world was opening up to spiritual possibilities. I must tell you that it was an absolutely fantastic voyage of discovery for me at that time – a time when I was also immersed in running archaeological excavations mostly on Roman or earlier Prehistoric sites – and insights, and connections were coming on almost daily. Now, for instance, I better understood Neolithic and Bronze Age burials, a returning to the earth womb – to be reborn. They held powerful spiritual beliefs, that I believe also included reincarnation.

**A jolt of an experience**

As well as taking an ongoing interest in fringe matters and spirituality, since back then, I should mention I've had a number of experiences that have forced me to think on the matter of life and death. These are experiences that have helped me to formalise and round-out my beliefs. I mention some of these in the *Fringe Benefits* chapter and won't labour them here. But there is one I'm thinking of right now that I haven't included there. Let me start by asking if you
believe in such a being as a guardian angel? I know a lot of people do and certainly stories about guardian angels have been around since biblical times at least. I keep an open mind on the whole topic of angels, but I’ll admit I’m less inclined to believe in guardian angels as such. Let me give you an alternative viewpoint on this matter. I firmly believe we do, each one of us, have a companion, a guardian, but this is not so much an angel as our own soul, or higher self if you prefer. From this higher vantage point, I suggest, we have the capacity to guide and intervene, on our worldly human selves, almost as an external agent, should we get into circumstances where such help or intervention is needed. This may happen most noticeably when our lives are in danger and intervention is required, necessary, and also possible – it won't be in every situation.

You need to make up your own mind regarding the matter but, given this scenario, in the following encounter I choose to believe I was helped out of a dangerous situation by my soul. In any case certainly the experience was that something or someone did help me, that part I’m now sure of. This happened before I read anything by Jung and I was still very much steeped in my non-spiritual beliefs – which made the event all the more unsettling.

This is about my driving home alone, in the early hours of a morning, along a road I knew well. I’d been over to see a girlfriend, the other side of Grantham, and some thirty plus miles from my home in Leicestershire. It was the late Sixties. At that time I was involved in motorcycle racing (which, by then, was the only Sunday service I attended) and fond of speed – I confess I still am fond of the exhilaration one gets from travelling fast but am much less the boy-racer these days. When quiet, like it normally was at that time of morning, along that stretch of road, I could really get up some momentum and regularly reached speeds in excess of 90 mph between villages, after leaving Grantham. On this occasion, after a mile or two from Grantham, I caught up with the only other car on the road. This person was driving a Jaguar as I well recall. Their car was very much faster on acceleration than mine – a souped-up Mini – particularly on straight stretches of road. By comparison though,

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Introduction
they drove very slowly through bends and curves. So slow in fact that the driver was actually, and frustratingly, holding me up on my journey. This situation went on for some miles.

To cut to the chase, I decided there was nothing for it but to overtake this car... I took my opportunity to do so just prior to a particular stretch of road that is winding and runs gently downhill for about three or four miles towards the town of Melton Mowbray. I had caught up with the car once again as we came towards this stretch of road, and, as they braked for the first in the series of bends; I pulled out and drove past them. It was dry and my car hugged the road well. I pulled away rapidly. The lights of the other car were now disappearing into the distance behind me as I drove through the fast bends that followed. And so I continued on apace towards a final bend that led down towards the town – about a mile away from it.

The bend I’m thinking of was back then, and might still be, a sharpish right hander that led one down a steepish bit of hill. The camber ran away from the direction of the bend too, to add to the potential hazard. With the wind in my sails, and alive with the excitement of finally getting past the other car, I approached this bend at a much higher speed than I should. I braked, and then it happened... One of my rear brakes (on the driver side) suddenly locked with the effect that it threw the car into a dramatic spin and I lost control. Now, merely a passenger, the car spun down the hill for what must have been a full turn and then some. The next clear impression I had was that it was now coming out of the spin and heading across the comparatively narrow two-lane road towards the stone wall of a field. I was still doing a fair rate of knots. My recollection of speed is relative but things were happening quickly. I recall thinking this was it, there was no way I could stop this; the car and I were soon to be going into the wall at speed. I remember vividly bracing myself for the impact. This was also before seatbelts were compulsory in cars too, and I didn't have one.

Suddenly, just as shocking, the car now veered away from heading towards the wall, and now – while facing in the opposite direction to which I had come from, for the second time at least – it
slowed rapidly, and next it gently slid and stopped by the grass verge on the side of the road. It looked like, for all of the world, that I was on my way up the hill, and had just parked at the spot. The next moment everything switched off – the lights and engine – and there was silence in the night's darkness that now enveloped me. But only briefly: the other car now arrived and passed by my parked vehicle at speed. Everything had happened so fast that I suspect the other driver wasn’t even aware that it was the same car that had passed them, or that anything untoward had happened.

