

Buddhist Metaphysics, No-Self, and Meditation

A Bayesian Inquiry into Selfhood, Consciousness, and Contemplative Evidence

Circulation edition | October 7, 2026

Rodney Malpert, J.D., M.A. (Cornell University)

With AI research and drafting assistance from ChatGPT and Claude

RodMalpert.com

Abstract

This paper asks what Buddhist philosophy and contemplative practice contribute to contemporary debates about the self, consciousness, metaphysical dependence, and personal continuity. It does not ask for a single probability that Buddhism is true. It separates ten propositions that are often run together, identifies the serious rivals to each, and assigns each a provisional probability or, where the proposition is already scored in a companion paper, a Bayes factor showing how far the Buddhist and contemplative material moves the inherited estimate.

The results are uneven by design. The denial of a permanent, independent ego is very probably correct (about 0.90), but it is shared with naturalism and so gives Buddhism priority and corroboration, not distinctive confirmation. Reductionism about persons is more likely than not (about 0.60). The strongest reading of no-self, on which experience has no subjective or perspectival character at all, is probably false (about 0.25), and important Buddhist philosophers agree. Emptiness is highly probable as a claim about persons and ordinary objects (about 0.85). Its global, anti-foundationalist reading is less probable but live (about 0.20). That reading conflicts with theories positing an intrinsically real ground of consciousness; it does not rule out every mind-involving ontology. The paper therefore treats Buddhist schools as distinct interlocutors.

Meditation probably improves access to the fine structure of experience in some domains (about 0.65) and probably does not deliver otherwise unavailable knowledge of metaphysical facts (about 0.10). The contemplative record moves the probability that consciousness is fundamental only slightly (a Bayes factor near 1.1). Insight into no-self plausibly contributes to reduced suffering by a mechanism of its own (about 0.40), while complete and irreversible liberation as classically described is unlikely (about 0.07). The Buddhist-specific evidence leaves the companion paper's estimate of broad postmortem continuation essentially unchanged; serial re-embodiment of any kind is assigned about 0.10 and karmically ordered rebirth about 0.03. A persisting meditative state as the cause of tukdam is assigned about 0.03 and nonlocal field effects of group meditation about 0.01.

All figures are judgment-based subjective probabilities with stated ranges, produced by a targeted and not a systematic review, and tested against three perspectival passes. They are offered as a first complete set of commitments to be attacked, not as settled results.

1. Introduction

Buddhist philosophy places pressure on several assumptions familiar in Western metaphysics. A person may not contain a permanent, independent ego. Experience may be organized without a central controller. Things may depend on causes, parts, and conceptual designation and possess no self-grounding nature. Meditation may alter the way selfhood and consciousness appear. Some Buddhist traditions also defend rebirth or other forms of continuity that seem difficult to reconcile with the cessation of an individual organism. These claims are related, but no one of them entails all the others.

The question of the self is especially prone to overstatement. The discovery that the ordinary sense of “I” is constructed would challenge a simple inner-owner model. It would not show that experience has no subjectivity, that persons do not exist conventionally, or that a consciousness-first metaphysics is true. A physicalist can accept a constructed self; a theorist of minimal subjectivity can reject an ego-substance; and a Buddhist can deny intrinsic existence while retaining conventional persons. The argument must therefore compare views at the same level.

The inquiry has three aims. First, it reconstructs representative Buddhist positions in terms that can be compared with analytic philosophy, while retaining differences among traditions. Second, it applies a Bayesian method to individual claims, treating philosophical arguments, ordinary scientific evidence, contemplative testimony, and extraordinary claims as distinct evidential classes. Third, it commits to numbers. Each estimate is accompanied by a range, its main supporting and opposing considerations, and a statement of what could move it. The exercise makes disagreement visible without pretending that philosophical judgments are measured frequencies or that the evidence audit is complete.

Three limits should be stated at the outset. The literature review behind this paper is targeted, not systematic: it relies on the standard scholarly reconstructions and on the published reports of the empirical studies, and it includes no reanalysis of raw data. The probabilities are subjective credences disciplined by explicit comparison with rivals; they are not frequencies and should not be read with more precision than their ranges allow. And the estimates for consciousness and for survival are not free-standing, because companion papers already score those questions. Here the paper reports only how much the Buddhist and contemplative material should move them.

The central finding can be put in one sentence. Where Buddhist claims are best supported they are least distinctive, and where they are most distinctive they are least supported; but the tradition’s analytical contribution to the first group, and its role in generating hypotheses and trained observers for the second, are both real and undervalued.

2. What is being compared?

2.1 Three levels of inquiry

Metaphysics asks what exists and what kind of existence things have. Philosophy of mind asks what consciousness, subjectivity, representation, and agency are. Personal identity asks what makes a person at one time the same as, or continuous with, a person at

another time. Buddhist thought crosses all three domains. It is a mistake to infer an answer in one domain directly from an argument in another.

An argument against an unchanging self does not settle whether experience is fundamentally physical, mental, dual-aspect, or something else. A theory of emptiness may challenge the demand for an ultimate foundation without supplying a new foundational substance. An account of continuity through causal relations may explain ordinary persistence without proving that any subject survives death. These separations define the paper's units of analysis.

2.2 Ten propositions

"Buddhism is true" obscures the possibility that some propositions are well supported, others false, and others too ambiguous to score. The paper scores the following, with sub-propositions where a single label hides two different claims.

Label	Proposition	Relation to naturalism
P1	No permanent, independent, unchanging ego (an ātman or soul-substance) is what a person is.	Shared
P2	Persons are reducible: facts about persons consist in facts about changing psychophysical events and their relations, with no further fact.	Shared with reductionist naturalism
P3	Experience nonetheless has a real subjective or perspectival character (minimal subjectivity). The denial of P3 is the strongest reading of no-self.	Contested within Buddhism and within naturalism
P4a	Persons and ordinary composite objects lack intrinsic, self-grounding nature (local emptiness).	Shared
P4b	Nothing at any level has intrinsic nature; there is no ultimate metaphysical foundation (global emptiness).	Mixed; distinctive in its Madhyamaka form
P5	Consciousness is metaphysically fundamental.	Distinctive; scored in the companion metaphysics model
P6a	Contemplative training improves the reliability or resolution of reports about the structure of experience.	Compatible
P6b	Contemplative training gives access to metaphysical facts about self or consciousness that are not otherwise available.	Distinctive
P7	Buddhist insight has soteriological efficacy: (a) practice yields real benefit; (b) insight into no-self or impermanence reduces suffering by a mechanism of its own; (c) complete and irreversible liberation is attainable.	(a) shared; (b) mixed; (c) distinctive
P8	Postmortem continuity: (a) broad continuation as defined in the companion survival paper; (b) serial re-embodiment of any kind; (c) karmically ordered rebirth as classically described.	Distinctive
P9	Tukdam: (i) delayed decomposition beyond ordinary forensic variation occurs; (ii) it is caused by a persisting meditative state.	(i) compatible; (ii) distinctive

Label	Proposition	Relation to naturalism
P10	Group meditation produces nonlocal effects on distant persons or societies.	Distinctive; not a Buddhist doctrine

2.3 What counts as a Buddhist contribution

Three kinds of contribution should be kept apart, because they carry different evidential weight.

The first is priority and corroboration. If a tradition reached a conclusion by its own methods two thousand years before cognitive science reached a similar one, that is modest evidence that the tradition's methods are not worthless, and modest additional support for the conclusion to the extent that the two routes are independent. It is not evidence that favors Buddhism over naturalism on that conclusion, because both predict it.

The second is argument. Buddhist philosophers produced arguments, some of which have no close Western counterpart: the Abhidharma analysis of persons into event streams, the Pudgalavāda reply, Madhyamaka arguments against intrinsic nature, the Yogācāra analysis of representation, Dignāga's reflexive awareness, and Dharmakīrti's argument for rebirth. Arguments change the hypothesis space and the priors. They are not observations, and this paper does not multiply them as likelihood ratios.

The third is evidence in the strict sense: observations that are more expected if a distinctive Buddhist proposition is true than if its best rival is true. This is the category in which the popular literature most often overclaims. Agreement with a shared proposition cannot be counted as evidence uniquely favoring Buddhism.

3. Method

3.1 Likelihoods, priors, and arguments

For rival hypotheses H and K , the evidential factor for an observation E is $P(E | H, B) / P(E | K, B)$, where B denotes shared background assumptions. The observation "a meditator reports the loss of a central controller" is expected under Buddhist reductionism, under physicalist self-model theories, and under several enactive accounts. It therefore provides little discrimination among those positions even if the report is entirely credible.

Priors are assigned to propositions, not to an undifferentiated religion. Where a professional baseline exists, the paper notes it. The 2020 PhilPapers survey, for example, found that roughly 44 percent of responding philosophers accept or lean toward a psychological view of personal identity, 19 percent a biological view, and 15 percent a further-fact view, and that a small majority accept or lean toward physicalism about the mind (Bourget and Chalmers 2023). Such figures are sociological anchors, not authorities, and they describe a population trained almost entirely in one tradition.

Testimony is grouped by source dependence. Multiple papers using the same participant, the same dataset, the same laboratory, or the same reporting tradition are not multiplied as if independent. Appendix A lists the dependence groups used.

3.2 How the numbers were produced

Each proposition was given an exact wording, a set of rivals, and a list of the considerations bearing on it. A central estimate and a range were then set by asking what a careful reasoner should believe after weighing the arguments and evidence reviewed here, and the result was stress-tested by three perspectival passes: a committed naturalist, a Buddhist-sympathetic analyst, and a consciousness-first theorist. The passes are reported in Section 12. They expose model dependence; they are not independent observations and are not averaged mechanically.

The ranges are meant to be read as the interval within which the estimate could reasonably fall after the section-by-section review still to come. Where the range is wide, the paper says so and says why. Where no defensible numerical likelihood ratio exists for a single item of evidence, the paper gives a direction and a qualitative strength and lets the proposition-level judgment carry the number.

3.3 Coherence with the companion papers

Two companion papers constrain this one. The metaphysics model assigns weights to physicalism, idealism, Russellian monism, and dualism and treats simulation and a creator intelligence as separate nodes. The survival paper uses a broad definition of meaningful postmortem continuation and gives a model-conditioned estimate near 47 percent, with a central region of 40 to 50 percent. Those figures are inherited judgments, not results of this paper. For P5 and P8a this paper therefore reports a Bayes factor to be applied to the companion model and identifies in Section 13 where the models should be restructured in light of the Buddhist material.

4. Buddhist positions in analytic perspective

4.1 Early Buddhist and Abhidharma analyses

The early discourses examine body, feeling, perception, volitional formations, and consciousness as candidates for identification with a self. The *Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta* (*Saṃyutta Nikāya* 22.59) presses two tests: each aggregate is impermanent and leads to affliction, and none is subject to command. If something were one's self, the argument runs, one could have it be as one wished. The conclusion drawn is that each aggregate should be regarded as "not mine, not I, not my self." The nun Vajirā's verses (*SN* 5.10) and the later *Milindapañha* give the complementary image: "being," like "chariot," is a designation applied when the parts are present.

Two features of these texts matter for what follows. The target is a specific conception of self: permanent, blissful or at least unafflicted, and under sovereign control, which is the profile of the Upaniṣadic ātman. And the texts are reticent about converting the analysis into a flat metaphysical denial. When the wanderer Vacchagotta asks whether there is a self, the Buddha is silent on both alternatives (*SN* 44.10). Some modern interpreters read not-self chiefly as a strategy of disidentification (Thanissaro 1996); most scholars read it as a doctrine with metaphysical content while agreeing that its scope is the permanent ego and that it does not deny the empirical person (Collins 1982; Harvey 1995). Either way, the early material supports P1 directly, is consistent with P2, and does not assert the denial of P3.

Abhidharma traditions develop the analysis systematically. Persons are explained through momentary events, the dharmas, and the person is real only conventionally: a convenient designation for a causally connected series. This is recognizably a reductionist theory of persons, and the comparison with Parfit is apt (Siderits 2015). The analogy should not erase two differences. Abhidharma dharmas were held by most schools to possess intrinsic nature (*svabhāva*), which makes Abhidharma a foundationalist ontology of events, and that is precisely what Madhyamaka attacks. And Buddhist taxonomies of mental factors are not modern scientific ontologies; nothing in the argument depends on their detail.

4.2 Pudgalavāda as an internal challenge

The Pudgalavāda or “personalist” schools, which by some ancient reports included a large share of Indian monastics, held that the person is neither identical to the aggregates nor wholly distinct from them, and is “inexpressible” in either way, as fire is related to its fuel. Their motives were philosophical: the unity of experience, memory, moral responsibility, and rebirth all seemed to require a bearer. Vasubandhu’s critique in the ninth chapter of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* is the classic reply: if the person is conceived in dependence on the aggregates, it is a conventional designation after all; if it is not, it is a self by another name (Duerlinger 2003; Priestley 1999).

Pudgalavāda matters here for two reasons. It shows that reductionism was never the unanimous Buddhist view, so “the Buddhist position” on P2 does not exist. And its motives anticipate modern non-reductive rivals: emergentist accounts of persons, constitution views, and the claim that the unity of consciousness is not exhausted by relations among events. The dispute between Vasubandhu and the personalists is the dispute over P2.

4.3 Madhyamaka and emptiness

Madhyamaka extends the critique of intrinsic nature from the person to everything. Nāgārjuna argues that anything that arises in dependence on causes, on parts, or on conceptual designation cannot possess *svabhāva*, and that nothing fails to be dependent in at least one of these ways. The pivotal verse identifies dependent origination with emptiness and both with dependent designation (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24:18). Emptiness on this reading is not a hidden substance and not the claim that nothing exists. Conventional things function precisely because they are dependent; and emptiness is itself empty, since it too is not a self-standing ground (Garfield 2015; Westerhoff 2009; Siderits and Katsura 2013).

The analytic comparison must ask which dependence is at issue. Causal dependence, mereological dependence, conceptual dependence, and metaphysical grounding are not interchangeable, and an argument that succeeds for one may fail for another. The most defensible contemporary reconstruction treats Madhyamaka as metaphysical anti-foundationalism: chains of dependence have no terminus in entities that exist by their own nature (Westerhoff 2020; Bliss and Priest 2018). Stated that way, it has Western analogues, including arguments that there may be no fundamental level (Schaffer 2003) and ontic structural realism, on which relations and structure are not grounded in intrinsically natured objects (Ladyman and Ross 2007). It also has a clear opponent: metaphysical foundationalism in every form, physical or mental.

A consciousness-first theory that posits intrinsic awareness conflicts with global emptiness.

Candrakīrti rejects foundational consciousness and reflexive awareness. Other mind-involving views may be anti-foundationalist and need separate assessment.

4.4 Yogācāra and consciousness

Vasubandhu's *Viṃśikā* argues that experience as of external objects can be explained by cognition alone, using dreams, shared karmic perception, and difficulties in atomism; the *Triṃśikā* describes a transformation of consciousness, including a store consciousness, from which the appearance of subject and object arises. Whether this is metaphysical idealism is disputed. One line of scholarship reads Yogācāra as denying mind-independent objects (Schmithausen 2005; Kellner and Taber 2014); another reads it as epistemological or phenomenological, a claim about what cognition can reach and about the constructed character of the subject-object division (Lusthaus 2002). Careful recent work tends to find that Vasubandhu's arguments do aim at an idealist conclusion while warning against assimilating it to Berkeley (Gold 2015; Kellner and Taber 2014).

Yogācāra also supplies Buddhism's main defence of P3. Dignāga and Dharmakīrti hold that every cognition is reflexively aware of itself (*svasaṃvedana*). This is subjectivity without a subject: no owner, but an ineliminable self-presenting character in each experience (Williams 1998; MacKenzie 2008; Coseru 2012). The view is close to the minimal-self position in contemporary phenomenology.

Two bridges remain unbuilt in any consciousness-first inference from this material. That objects are known only through cognition is not yet a claim that minds constitute the world. And a phenomenology in which subject and object are not experienced as separate does not establish that reality is ontologically one.

4.5 Buddha-nature, luminous mind, and nondual traditions

A brief canonical passage calls the mind luminous and says it is defiled by adventitious defilements (*Aṅguttara Nikāya* 1.49 to 1.52). The *tathāgatagarbha* literature and the *Ratnagotravibhāga* develop positive language about an element present in all beings, and the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra* goes so far as to use the word "self" for it. *Dzogchen* and *Mahāmudrā* speak of an awareness that is primordially pure. These materials are a standing challenge to a purely reductionist presentation of Buddhism.

They do not form one doctrine. Some interpreters, traditional and modern, read Buddha-nature as a way of saying that the mind is empty and therefore capable of awakening; others, including the Tibetan "other-emptiness" tradition, hold that ultimate awareness is empty of everything other than itself but not empty of its own nature. The second reading is a foundationalism of awareness and conflicts with P4b; the first does not (King 1991; Zimmermann 2002; Duckworth 2008).

Miri Albahari offers the strongest contemporary bridge from this material to metaphysics. She argues that the Pāli texts themselves imply an unconditioned witness-consciousness that is real, while the bounded personal self is an illusion built upon it, and she later defends a "perennial idealism" on which convergent reports of nondual awareness count as evidence for a universal ground of consciousness (Albahari 2006, 2009, 2019). This is a serious steelman of the consciousness-first reading. It is a contemporary argument, however, and not a conclusion that can be attributed to Buddhism as a whole; *Madhyamaka* readers reject it. The naturalistic rival is equally developed: on the self-model theory, "pure awareness" is what a system experiences when its model of itself as

an epistemic agent is reduced to the bare representation of wakefulness, and nothing about that requires awareness to be the ground of reality (Metzinger 2003, 2024).

4.6 Summary: where the schools stand on the propositions

Tradition	P2 reductionism	P3 minimal subjectivity	P4b global emptiness	P5 consciousness fundamental
Early discourses	Consistent, not asserted	Not denied	Not asserted	Not asserted
Abhidharma	Affirmed	Varies by school	Denied (dharmas have svabhāva)	Denied
Pudgalavāda	Denied	Affirmed in effect	Not at issue	Not asserted
Madhyamaka	Persons conventional; no ultimate reduction base	Reflexive awareness denied by Candrakīrti	Affirmed	Denied
Yogācāra	Affirmed	Affirmed (svasaṃvedana)	Contested	Affirmed on idealist readings
Buddha-nature and nondual traditions	Varies	Affirmed	Divided	Affirmed on strong readings

The table makes the paper’s first substantive point. The Buddhist tradition is unanimous only on P1. On every other proposition it contains the debate and does not settle it. The testimony of “Buddhism” therefore carries no net weight on P2 through P5; what carries weight is the quality of the arguments on each side.