I collected my senses. Hey I was alive and in one piece. I took stock of what had just happened. After a short while I got out and checked the car. It too was in one piece – no obvious damage at all. It all looked fine. I tried the engine and it started without a problem. I soon discovered the brakes were fine, having cooled down. I turned the car around and was on my way again – homeward bound – and giving thanks that, in my mindset, I had gotten away with it. That had been a close call, but luck was on my side.6

So was it luck or a fluke? At the time I thought it must have been some kind of chance happening. In reality I couldn't really make sense of it. It was outside my understanding. Certainly it was shocking for a number of obvious reasons and it did rattle me that I couldn't quite explain what had happened. I understood why it went into a spin, with the brake locking, but how it was all calmed down and parked safely was something else. It was like someone else had taken over and parked the car. It occurred to me afterwards that had I instead avoided the wall but come to halt in the middle of the road, the chances are, in the circumstances, the other car would probably have run into me. Later, as I experienced other events and began to see things differently, I became convinced that a helping hand did intervene to save me from serious damage that night. The incident gave me much cause for thought back then and still brings back vivid memories and goose-bumps as I write about it.
A guide for beginners and seasoned travellers

I trust this book will provide you with a good down-to-earth, easy to grasp presentation of, what I call, a thought-provoking, if challenging, spiritual perspective on life and death. Many of the subjects and ideas presented here can be found in other books, but not necessarily assembled with one overriding intention or vision. You’ll find books that tend to focus on one aspect of the prism, be it near-death experience, ghosts, previous lives, mediumship etc. What this book does is draw together a number of these various strands of experience, and associated disciplines, with the intention to provide a more integrated philosophical perspective. It also draws upon ideas that have been around for what seems like an eternity – certainly a few thousand years – and throws in a number of new ideas too. It draws on traditional and esoteric knowledge, on paranormal matters, and a touch more of personal experience.

It needs also to be pointed out that what I have to say here is drawn from traditions, accounts and experiences that are largely still very ignored or overlooked in our world. This is for the most part considered unorthodox, controversial and fringe – and I use the word fringe in the book to make this point. It is not to undermine the value of such knowledge. The advice meanwhile is to not let your children read this unless you want them to grow up asking awkward questions about life, and especially that bit we normally avoid discussing – death. Ah, but on the contrary, that is precisely what I would want them to do. Indeed I argue the content I put forward here should be more readily addressed in our educational systems, for young and old alike – that is, if we are ever to become fully functioning and fully rounded spiritual beings.

Throughout I’m asking you, the reader, to consider that the world isn’t quite as we see it through the lenses of our everyday normality where it is easy to lose ourselves, and lose our awe for life, in the hustle and bustle of nine to five – in the constructs we have
erected that keep us from considering a fuller extent of reality. We have yet to grasp the whole picture of what we are involved with, and, although it is not beyond us, many of us indeed are afraid to look over the parapet to get a better view, fearing what we might find.

Well, I'm hoping this book will provide you with an alternative vantage point for safe and inspiring viewing. But better than that, join me on this journey and adventure. All you'll need to bring with you is an open mind – and to consider exploring further from the information and resources that are a part of what follows. Are you ready to go? Great, let's saddle up and get started.

See you on the other side… Of course I mean the other side of this introduction – for now. Enjoy your journey.

Notes & references

2 Speaking up. I learnt that lesson many years ago when in odd circumstances I found myself involved in an American radio interview of MP Shirley Williams. This was at Radcliffe College, a ladies college in Cambridge, Massachusetts, US, and Ms Williams was being interviewed about her then latest book, Politics is for People. I had turned up on spec, expecting to be part of an audience of about 100 people. As it transpired I was one of a two-people audience in a room just large enough for the small group. During the interview the audience were invited to comment on what had been said. I held back but then Shirley put me on the spot saying, “I think Francis has something to say.” And sure I did. It poured out. Probably not very coherently but to Shirley it made sense and she answered my comments constructively, in the manner we are accustomed to, from her. Either way, she made me feel I had made some valuable contribution to the discussion. I've always endeavoured to speak my mind since – when I have something to say that is.
3 I was brought up to believe that not attending mass on a Sunday was a black mark on one’s soul.
6 If you want to read about a more dramatic escape, take a look at Lucky escapes or intervention - http://lifeanddeaththebook.com/fringe-benefits/lucky-escapes-or-intervention/
Chapter 1

The Good Life

What is the good life? If we are secure with all, or most, of our sociocultural, material needs and ambitions being met, are we living the good life?

You are educated. Your certification is in your degree. You may think of it as the ticket to the good life. Let me ask you to think of an alternative. Think of it as your ticket to change the world.