5. No-self, subjectivity, and personal identity

5.1 P1: no permanent, independent ego

The case for P1 is overdetermined. The Buddhist argument asks what explanatory work an unchanging owner performs once bodily and mental processes account for memory, agency, character, and social identity, and observes that nothing found in experience fits the description. Hume reached the same result by the same introspective route. Cognitive science adds evidence of a different kind. The sense of bodily ownership can be relocated by simple manipulations such as the rubber hand and full-body illusions (Botvinick and Cohen 1998; Blanke and Metzinger 2009). The experience of authorship can be dissociated from the causes of action (Wegner 2002). Neurological and psychiatric conditions fractionate the components of selfhood. Narrative and self-model theories explain how a system could come to represent itself as a persisting inner subject without containing one (Dennett 1991; Metzinger 2003).

The residual probability belongs to substance dualism with an immutable soul, to primitive further-fact views, and to readings of Advaita or of Buddha-nature on which an unchanging witness is what a person ultimately is. The last deserves care. An unconditioned, impersonal awareness, if there is one, is not an ego: it is not individual,

not an agent, and not the bearer of a biography. P1 as worded here is compatible with it. What P1 excludes is a permanent individual self.

Estimate for P1: 0.90, range 0.82 to 0.96. The Buddhist contribution is priority, a well-developed argument, and an independent introspective tradition that converges with the experimental record. Since naturalism predicts the same result, the Bayes factor for distinctively Buddhist doctrine over naturalism on this proposition is 1.

5.2 P2: reductionism about persons

P1 does not entail P2. One can deny a soul and still hold that persons are not reducible: that we are organisms whose persistence conditions are biological and owe nothing to psychological continuity (Olson 1997); that persons are constituted by but not identical to bodies; that the unity of a conscious perspective is an emergent fact not captured by relations among events; or, with the personalists, that the person is real though not separable from the aggregates.

The case for P2 rests chiefly on the puzzle cases. Fission, gradual replacement, and branching show that the relations that seem to matter can come apart from strict identity, and that questions of the form “will it be me?” can lack a determinate answer while everything else is known (Parfit 1984). Abhidharma reaches a similar result through the analysis of the series, and Vasubandhu’s dilemma against the personalists is still a good argument. Against P2 stand the phenomenal unity of consciousness, the difficulty of stating reductionism without presupposing the subjects it reduces, and the practical indispensability of persons, which leads even some Buddhist-inspired philosophers to defend the reality of persons while denying selves (Garfield 2022) or to locate the self in ownership and attention with no appeal to a substance (Ganeri 2012).

Animalism raises a classification question. It denies a further fact and denies a soul, but it also denies that our persistence consists in psychological or causal continuity. As worded, P2 counts animalism as a rival, because P2 says persons reduce to event streams and their relations, and animalism says a person is a substance of a biological kind.

Estimate for P2: 0.60, range 0.45 to 0.75. The professional baseline, in which a psychological view leads but commands less than half the field, is consistent with this. The Buddhist contribution here is substantial as argument: the Abhidharma and Pudgalavāda exchange is one of the most extended debates on reductionism in any tradition. It does not shift the estimate by weight of authority, because the tradition is divided.

5.3 P3: minimal subjectivity

The strongest reading of no-self holds that there is no subject of experience in any sense, not even a minimal perspectival character: there are only impersonal events, and the sense that experience is given to someone is itself an illusion. Its denial, P3, holds that each experience has a first-personal mode of givenness, a “for-me-ness,” even if there is no enduring owner.

The argument for P3 is that the illusion of a subject would have to appear to something, and that pre-reflective self-awareness seems to be a structural feature of experience and not a content that could be subtracted (Zahavi 2014; Strawson 2009). Dignāga’s reflexive awareness is the Buddhist version. The argument against it comes from Madhyamaka, which holds that awareness no more illuminates itself than a blade cuts itself, and from contemporary no-subject theorists who argue that the Abhidharma picture is best read as

eliminating subjects altogether (Chadha 2023). The essays collected in Siderits, Thompson, and Zahavi (2010) show that the question divides Buddhist-informed philosophers along the same lines as everyone else.

The contemplative record bears on this proposition more directly than on any other, and it does not favor the strong reading. Reports of deep self-loss in meditation typically describe the falling away of ownership, agency, narrative, and bodily boundaries, in that rough order of ease, with awareness continuing (Ataria, Dor-Ziderman, and Berkovich-Ohana 2015; Millièrè et al. 2018). Reports of “pure awareness” describe wakeful experience with minimal content and no sense of an agent, and they do not describe the absence of experience (Gamma and Metzinger 2021). The one class of event in which subjectivity is said to vanish entirely, cessation, is described as a gap known only afterward, which is what the absence of experience would look like and is no evidence for subjectless experience. This pattern is what P3 predicts: the self can be dismantled a layer at a time, and the last layer to go is experience itself.

Estimate for P3: 0.75, range 0.60 to 0.88. The strongest reading of no-self therefore receives about 0.25. The uncertainty is wide because much turns on whether “for-me-ness” names a real feature or only a redescription of the fact that experiences occur.

5.4 The consistency test

Personal identity adds a temporal dimension, and with it a test that any continuity theory must pass. If continuity is defined through causal relations and not through an enduring carrier, the same standard must apply to ordinary persistence, severe memory loss, copying, branching, and proposed postmortem continuation.

Applied to rebirth, the test is demanding. On the classical account what passes from one life to the next is a causally connected stream that carries dispositions and karmic potentials. Ordinarily it carries no memories, no persisting character in any recognizable sense, and no body. Compare this with Parfit’s Relation R, which requires psychological connectedness and continuity. A perfect copy preserves all of a person’s memories, intentions, and character and lacks only the normal cause. A rebirth successor preserves the causal link and almost none of the psychological content. Anyone who doubts that a perfect copy preserves what matters should doubt far more strongly that rebirth does. Anyone who accepts copying because psychological content is what matters has, for the same reason, little ground to regard an amnesic successor in another body as a continuation of himself.

The tradition does not hide this. The Milindapañha says that the one reborn is “neither the same nor another,” and the Buddhist motive for caring about the successor is in the end ethical and causal, not egoistic. The philosophical result is that even if P8c were true, it would be a further question whether karmic rebirth counts as survival in the sense the companion paper cares about. Section 10 returns to this.

6. Emptiness, dependence, and metaphysical theories

6.1 P4a: local emptiness

That persons, artifacts, organisms, and ordinary objects depend on causes, on parts, and on the classificatory interests of those who carve them out is close to common ground. Physicalists treat such things as stable patterns in a causally structured world; few hold

that tables or nations have self-grounding essences. The residual doubt comes from robust essentialism about natural kinds and from views on which organisms or persons are substances in a strong Aristotelian sense.

Estimate for P4a: 0.85, range 0.75 to 0.93. As with P1, the proposition is shared, and the Buddhist contribution is priority and analysis.

6.2 P4b: global emptiness

The global thesis is the philosophically interesting one. Three readings should be scored separately in principle. On the anti-foundationalist reading, dependence has no terminus: there is no level of entities that exist by their own nature. On the semantic or anti-realist reading, the very idea of a way things are ultimately, apart from conventions of description, is incoherent, so that the only truth is conventional truth (Siderits 2015; the Cowherds 2011). On the therapeutic reading, emptiness is a practice of releasing reification and asserts no thesis. The therapeutic reading makes no claim to score. The estimate below concerns the first reading and treats the second as a more radical variant included within it.

In favor of P4b: Nāgārjuna's arguments that a thing with intrinsic nature could not enter causal relations or change have real force against some conceptions of substance; physics has repeatedly dissolved candidate fundamentals into relational structure; and no argument shows that there must be a bottom level (Schaffer 2003). Infinite or circular dependence structures are at least coherent (Bliss and Priest 2018).

Against P4b: the central inference, from "dependent in some way" to "lacking intrinsic nature in every way," trades on the ambiguity among kinds of dependence. A fundamental field could have causes for its particular states and still have intrinsic properties. The intuition that dependent being must be grounded in something is widely shared and is the nerve of cosmological reasoning. Structural realism without *relata* is contested. And if the hard problem motivates the view that experience has an intrinsic qualitative nature, as Russellian monists hold, then there is at least one thing with *svabhāva*.

There is also a coherence constraint with the rest of the project. P4b conflicts with foundationalist versions of physicalism, idealism, Russellian monism, and dualism, to the extent that each posits an intrinsically natured ground. It need not conflict with every theory called physicalist or idealist: a no-bottom-level or relational version may remain open. The companion model presently lacks an explicit axis for this distinction. The 0.20 assigned below is a provisional judgment about P4b, not a remainder mechanically derived from the model's other weights.

Estimate for P4b: 0.20, range 0.08 to 0.35. This is the proposition on which Buddhist philosophy makes its most distinctive and least assimilated contribution to metaphysics, and it is under-represented in the companion model, which has no anti-foundationalist option at all.

6.3 The two truths

The relation between conventional and ultimate truth is not a relation between two worlds, and it is not the companion model's distinction between a local simulated architecture and ultimate reality. A simulation hypothesis is foundationalist in form: it says that this world depends on a deeper one, and that some level is basic. For Madhyamaka, the ultimate truth about things is their emptiness, which is not a deeper

layer of entities. The two frameworks can be combined, since a simulated world would be a vivid case of dependent and designation-relative existence, but neither interprets the other.

7. Is consciousness fundamental?

P5 is scored in the companion metaphysics model on grounds that have nothing to do with Buddhism: the hard problem, the causal closure of physics, fine-tuning, and the empirical survival literature. The question here is narrower. How far should Buddhist philosophy and the contemplative record move that estimate?

Three inputs are available. The first is the testimony of the tradition, and Section 4.6 showed that it is divided: Abhidharma and Madhyamaka deny that consciousness is the ground of reality, Yogācāra on its idealist reading and the strong Buddha-nature readings affirm it. A divided witness moves nothing.

The second is argument. The Yogācāra arguments establish at most that the hypothesis of mind-independent matter is not forced by experience. That is the familiar underdetermination result and was already available. Albahari's argument is new and deserves weight as a hypothesis, but its evidential premise is the third input.

The third is contemplative experience: trained practitioners in several traditions report states of contentless, boundless, non-dual awareness, often accompanied by the conviction that this awareness is what is most fundamentally real. Is such a report more probable if consciousness is fundamental than if it is not? Somewhat, but not much, for four reasons. First, the naturalistic model predicts the experience in detail: attenuate the self-model and sensory content while keeping tonic alertness, and the system will represent bare wakefulness without boundary or owner (Metzinger 2024). Second, the sense of ultimacy attaches to states induced by other means. Psychedelic experiences shift metaphysical beliefs away from physicalism for months afterward (Timmermann et al. 2021), which shows that the conviction is produced by the type of state whatever the truth of the matter. Third, the traditions interpret similar states in incompatible ways: as the Self in Advaita, as the absence of self in Theravāda, as emptiness in Madhyamaka, as union with God in theistic mysticism. This is the old dispute between constructivists and perennialists (Katz 1978; Forman 1990), and whichever side is right, the experience underdetermines the ontology. Fourth, if consciousness is fundamental it is unclear why access to that fact should require years of training and why the result should be so sensitive to doctrine.

Something remains. That a waking state with no content and no self can occur at all, and that it is reported as more real and not less, is slightly better predicted by views on which awareness is basic and content is added than by views on which awareness is a construction from content. The paper assigns a Bayes factor of 1.1 in favor of P5, with a range of 0.9 to 1.4. The effect on plausible priors is small:

Prior for P5	Posterior at 0.9	Posterior at 1.1	Posterior at 1.4
0.30	0.28	0.32	0.38
0.50	0.47	0.52	0.58
0.60	0.57	0.62	0.68
0.75	0.73	0.77	0.81

Whatever the companion model's current weight on consciousness-fundamental frameworks, the Buddhist and contemplative material should raise it by about two percentage points and no more than about eight. The contemplative argument for idealism is an argument for keeping the hypothesis live. It does not establish it.

8. Meditation as a source of evidence

8.1 The inferential chain

Meditation can alter attention, affect, agency, bodily ownership, self-location, and the boundary between self and world. The inferential chain from such changes to metaphysics has four links. An experience occurs. The practitioner or investigator characterizes its phenomenological structure. A psychological mechanism is proposed. A metaphysical interpretation is attached. "There was no obvious controller in this episode" is not identical to "there is no subject," and neither entails "all things are empty of intrinsic nature." P6a concerns the second link. P6b concerns the fourth.

8.2 P6a: does training improve phenomenological access?

The neurophenomenological programme treats disciplined first-person reports as data to be coordinated with behavioral and neural measures (Varela 1996; Lutz et al. 2025). Its working assumption is that training improves the reports. The evidence is supportive but narrow and mixed.

In favor: among experienced meditators, practice hours predicted the agreement between introspective reports of tactile sensitivity across body regions and objective measures (Fox et al. 2012). A randomized two-week training improved metacognitive accuracy for memory, though not for perception (Baird et al. 2014). Experienced practitioners can produce distinct reported states on instruction with corresponding and reproducible neural differences, as in magnetoencephalography work on the narrative and minimal self (Dor-Ziderman et al. 2013). The intensive case studies discussed below show within-person regularity between report and physiology across dozens of events.

Against: experienced meditators were no better than non-meditators at detecting their own heartbeats, in two separate studies, while rating their own performance more highly (Khalsa et al. 2008, 2020). Introspection is unreliable in ways that practice does not obviously cure, especially for the general structure of experience as opposed to its momentary contents (Schwitzgebel 2011). And training is never neutral: traditions teach attention, vocabulary, and interpretation together, so that expert reports may be more consistent because they are more scripted (Sharf 1995; Thompson 2020). The contemporary rhetoric of meditative "experience" as the foundation of Buddhism is itself partly a modern construction.

The fair summary is that training improves some forms of access in some domains, that confidence outruns accuracy in others, and that no general calibration of contemplative expertise yet exists.

Estimate for P6a: 0.65, range 0.50 to 0.80, where the proposition is that sustained training yields more reliable or finer-grained reports of experiential structure in at least the domains practiced.

8.3 P6b: does training give access to metaphysical facts?

For P6b to be true, something in the trained practitioner's experience would have to track a metaphysical fact, such as the nonexistence of a self or the fundamentality of awareness, in a way that untrained reflection and third-person science cannot.

The convergence argument is the best case for it. Practitioners across centuries and cultures, using the technique of sustained attention to experience, report that no enduring self is found. Because P1 is probably true on independent grounds, this convergence is some evidence that the method can be reliable. But it is weak evidence for P6b in particular. The finding is one that untrained reflection (Hume) and experimental psychology also reach, so it is not otherwise unavailable. Where contemplatives go beyond what other methods can check, they diverge, as Section 7 noted. And the experience of not finding a self is predicted both by there being no self and by a self that is not the kind of thing introspection could find, which is why Kant, and the Pudgalavādins, were unmoved.

There is a further structural problem. Phenomenology is about how things appear. A method that perfected the observation of appearances would still need a bridge principle to conclusions about what underlies them. The Buddhist traditions that take meditation to be liberating do not, for the most part, claim that it yields knowledge without such a framework; classical accounts place insight within a prior training in view.

Estimate for P6b: 0.10, range 0.04 to 0.22. The residual probability reflects the possibility that consciousness is fundamental and that some contemplative states are, as Albahari argues, partial acquaintance with that fact.

8.4 Advanced states

Deep absorption, non-dual awareness, minimal-content experience, and cessation should be studied as distinct phenomena. Recent work shows that they are tractable.

In one intensively sampled practitioner with more than 23,000 hours of practice, 37 self-reported cessation events across 29 sessions were preceded by a decline in alpha power beginning roughly 40 seconds before onset and reaching its minimum immediately afterward (Chowdhury et al. 2023). Preliminary data from another laboratory describe extended cessation, *nirodha samāpatti*, in a practitioner who reports entering it for durations set in advance, and propose that it reflects a progressive dismantling of hierarchical predictive processing (Laukkonen et al. 2023). Ultra-high-field imaging and combined electrophysiological studies of a single adept describe distinct and reproducible signatures across the absorptions (Yang et al. 2024; Chowdhury et al. 2025). A preliminary conference report on three practitioners found that a complexity measure which falls reliably under anesthesia did not fall during reported extended cessation, which if confirmed would mark the state as physiologically unlike ordinary unconsciousness. That report has not appeared in peer-reviewed form and is given no weight here.

Three cautions govern the use of this literature. The studies come largely from one research programme and overlapping participants, and they are counted as a single dependence group. They demonstrate tractability and within-person regularity, not prevalence or independent replication. And a reported gap in awareness does not by itself distinguish absent consciousness from absent memory formation or later reconstruction. Nothing in this literature yet discriminates among ontologies. A brain that can voluntarily suspend the processes underlying experience is what physicalism would predict if the

reports are accurate. What the cessation studies do threaten is one specific view: the claim that awareness is an unbroken, unconditioned ground that never lapses. If consciousness can be switched off by a practiced act and the practitioner reports nothing, the witness is at least not continuously manifest. This is weak evidence against the strongest awareness-realist readings and is one reason the Bayes factor in Section 7 is not higher.

Large phenomenological collections map the reports. The Minimal Phenomenal Experience project gathered about 1,400 responses in 57 countries to a 92-item instrument and extracted twelve factors (Gamma and Metzinger 2021; Metzinger 2024). The decisive question is whether any feature of these states is more expected under a consciousness-first theory than under a naturalistic account of altered self-modeling. Section 7 gave the answer: slightly, at most.

9. Soteriology

9.1 P7a: does practice help?

Meditation-based programmes produce real benefits. A meta-analysis of randomized trials with active controls found moderate evidence of improvement in anxiety, depression, and pain and no evidence of superiority to other active treatments (Goyal et al. 2014). A systematic review of 44 meta-analyses found effects comparable to other evidence-based treatments, larger against passive controls, and smaller against active ones (Goldberg et al. 2022). The field's methodological problems are well documented: heterogeneous interventions, expectancy, weak controls, publication bias, and overstatement of neural findings (Van Dam et al. 2018). A combined analysis of two randomized trials found no structural brain changes attributable to an eight-week programme (Kral et al. 2022). Adverse effects are not rare: a systematic review estimated that roughly one participant in twelve experiences one, most often anxiety or depression (Farias et al. 2020).