Tom Brokaw, American TV journalist and author

To begin this journey into making sense of life and death, I believe it will be very helpful if we start by reminding ourselves of what it is that a great many of us desire, want, or indeed expect from life.

What we want of course is largely going to be driven by what's available to us, and where and how we have been raised. If you think about it; within the increasingly secular and sophisticated cultural situation in which a lot of us now live, or are beginning to live (and here I'm thinking of countries that are essentially industrialised, driven by modern economies, involving communication technologies, and democracies; with less interference by orthodox religions), we have developed a broad vision of this lifestyle, complete with its stereotypes that we subscribe to, or at least pay homage to. Because of this vision one could argue that this ideal also has a series of identifiable steps or milestones that pivot around where we will want to be, and what we will want to have, by certain
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Notes & references

1 Tom Brokaw on Brainy Quote.  
Have you considered what is coming, just over that horizon, just around that corner; and are you prepared for it? I suggest you really ought to be.

If you have yet to give serious thought to what your life is about, whether there is meaning behind it or not, now is the time to find out – don’t leave it too long.

Dream as if you’ll live forever. Live as if you’ll die today.

James Dean, American actor

In this chapter I’m setting out the scene for the rest of this book, by checking in on some important life questions. You will probably need to get your thinking cap on to deal with them. Before getting to that point though we have another little matter to occupy us – and this won’t go away.

It's coming...

If it be now, 'tis not to come. If it be not to come, it will be now. If it be not now, yet it will come – the readiness is all.

William Shakespeare
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2 Shakespeare’s Hamlet: Act 5, Scene 2.
Could we, in our wildest dreams, learn anything about ourselves from reports of paranormal events and experiences? Could people who have had a near-death experience, or those who have discovered they had a previous life, through past-life-recall, possibly provide us with valuable insight into the true nature of our existence? More broadly, could there be any benefit to our understanding of life and death by exploring what are often described as fringe matters and beliefs?

Well, from my perspective, it is a resounding yes in answer to all of these questions. In this chapter I’m going to explore some of the more prominent areas of fringe interests and provide evidence that should give us grounds for looking into life, death and spiritual matters more closely, and indeed more seriously.

Let me add to this that while it is quite usual for us to ignore or side-line much of what I will be discussing here – hence why it is deemed as fringe – it is, I’d argue, only by exploring these areas, in the round, that we can readily see a more holistic, meaningful and spiritual picture begin to emerge. I further believe this will give us cause enough to take heart and consider our survival of death is better than likely. Indeed some of the evidence for this being the case
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What is the meaning of human life, or of organic life altogether? To answer this question at all implies a religion. Is there any sense then, you ask, in putting it? I answer, the man who regards his own life and that of his fellow creatures as meaningless is not merely unfortunate but almost disqualified for life.

Albert Einstein, physicist, philosopher

Staying with Einstein's thoughts on the matter, is life, as we know it, really a random chance outcome, the product of blind evolution, a hit or miss affair? Alternatively could there possibly be a plan, an intelligence operating behind it? Are we human beings any different from the rest of the animal kingdom, and if so in what way are we different? And in that context just what did happen, dramatic by evolutionary standards, around fifty thousand or so years ago, that changed our direction and led us to where, and what, we are today?

This chapter will endeavour to answer these questions by taking a look at the development of life, and particularly human development. It'll be raising one or two obvious factors here that we
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Chapter 5

The Soul Question

Does such a thing as the soul exist? If so what is its nature and where is it? And further, if given each one of us has, or is, a soul, what does that mean in context with life and death?

For this chapter I will be drawing on orthodox Christian and esoteric (Theosophical and Rosicrucian) perspectives on the soul, and equally how the soul ties in with the concept of *karma*. The chapter challenges, what I believe to be, misconceptions regarding what the soul is, and its place in our lives. Or, as I will argue, it is not so much about *place* as the fact we are souls, and finding our way through the situations we generate. The focus here is on providing an answer (or answers) to the soul question – which is then expanded upon in the remainder of the book.

I've chosen to draw on Christianity, in general and Roman Catholicism in particular, for reasons that it is the religion I have most experience of, that also holds with the existence of the soul. Also, for it being the largest of the Abrahamic group of religions, it shares common ground, and overlaps, with Judaism, Islam and Bahá'í faiths. It is this group however that I also have most concerns with regarding some of the accepted beliefs about soul, and life and
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Is there an *Other Side*, a place we go to after death? If there is such a place what is it like? What will we do there? For that matter, where is it?

Our ideas about death have been erroneous; we have looked upon it as the great and ultimate terror, whereas in reality it is the great escape, the entrance into a fuller measure of activity, and the release of the life from the crystallised vehicle and an inadequate form.