Estimate for P7a: 0.90 that structured practice yields real, modest benefit for common forms of distress compared with no intervention; about 0.25 that it is superior to well-matched active alternatives. Neither figure bears on any ontology.

9.2 P7b: is insight the active ingredient?

The distinctive Buddhist claim is not that sitting quietly helps. It is that suffering arises from craving and clinging rooted in a mistaken apprehension of self and permanence, and that seeing through the mistake reduces it. A test of that claim must separate insight from relaxation, attentional training, social support, and expectation.

Some evidence favors a specific mechanism. Mediation analyses of mindfulness-based programmes point to reduced rumination and to mindfulness itself, including the capacity to observe thoughts as events and not as oneself, among the mediators of benefit (Gu et al. 2015). Decentering is a secular descendant of disidentification from the aggregates. Reports from long-term practitioners describe durable reductions in self-referential processing with greater equanimity.

Other evidence cuts against it. In the largest direct test of the claim that internalizing no-self reduces fear of death, Tibetan monastics reported more fear of the annihilation of the self at death than lay Tibetans, Indian Hindus, or Americans, and were less willing to give up time in their own lives to extend another's, despite firmly denying a continuing self

(Nichols et al. 2018). The finding has several possible explanations, including that scholastic training differs from contemplative realization, but the simple prediction failed. Changes in the sense of self are also among the more common difficult experiences reported by Western Buddhist meditators, sometimes with lasting distress and impairment (Lindahl et al. 2017; Lindahl and Britton 2019). The loss of the sense of self is the central symptom of depersonalization, which is not a liberated condition. The tradition would say that right insight differs from pathological self-loss in the accompanying understanding and affect, and that may be so, but it concedes that the loss of self-sense is not in itself the cure.

Estimate for P7b: 0.40, range 0.25 to 0.55, where the proposition is that insight into no-self or impermanence, as distinct from common factors, makes a substantial causal contribution to durable reduction of suffering in a meaningful share of serious practitioners.

9.3 P7c: complete liberation

The classical claim is stronger: that craving, aversion, and delusion can be eradicated completely and irreversibly. No controlled evidence addresses it. The case for it is testimony from within traditions that have strong institutional reasons to affirm it and no public method of certifying it. Against it stand the general plasticity and fallibility of human psychology, the absence of any independently verified case, and the well-documented misconduct of a number of teachers recognized as highly realized by their own communities, which shows at least that recognized attainment does not reliably deliver its advertised ethical fruits. A weaker claim, that very large and stable reductions in suffering occur in some practitioners, is plausible and falls under P7b.

Estimate for P7c: 0.07, range 0.02 to 0.18.

10. Rebirth, survival, and continuity

10.1 The structure of the question

Rebirth is a distinct claim, not a corollary of no-self. Four questions must be separated. Does anything continue after death (P8a)? If so, does it return to embodied life (P8b)? If so, is the process ordered by the moral quality of past action, as the doctrine of karma holds (P8c)? And would any of this be survival of the person in a sense worth wanting? The companion survival paper addresses the first question with a broad definition and an estimate near 47 percent. This paper asks what Buddhist argument and Buddhist-associated evidence add.

10.2 Dharmakīrti's argument

The most important Buddhist philosophical argument for rebirth appears in the second chapter of Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika*. A moment of consciousness, he argues, must have a prior moment of consciousness as its substantial cause, the cause that becomes the effect as clay becomes the pot. Matter can be a cooperating condition but not a substantial cause, because consciousness and matter have different natures. The first moment of consciousness in this life therefore had a conscious predecessor, and the last will have a successor (Franco 1997; Jackson 1993).

The argument is valid given its premises, and its key premise is the denial of physicalism together with the denial that consciousness can emerge from what is not conscious. A

physicalist rejects it without strain, pointing to the development of consciousness in organisms and its dependence on the brain (Arnold 2012; Thompson 2015). Even granted its premise, the argument proves less than rebirth. It would show that consciousness does not arise from nothing, which a panpsychist or idealist also accepts, without showing that consciousness comes in discrete individual streams that pass from one organism to exactly one other. Under an idealism of universal mind, the predecessor of an individual's first conscious moment is the universal field, not a previous person.

The argument therefore largely re-expresses a prior on P5 and adds a contestable step from fundamentality to individuated streams. It contributes a Bayes factor of about 1 to P8.

10.3 Cases of the reincarnation type

The empirical evidence most often cited is the collection of cases, assembled over six decades at the University of Virginia and numbering about 2,500, in which young children speak as though remembering a previous life (Stevenson 1974, 1997, 2001; Tucker 2005). The typical features are onset between ages two and five, fading by about seven, a high proportion of previous lives that ended violently, a short interval between death and birth, and in some cases behaviors, phobias, or birthmarks corresponding to the previous person.

The companion survival paper already includes this literature in its evidence ledger, and it must not be counted again. Only two questions belong here. The first is whether the recent critical literature should change the weight. The most thoroughly investigated American case, that of James Leininger, was the subject of a long critical re-examination arguing that the documentary record is less robust than presented and that ordinary sources for the child's statements were available (Sudduth 2021), to which the original investigator replied sharply (Tucker 2022). The exchange illustrates the standing difficulty: nearly all cases depend on parental testimony collected after the families have met or the identification has been made, and cases with written records made before verification are few. The general critiques remain in force (Edwards 1996; Sudduth 2016). No adjustment to the companion paper's weight is proposed, but the Leininger exchange should be cited there.

The second question is specific to this paper. Supposing some of the cases are what they seem, do they favor the Buddhist account of rebirth over other accounts of survival? They do not. Cases are reported in Hindu, Druze, Tlingit, Igbo, and Western settings as well as Buddhist ones, with features that follow local expectations about, for example, change of sex or rebirth within the family. The pattern of short intervals, local rebirth, and unfinished business does not resemble the traditional cosmology of many realms and long sojourns. And Stevenson reported finding little evidence in his cases of the moral ordering that the doctrine of karma predicts. If the cases are evidence of anything, they are evidence of a mundane and local form of reincarnation in a small minority of deaths. Conditional on their genuineness, the Bayes factor for karmically ordered rebirth against unordered re-embodiment is below 1, perhaps 0.5.

The tradition makes one further testable claim. Recollection of past lives is listed among the higher knowledges attained through deep concentration. If that were a reliable attainment, advanced practitioners should be able to produce verifiable details of earlier lives. No systematic record of such verification exists. The absence is weak evidence against, since no one has tried very hard to look.

10.4 Tukdam

Tukdam is the Tibetan term for a state in which an accomplished practitioner, though clinically dead, is held to remain in meditation, with the body staying fresh and upright for days or weeks. It is a Buddhist-native claim with a physical signature, which makes it unusually testable.

A study of 13 postmortem cases, with six sets of recordings excluded for interference or incomplete protocol, found no recognizable electroencephalographic activity in the analyzable recordings. The earliest began 26 hours after clinical death (Lott et al. 2021). This result limits a hypothesis of residual measurable brain activity at those times. It cannot establish whether awareness persisted, and it does not address biological processes set in motion before death. A later report described two cases observed for 19 and 31 days in which decomposition appeared slower than expected under the recorded conditions before accelerating (Tidwell et al. 2024). A 2025 journal issue collects anthropological and methodological reflection on the project (Tidwell 2025).

The first question is whether there is a phenomenon. Decomposition rates vary widely with body mass, terminal illness, hydration, fasting before death, medication, ambient conditions, and handling. Two cases without matched controls or blinded assessment cannot establish an anomaly, and communities select which deaths to report as tukdam after observing how the body behaves. The paper assigns 0.25, with a range of 0.10 to 0.45, to the claim that delayed decomposition beyond ordinary forensic variation occurs in these practitioners. The second question is whether a persisting meditative state causes it. Ordinary candidates, such as ascetic diet and reduced gut flora at death, would have to be excluded first, and the traditional explanation requires a mental state to persist without measurable brain activity and to act on tissue. The paper assigns 0.03, with a range of 0.005 to 0.08. The research itself is well designed for its circumstances and should continue with prospective enrollment, matched controls, and microbiological measures.

10.5 Estimates for P8

The Buddhist-specific material leaves broad continuation where the companion paper put it. Dharmakīrti's argument restates a prior; the reincarnation cases are already counted; tukdam is at present a null for brain activity and an unconfirmed anomaly for decomposition. Bayes factor for P8a: 1.0, range 0.9 to 1.15.

Serial re-embodiment of any kind, including routes considered in the companion model, is assigned 0.10 (range 0.04 to 0.20). This is an independent judgment, not a measured partition of the companion paper's continuation estimate. Karmically ordered rebirth, with moral causation determining the realm and circumstances of the next life, is assigned 0.03 (range 0.01 to 0.08).

The consistency test of Section 5.4 adds a qualification. Even the 0.03 should not be added to the probability of personal survival without discount, because a successor who shares only a causal link and some dispositions with the deceased does not clearly continue that person in the sense the survival paper defines. Classical Buddhism would agree: rebirth is the problem to be solved. It is not the consolation.

11. Extraordinary and nonlocal claims

Claims of remote influence, telepathy, or large-group “field effects” deserve a separate evidential standard. If robustly replicated, they would matter greatly to metaphysics, though even then unknown physical mechanisms, social mediation, and model error would remain competing explanations alongside nonlocal mind.

The Maharishi-effect literature is an adjacent comparator and not a Buddhist doctrine. Its best-known study reported that the size of a group of meditators in Jerusalem in 1983 predicted improvements in a composite index of crime, accidents, fires, stock prices, mood, and war intensity in Lebanon (Orme-Johnson et al. 1988). A methodological critique challenged the treatment coding, the possibility of reverse causation, and the adequacy of the time-series models, and the authors replied with robustness analyses (Schrodt 1990; Orme-Johnson, Alexander, and Davies 1990). A later critique argued that ordinary cultural and political events during the study period account for the pattern and that the theory lacks a plausible mechanism and prior support (Fales and Markovsky 1997); the proponents again replied. A study in Washington, D.C. reported a reduction in violent crime relative to a time-series forecast during an assembly in a summer when the city’s homicide count was at or near its peak (Hagelin et al. 1999).

Without reanalysis of the data, the paper judges this literature on its structure. The studies were conducted and analyzed by researchers affiliated with the organization that promotes the effect. The group size was not randomly assigned, and attendance at such assemblies rises and falls with holidays, weather, and the news, each of which independently affects the outcomes. The outcome indices are composites with flexible construction. The Middle East study reportedly lodged its measures in advance with outside scientists, which is to its credit, but no replication by investigators without allegiance to the movement has been reported in more than three decades, although the claimed effect is large and the experiment is cheap. The prior for a causal influence of meditation on distant strangers, with a threshold given by the square root of one percent of the population, is very low because it conflicts with a great deal of well-confirmed physics and psychology and is predicted by no theory with other successes.

Estimate for P10: 0.01, range 0.002 to 0.04. A preregistered, adversarially designed, independently analyzed study with randomized timing would be decisive in either direction and is the only kind of new evidence worth collecting.

12. Results

12.1 Summary of estimates

Proposition	Estimate	Range	Distinctive of Buddhism?
P1 No permanent, independent ego	0.90	0.82 to 0.96	No; shared
P2 Persons are reducible	0.60	0.45 to 0.75	No; disputed within Buddhism
P3 Minimal subjectivity is real	0.75	0.60 to 0.88	Disputed within Buddhism
P4a Local emptiness	0.85	0.75 to 0.93	No; shared

Proposition	Estimate	Range	Distinctive of Buddhism?
P4b Global emptiness	0.20	0.08 to 0.35	Yes (Madhyamaka)
P5 Consciousness fundamental	Bayes factor 1.1	0.9 to 1.4	Disputed within Buddhism
P6a Training improves phenomenological access	0.65	0.50 to 0.80	Compatible
P6b Training gives metaphysical access	0.10	0.04 to 0.22	Yes
P7a Practice yields real benefit	0.90	0.85 to 0.95	No
P7b Insight has a mechanism of its own	0.40	0.25 to 0.55	Partly
P7c Complete, irreversible liberation	0.07	0.02 to 0.18	Yes
P8a Broad continuation	Bayes factor 1.0	0.9 to 1.15	Inherited estimate unchanged
P8b Serial re-embodiment of any kind	0.10	0.04 to 0.20	Shared with other traditions
P8c Karmically ordered rebirth	0.03	0.01 to 0.08	Shared with other Indian traditions
P9i Anomalous delay in decomposition	0.25	0.10 to 0.45	Compatible
P9ii Caused by a persisting meditative state	0.03	0.005 to 0.08	Yes
P10 Nonlocal field effects	0.01	0.002 to 0.04	Not a Buddhist doctrine

12.2 Three perspectival passes

Each pass asks what a well-informed and fair-minded holder of the stated outlook would assign after reading the same material. The adopted figure is a judgment informed by the passes and is not their mean.

Proposition	Naturalist	Buddhist-sympathetic	Consciousness-first	Adopted
P1	0.97	0.93	0.80	0.90
P2	0.75	0.65	0.40	0.60
P3	0.60	0.70	0.92	0.75
P4a	0.90	0.95	0.70	0.85
P4b	0.12	0.45	0.10	0.20
P5 (Bayes factor)	0.95	1.1	1.5	1.1
P6a	0.55	0.80	0.70	0.65
P6b	0.03	0.25	0.20	0.10
P7b	0.30	0.60	0.40	0.40
P7c	0.02	0.20	0.08	0.07
P8b	0.02	0.20	0.15	0.10

Proposition	Naturalist	Buddhist-sympathetic	Consciousness-first	Adopted
P8c	0.005	0.10	0.03	0.03
P9ii	0.005	0.08	0.05	0.03
P10	0.002	0.02	0.04	0.01

The passes all assign low probability to P10 and generally favor P1, although their numerical judgments differ even on some shared propositions. They diverge most on P4b, P6b, and the rebirth propositions. The divergence tracks prior metaphysical commitments more than any difference in reading the evidence: on the distinctive propositions, the evidence reviewed here does not bring differing priors together.

Two patterns deserve notice. The Buddhist-sympathetic and consciousness-first passes are not allies. They part on P2, P3, and above all P4b, where the consciousness-first theorist is the firmest opponent of global emptiness. And the naturalist pass assigns high probability to most of what the early Buddhist texts assert about the self, which is the sense in which Buddhist no-self has been vindicated.

12.3 What would change the estimates

Proposition	Observation that would move it most	Direction
P2	A persuasive account of phenomenal unity that requires no subject, or a demonstration that none is possible	Up or down
P3	Credible, cross-traditional reports of subjectless experience that are not gaps known only afterward	Down
P4b	A physical theory in which no level is fundamental, or a compelling argument that grounding must terminate	Up or down
P5	A feature of pure-awareness states predicted by consciousness-first theories and not by self-model theories, confirmed across laboratories	Up
P6a	Blinded tests in which trained practitioners outperform controls on objectively scorable introspective tasks beyond the domain practiced	Up
P6b	Contemplatives of different traditions, kept from communicating, converging on a novel and checkable claim	Up
P7b	Trials in which insight practices outperform matched concentration or relaxation practices on durable outcomes, with self-related mediators	Up
P8b, P8c	Cases with written records made before verification, collected prospectively by independent teams; verified past-life recall by adepts	Up
P9	Prospective tukdam cases with matched controls and blinded forensic assessment	Up or down
P10	An independent, preregistered replication with randomized timing	Up or down

12.4 The working expectation, tested

The hypothesis tested here is that contemplative evidence discriminates psychological models of self-experience more readily than ultimate ontologies. The reviewed evidence supports it. Contemplative data bear with some force on P3, P6a, and P7b, which concern the structure of experience and its modification, and bear weakly on P4b, P5, and P8, which concern what there is.

13. Implications for the companion papers

For the metaphysics model. The current hypothesis space does not explicitly represent global anti-foundationalism. It should add a cross-cutting question asking whether each ontological family posits an intrinsically real ground. This is preferable to treating every structuralist or no-bottom-level view as an entirely separate substance family. The 0.20 estimate for P4b is a provisional weight for that question, subject to reconciliation with the companion model. Buddhist philosophy should not be treated as a single witness for idealism: Yogacara on an idealist reading and some Buddha-nature readings point toward it; Madhyamaka rejects a foundational mind. The contemplative material supplies a Bayes factor near 1.1 for consciousness fundamental, to be entered once.

For the survival paper. The Buddhist-specific material warrants no fresh update to the companion estimate. The reincarnation-type cases should cite the Leininger exchange and remain counted once. Serial re-embodiment can be displayed as a tentative outcome category, but the 0.10 assigned here is not a measured share of the companion model's broad continuation probability, and its routes may overlap other categories. A joint outcome partition would need explicit definitions and conditional probabilities before the figures could be combined. The paper's broad and narrow survival criteria should also be linked to P2: if persons are reducible, the question whether a successor is the deceased may be indeterminate, while the degree to which psychological features persist remains assessable.

For the cryonics paper. That paper already scores strict identity and what matters separately across repair, reconstruction, and copying. P2 at 0.60 supports giving the what-matters results the leading position. The consistency test of Section 5.4 can be borrowed directly: a framework that counts amnesic rebirth as survival cannot consistently deny survival through high-fidelity reconstruction, and a framework that requires rich psychological continuity will count reconstruction far above rebirth.

14. Limitations

The review was targeted and relied on published reports and standard scholarly reconstructions; primary texts were consulted through translation and secondary literature, and no claim of passage-level philological verification is made. No raw data were reanalyzed. The advanced-meditation literature comes from few laboratories and very few participants. The probabilities are judgments, and a different careful reasoner could differ by the width of the stated ranges or more on P2, P3, and P4b, where the philosophical disagreement is deep and old. The three passes were generated within a single drafting process and do not substitute for review by scholars who hold those

positions. The author's companion papers start from priors more favorable to non-physicalist frameworks than the professional baseline, and readers who start elsewhere should apply the Bayes factors reported here to their own priors.

One limitation runs the other way. The method privileges propositions that can be stated and scored. Much of what Buddhist traditions value, including ethical formation, the training of attention, and a way of facing mortality, is not a proposition and has not been assessed.