Alice A Bailey, esoteric writer, theosophist

Am I entirely right to say (as I did in the *Are You Ready For This?* chapter, using a bit of logic) that for the most part we can really, bottom line, only talk about *belief* or *faith* in the afterlife than to know it as something real? Well, that is going to be true for the greater majority of us at this time, particularly those of us who need some kind of undeniable proof. It reflects our human condition where it can be a challenge to step outside of the limiting senses we live in, and rely on, to guide us in our world. I hasten to add though that evidence for the afterlife is mounting, and besides it is not how everyone is seeing this matter. Experience can change how we view things. I trust that reading through the content of the *Fringe Benefits* chapter you will have been given some cause to consider that the afterlife is based upon more than belief or faith. Rather it is based
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A question: After all that has been covered in the previous chapters, on matters of soul, life and death, is this going some way towards helping you to make sense of it?

In this chapter I'm going to revisit some of the main points of what this book has been driving at – including picking up on my where to next comments, that I made much earlier in The Good Life chapter, and to offer some suggestions on this.

Let me start by saying I think it is a fair assumption that, for a lot of us, we live in an increasingly sophisticated, complex, restless and impatient world. There are estimated to be over seven billion of us living on our planet, and, of course, while not all of us live within what we might describe as modern capitalist, industrial, or democratically driven economies, a lot of us do – and judging by our needs for material things, happiness and security, this number is set to grow. For the most part this book assumes some familiarity with this situation and the challenges it brings to our spiritual health, to being open, or remaining open to, as I see it, the spiritual reality we are in.
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While I thought that I was learning how to live, I have been learning how to die.

Leonardo da Vinci, painter, sculptor, architect, inventor, writer

It is a given that most of us really don't know when our death is going to arrive and whether we prepare, or how we prepare, for the event is of course entirely up to ourselves. What follows here are some constructive thoughts and ideas to encourage you to think about the matter. These are not intended to be upsetting or depressing. Given we are in wholesome circumstances, we all want a good and long physical life. But we know every beginning will have an ending and it is a sign of human maturity to consider and make preparation for that eventuality, to make it as comfortable and successful as we can.

What I want to get across here is the importance of being mindful of your eventual death, and to consider what you can do now, no matter what age, to prepare for it emotionally and spiritually.
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About The Author

Francis O’Neill writes about spiritual health, mind body & spirit, and astrology matters.

As well as being a practicing astrologer, he has spent a good deal of his life in field archaeology, supervising rescue excavations on Roman and prehistoric sites, and also as a qualified lecturer in adult education.

He lives in the Cotswolds (UK) with his partner, the composer musician, Annie Locke.

*Life and Death: Making Sense of It* is his first book in the *Making Sense of It* series, published by Some Inspiration Publications. All books in the series deal with helping to explain, or contribute to the holistic-spiritual paradigm, or worldview, in one form or another.

If interested, his book, *Love’s Story of Why We Are Here*, is the natural follow-on companion of *Life and Death: Making Sense of It*.

Find out more...

You can find out more about the writer, his books, and spiritual interests, by visiting the publisher website, SomeInspiration.com – where, like other online, and bricks & mortar stores, you can also buy these titles.
Life and Death: Making Sense of It

This book has the potential to change the world-view of its readers. It offers a broad yet very detailed sweep across the whole spectrum of the subject matter, which makes the book wide-ranging and inclusive... This is a very individual and readable book which is written from the heart, and which reaches out with great warmth to its readers.

Joanne Harrington, Editor

Looking at the subject of life and death is surely one that most people put off for as long as possible. Yet what if there was a way to shine a light on the matter, to make it more palatable and accessible; a way that could also help towards making our present life more rewarding and purposeful?

In this work the author helps us to face our natural fears, and to see another side to the situation. He achieves this by exploring the matter from different, and sometimes controversial, angles. And, as a bottom line, he provides grounds for remaining cheerful, and optimistic in the face of our mortality.

This book includes discussion on topics as diverse as:

✓ The Good Life
✓ Human evolution: And what happened around 50 thousand years ago?
✓ Near-death experience
✓ Past lives of children
✓ Past life regression
✓ Who we are as spiritual beings
✓ Karma and reincarnation
✓ Ghosts and the paranormal
✓ Mediums
✓ The afterlife and what our experience may be on the "Other Side"
✓ What we might do with six months left to live

Francis O'Neill writes, in an investigative approach, about mind, body & spirit matters. He has experienced, first-hand, something of the paranormal, and has spent over 40 years studying the spiritual and esoteric perspective on life. As well as being a professional astrologer – and becoming an author – he has spent a good deal of his working life in archaeology and as a lecturer in adult education.