15. Conclusion

Buddhist philosophy and meditation make serious contributions to debates about selfhood and consciousness, and the contributions differ in kind. On the nonexistence of a permanent ego and the dependent, constructed character of persons and ordinary things, the tradition was right early, for good reasons, and its conclusions now have independent scientific support; these claims are highly probable and are not distinctively Buddhist. On reductionism and on minimal subjectivity, the tradition contains the debate and does not resolve it, and its internal arguments are among the best available. The contemplative record tells mildly against the most radical reading of no-self. On global emptiness, Buddhism offers a distinctive metaphysical option that deserves a place in the hypothesis space it has not yet been given, at perhaps one chance in five, and that competes with consciousness-first metaphysics.

Meditation is a real instrument for observing experience, of uncertain and domain-limited calibration, and probably not an instrument for observing metaphysical facts. It lends consciousness-first views a little support and no more. Insight may be a real mechanism of relief; perfected liberation is improbable. The Buddhist case for rebirth adds little to the general case for survival, the available cases fit karmic doctrine poorly, and by the tradition's own account the successor in rebirth is not straightforwardly oneself. The extraordinary claims remain improbable and cheaply testable.

A credible assessment gives Buddhist claims their strongest formulation, compares them with sophisticated rivals, counts shared evidence once, and commits to numbers that others can attack. The numbers given here are a first such commitment.

Appendix A. Evidence ledger and dependence groups

Item	Dependence group	Bears on	Direction and strength
Aggregate analysis; chariot argument	Early Buddhist argument	P1, P4a	Supports; argument, enters via prior
Vasubandhu's critique of the person; Pudgalavāda replies	Abhidharma debate	P2	Divided; argument
Parfit's puzzle cases	Analytic argument	P2	Supports; argument
Reflexive awareness (Dignāga); phenomenological minimal self	Argument, two traditions	P3	Supports; argument
Candrakīrti against reflexive awareness; no-subject readings	Argument	P3	Opposes; argument

Item	Dependence group	Bears on	Direction and strength
Bodily illusions, agency dissociations, clinical fractionation of self	Experimental psychology (many laboratories)	P1, P4a	Supports strongly; neutral between Buddhism and naturalism
Reports of graded self-loss with awareness retained	Contemplative phenomenology (several groups)	P3	Supports moderately
Minimal Phenomenal Experience survey	Single project	P3, P5	P3 supports weakly; P5 nearly neutral
Cross-tradition divergence in interpreting similar states	History of mysticism	P5, P6b	Opposes P6b moderately
Psychedelic experiences shift metaphysical belief	Single survey study plus related work	P5, P6b	Debunking; weakens testimony
Madhyamaka arguments against intrinsic nature	Argument	P4b	Supports; argument
Possibility of no fundamental level; structural realism	Analytic argument, philosophy of physics	P4b	Supports weakly
Grounding intuitions; intrinsic qualitative character	Analytic argument	P4b	Opposes
Body-scan accuracy; metacognition training	Two laboratories, small samples	P6a	Supports weakly to moderately
Heartbeat detection nulls	One group, two studies	P6a	Opposes weakly
Cessation and absorption case studies	Largely one programme, overlapping participants	P6a, P5	P6a supports weakly; P5 weakly opposes strong awareness realism
Meta-analyses of mindfulness-based programmes	Many trials	P7a	Supports strongly
Mediation by decentering and rumination	Meta-analysis of mediation studies	P7b	Supports weakly
Fear of death among Tibetan monastics	Single cross-cultural study	P7b	Opposes moderately
Distressing changes in sense of self	One research group, qualitative	P7b	Opposes weakly
Dharmakīrti's argument	Argument	P8	Neutral; restates prior on P5
Cases of the reincarnation type	One research tradition; already in companion ledger	P8a, P8b, P8c	Not recounted; conditional on genuineness, opposes P8c relative to P8b
Tukdam	Single project	P9ii	Opposes weakly

Item	Dependence group	Bears on	Direction and strength
electroencephalography null			
Tukdam decomposition case reports	Same project	P9i	Supports weakly
Group-meditation time-series studies	Single affiliated research community	P10	Supports very weakly after discount for allegiance and design

Selected Bibliography

Albahari, Miri. *Analytical Buddhism: The Two-Tiered Illusion of Self*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.

Albahari, Miri. "Witness-Consciousness: Its Definition, Appearance and Reality." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 16, no. 1 (2009): 62-84.

Albahari, Miri. "Perennial Idealism: A Mystical Solution to the Mind-Body Problem." *Philosophers' Imprint* 19 (2019).

Arnold, Dan. *Brains, Buddhas, and Believing*. Columbia University Press, 2012.

Ataria, Yochai, Yair Dor-Ziderman, and Aviva Berkovich-Ohana. "How Does It Feel to Lack a Sense of Boundaries? A Case Study of a Long-Term Mindfulness Meditator." *Consciousness and Cognition* 37 (2015): 133-147.

Baird, Benjamin, Michael D. Mrazek, Dawa T. Phillips, and Jonathan W. Schooler. "Domain-Specific Enhancement of Metacognitive Ability Following Meditation Training." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 143, no. 5 (2014): 1972-1979.

Blanke, Olaf, and Thomas Metzinger. "Full-Body Illusions and Minimal Phenomenal Selfhood." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 13, no. 1 (2009): 7-13.

Bliss, Ricki, and Graham Priest, eds. *Reality and Its Structure: Essays in Fundamentality*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

Bodhi, Bhikkhu, trans. *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya*. Wisdom Publications, 2000.

Botvinick, Matthew, and Jonathan Cohen. "Rubber Hands 'Feel' Touch That Eyes See." *Nature* 391 (1998): 756.

Bourget, David, and David J. Chalmers. "Philosophers on Philosophy: The 2020 PhilPapers Survey." *Philosophers' Imprint* 23 (2023).

Chadha, Monima. *Selfless Minds: A Contemporary Perspective on Vasubandhu's Metaphysics*. Oxford University Press, 2023.

Chowdhury, Avijit, et al. "Investigation of Advanced Mindfulness Meditation 'Cessation' Experiences Using EEG Spectral Analysis in an Intensively Sampled Case Study." *Neuropsychologia* 190 (2023): 108694.

Chowdhury, Avijit, et al. "Multimodal Neurophenomenology of Advanced Concentration Absorption Meditation." *NeuroImage* 305 (2025): 120973.

- Collins, Steven. *Selfless Persons: Imagery and Thought in Theravāda Buddhism*. Cambridge University Press, 1982.
- Coseru, Christian. *Perceiving Reality: Consciousness, Intentionality, and Cognition in Buddhist Philosophy*. Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Cowherds, The. *Moonshadows: Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy*. Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Dennett, Daniel C. *Consciousness Explained*. Little, Brown, 1991.
- Dor-Ziderman, Yair, Aviva Berkovich-Ohana, Joseph Glicksohn, and Abraham Goldstein. "Mindfulness-Induced Selflessness: A MEG Neurophenomenological Study." *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 7 (2013): 582.
- Duckworth, Douglas S. *Mipam on Buddha-Nature: The Ground of the Nyingma Tradition*. State University of New York Press, 2008.
- Duerlinger, James. *Indian Buddhist Theories of Persons: Vasubandhu's "Refutation of the Theory of a Self."* RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.
- Edwards, Paul. *Reincarnation: A Critical Examination*. Prometheus Books, 1996.
- Fales, Evan, and Barry Markovsky. "Evaluating Heterodox Theories." *Social Forces* 76, no. 2 (1997): 511-525.
- Farias, Miguel, et al. "Adverse Events in Meditation Practices and Meditation-Based Therapies: A Systematic Review." *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* 142, no. 5 (2020): 374-393.
- Forman, Robert K. C., ed. *The Problem of Pure Consciousness: Mysticism and Philosophy*. Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Fox, Kieran C. R., et al. "Meditation Experience Predicts Introspective Accuracy." *PLOS ONE* 7, no. 9 (2012): e45370.
- Franco, Eli. *Dharmakīrti on Compassion and Rebirth*. Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien, Universität Wien, 1997.
- Gamma, Alex, and Thomas Metzinger. "The Minimal Phenomenal Experience Questionnaire (MPE-92M): Towards a Phenomenological Profile of 'Pure Awareness' Experiences in Meditators." *PLOS ONE* 16, no. 7 (2021): e0253694.
- Ganeri, Jonardon. *The Self: Naturalism, Consciousness, and the First-Person Stance*. Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Garfield, Jay L. *Engaging Buddhism: Why It Matters to Philosophy*. Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Garfield, Jay L. *Losing Ourselves: Learning to Live without a Self*. Princeton University Press, 2022.
- Gold, Jonathan C. *Paving the Great Way: Vasubandhu's Unifying Buddhist Philosophy*. Columbia University Press, 2015.
- Goldberg, Simon B., et al. "The Empirical Status of Mindfulness-Based Interventions: A Systematic Review of 44 Meta-Analyses of Randomized Controlled Trials." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 17, no. 1 (2022): 108-130.

Goyal, Madhav, et al. "Meditation Programs for Psychological Stress and Well-Being: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis." *JAMA Internal Medicine* 174, no. 3 (2014): 357-368.

Gu, Jenny, Clara Strauss, Rod Bond, and Kate Cavanagh. "How Do Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Improve Mental Health and Wellbeing? A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Mediation Studies." *Clinical Psychology Review* 37 (2015): 1-12.

Hagelin, John S., et al. "Effects of Group Practice of the Transcendental Meditation Program on Preventing Violent Crime in Washington, D.C." *Social Indicators Research* 47, no. 2 (1999): 153-201.

Harvey, Peter. *The Selfless Mind: Personality, Consciousness and Nirvāṇa in Early Buddhism*. Curzon Press, 1995.

Jackson, Roger R. *Is Enlightenment Possible? Dharmakīrti and rGyal tshab rje on Knowledge, Rebirth, No-Self and Liberation*. Snow Lion, 1993.

Katz, Steven T. "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism." In *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis*, edited by Steven T. Katz. Oxford University Press, 1978.

Kellner, Birgit, and John Taber. "Studies in Yogācāra-Vijñānavāda Idealism I: The Interpretation of Vasubandhu's *Viṃśikā*." *Asiatische Studien* 68, no. 3 (2014): 709-756.

Khalsa, Sahib S., et al. "Interoceptive Awareness in Experienced Meditators." *Psychophysiology* 45, no. 4 (2008): 671-677.

Khalsa, Sahib S., et al. "The Practice of Meditation Is Not Associated with Improved Interoceptive Awareness of the Heartbeat." *Psychophysiology* 57, no. 2 (2020): e13479.

King, Sallie B. *Buddha Nature*. State University of New York Press, 1991.

Kral, Tammi R. A., et al. "Absence of Structural Brain Changes from Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction: Two Combined Randomized Controlled Trials." *Science Advances* 8, no. 20 (2022): eabk3316.

Ladyman, James, and Don Ross. *Every Thing Must Go: Metaphysics Naturalized*. Oxford University Press, 2007.

Laukkonen, Ruben E., et al. "Cessations of Consciousness in Meditation: Advancing a Scientific Understanding of Nirodha Samāpatti." *Progress in Brain Research* 280 (2023).

Lindahl, Jared R., et al. "The Varieties of Contemplative Experience: A Mixed-Methods Study of Meditation-Related Challenges in Western Buddhists." *PLOS ONE* 12, no. 5 (2017): e0176239.

Lindahl, Jared R., and Willoughby B. Britton. "'I Have This Feeling of Not Really Being Here': Buddhist Meditation and Changes in Sense of Self." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 26, no. 7-8 (2019): 157-183.

Lott, Dylan T., et al. "No Detectable Electroencephalographic Activity After Clinical Declaration of Death Among Tibetan Buddhist Meditators in Apparent Tukdam, a Putative Postmortem Meditation State." *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (2021): 599190.

Lusthaus, Dan. *Buddhist Phenomenology: A Philosophical Investigation of Yogācāra Buddhism and the Ch'eng Wei-shih Lun*. RoutledgeCurzon, 2002.

Lutz, Antoine, et al. "An Overview of Neurophenomenological Approaches to Meditation and Their Relevance to Clinical Research." *Biological Psychiatry: Cognitive Neuroscience and Neuroimaging* 10, no. 4 (2025): 411-424.

MacKenzie, Matthew. "Self-Awareness without a Self: Buddhism and the Reflexivity of Awareness." *Asian Philosophy* 18, no. 3 (2008): 245-266.

Metzinger, Thomas. *Being No One: The Self-Model Theory of Subjectivity*. MIT Press, 2003.

Metzinger, Thomas. *The Elephant and the Blind: The Experience of Pure Consciousness*. MIT Press, 2024.

Millière, Raphaël, et al. "Psychedelics, Meditation, and Self-Consciousness." *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (2018): 1475.

Nichols, Shaun, Nina Strohminger, Arun Rai, and Jay Garfield. "Death and the Self." *Cognitive Science* 42, suppl. 1 (2018): 314-332.

Olson, Eric T. *The Human Animal: Personal Identity without Psychology*. Oxford University Press, 1997.

Orme-Johnson, David W., et al. "International Peace Project in the Middle East: The Effects of the Maharishi Technology of the Unified Field." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 32, no. 4 (1988): 776-812.

Orme-Johnson, David W., Charles N. Alexander, and John L. Davies. "The Effects of the Maharishi Technology of the Unified Field: Reply to a Methodological Critique." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 34, no. 4 (1990): 756-768.

Parfit, Derek. *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford University Press, 1984.

Priestley, Leonard C. D. C. *Pudgalavāda Buddhism: The Reality of the Indeterminate Self*. Centre for South Asian Studies, University of Toronto, 1999.

Schaffer, Jonathan. "Is There a Fundamental Level?" *Noûs* 37, no. 3 (2003): 498-517.

Schmithausen, Lambert. *On the Problem of the External World in the Ch'eng wei shih lun*. International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 2005.

Schrodt, Philip A. "A Methodological Critique of a Test of the Effects of the Maharishi Technology of the Unified Field." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 34, no. 4 (1990): 745-755.

Schwitzgebel, Eric. *Perplexities of Consciousness*. MIT Press, 2011.

Sharf, Robert H. "Buddhist Modernism and the Rhetoric of Meditative Experience." *Numen* 42, no. 3 (1995): 228-283.

Siderits, Mark. *Personal Identity and Buddhist Philosophy: Empty Persons*. 2nd ed. Routledge, 2015.

Siderits, Mark, and Shōryū Katsura. *Nāgārjuna's Middle Way: Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Wisdom Publications, 2013.

Siderits, Mark, Evan Thompson, and Dan Zahavi, eds. *Self, No Self? Perspectives from Analytical, Phenomenological, and Indian Traditions*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

Stevenson, Ian. *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*. 2nd ed. University Press of Virginia, 1974.

- Stevenson, Ian. *Reincarnation and Biology: A Contribution to the Etiology of Birthmarks and Birth Defects*. Praeger, 1997.
- Stevenson, Ian. *Children Who Remember Previous Lives: A Question of Reincarnation*. Rev. ed. McFarland, 2001.
- Strawson, Galen. *Selves: An Essay in Revisionary Metaphysics*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Sudduth, Michael. *A Philosophical Critique of Empirical Arguments for Postmortem Survival*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.
- Sudduth, Michael. "The James Leininger Case Re-examined." *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 35, no. 4 (2021).
- Thanissaro Bhikkhu. "The Not-Self Strategy." Essay, 1996.
- Thompson, Evan. *Waking, Dreaming, Being: Self and Consciousness in Neuroscience, Meditation, and Philosophy*. Columbia University Press, 2015.
- Thompson, Evan. *Why I Am Not a Buddhist*. Yale University Press, 2020.
- Tidwell, Tawni L., et al. "Delayed Decompositional Changes in Indoor Settings among Tibetan Monastic Communities in India: A Case Report." *Forensic Science International: Reports* 9 (2024): 100370.
- Tidwell, Tawni L. "Introduction: Embodying a Liberated Mind at Death." *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* 49 (2025): 405-415.
- Timmermann, Christopher, et al. "Psychedelics Alter Metaphysical Beliefs." *Scientific Reports* 11 (2021): 22166.
- Tucker, Jim B. *Life Before Life: A Scientific Investigation of Children's Memories of Previous Lives*. St. Martin's Press, 2005.
- Tucker, Jim B. "Response to Sudduth's 'James Leininger Case Re-Examined.'" *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 36, no. 1 (2022).
- Van Dam, Nicholas T., et al. "Mind the Hype: A Critical Evaluation and Prescriptive Agenda for Research on Mindfulness and Meditation." *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 13, no. 1 (2018): 36-61.
- Varela, Francisco J. "Neurophenomenology: A Methodological Remedy for the Hard Problem." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 3, no. 4 (1996): 330-349.
- Wegner, Daniel M. *The Illusion of Conscious Will*. MIT Press, 2002.
- Westerhoff, Jan. *Nāgārjuna's Madhyamaka: A Philosophical Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Westerhoff, Jan. *The Non-Existence of the Real World*. Oxford University Press, 2020.
- Williams, Paul. *The Reflexive Nature of Awareness: A Tibetan Madhyamaka Defence*. Curzon Press, 1998.
- Yang, Winson F. Z., et al. "Intensive Whole-Brain 7T MRI Case Study of Volitional Control of Brain Activity in Deep Absorptive Meditation States." *Cerebral Cortex* 34, no. 1 (2024).
- Zahavi, Dan. *Self and Other: Exploring Subjectivity, Empathy, and Shame*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

Zimmermann, Michael. A Buddha Within: The Tathāgatarbhasūtra. International Research Institute for Advanced Buddhology, Soka University, 2002.

About the Author

Rodney Malpert holds a J.D. and M.A. from Cornell University and completed all Ph.D. requirements in Government except the dissertation, with graduate coursework in analytic philosophy. He practiced law in Silicon Valley and taught law at Southern Methodist University and Arizona State University. He edited most of Law Journal Press's Business Immigration Law: Strategies for Employing Foreign Nationals and coauthored several chapters. His independent research uses Bayesian methods and human-AI collaboration to examine metaphysics, consciousness, and personal identity.

Website and current papers: RodMalpert.com

Attribution and Disclosure

Rodney Malpert specified the questions, scope, cross-paper relationships, and evaluative aims. ChatGPT (OpenAI) assisted with conceptual organization, literature mapping, source checking, conceptual and editorial review, and verification of the cross-paper survival reference. Claude (Anthropic) contributed substantive writing and proposed probabilities. The estimates are provisional and remain subject to the author's review. This manuscript does not claim a systematic review, raw-data reanalysis, or specialist review. Named scholars are interlocutors, not endorsers.