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Near-Death Experiences:
Vision of the Afterlife through the Domains of the Liberal Arts

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Liberal Studies

by
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Introduction

A feeling of no longer needing one's physical body, a warm-spherical light that radiated unimaginable love and peace, a non-binary voice heard without being spoken by anyone and a sudden, yet reluctant return to one's physical body. These are only a few of the details provided by Dr. Jean Renee Hausheer when she explained what occurred during her near-death experience (NDE). (Hausheer) The famous psychologist Carl Jung once told of his NDE stating, "It seemed to me that I was high up in space. Far below I saw the globe of the Earth, bathed in a gloriously blue light." (Winston 289) These two accounts are among many of the NDEs described by many famous people that have provided very similar yet uniquely distinct tales. Actress Elizabeth Taylor said in her NDE that she spoke with one of her deceased husbands. (E. Taylor) Taylor explained the conversation with her deceased love as more of a reunion than a dream-like memory. (Ibid) They had an intimate conversation together before he told her she would have to return and would have to fight to go back. (Ibid) Actress Sharon Stone claimed to have seen a bright light and others around her during her NDE. As a result, she now feels that death is like a companion that is always close. (Stone)

These four experiences share certain characteristics, yet they are subjective experiences that had a profound impact on each person. Individuals from all over the world, with no connection to age, race, religion, ethnicity, social standing, nor historical context have provided NDE accounts that are remarkably similar. This paper will summarize NDEs through the lens of the Liberal Arts as a way to share the knowledge of one of humanity's greatest mysteries through the lenses of multiple disciplines spanning many centuries.

Mostly occurring at the cusp between life and death, NDEs break the established laws we have come to accept as part of our physical sciences. One way that NDEs break the established

understandings involve an unknown process that occurs while a person is supposed to be unconscious and without any cardiac function. How then does a person with no measurable physical nor mental action “return” with detailed accounts of journeying through space, seeing and hearing the doctors as they work to save their life and have conversations with those who are supposedly deceased people, and/or claiming to have been forced back to life with a higher universal consciousness and a myriad of other unexplainable characteristics? According to what we know about ourselves and our western empirical worldview, a person is unable to do that and know the things explained through NDE accounts. And with that thought we have no choice but to turn on ourselves through a process of savagery which provides us with only two logical possibilities to believe. During his NDE, Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung either saw the Earth from high above or experienced a mental process occurring at the time of his near passing on June 6, 1941, that made him believe that he did.

The modern, scientific mind asks if NDEs are a release of neurotransmitters that are higher than normal levels. Perhaps, NDEs are a mental process that is too low in intensity to register on medical equipment. Or does the philosophical perspective of dualism come into play through our unconsciousness as a way to take advantage of our physical state to escape confinement and ascend to a place where human limitation is no longer a factor? We are physical beings with our bodies being nothing more than shells that work to contain our consciousness. There are many theories involving the brain's chemistry, physiology, and bodily functions that are associated with our cognition and respiration.

Additionally, many experiencers have returned to consciousness with accounts that were impossible to verify. These accounts have provided some new topics to what has become known as the mind-body problem; a long-standing philosophical argument that means to explain whether the human body and our consciousness exist in separate states.

Jung wrote of an experience that involves sight, depth perception, and intensity while his body was physically shutdown. Hausheer was able to feel love and peace while also being able to place herself somewhere that she knew that she would have to leave. Taylor formed thoughts about conversation and loss while Stone saw white light and experienced a presence of many other people. These experiences were very complex and required multiple parts of the brain acting together to process information while the individual is conscious, but these individuals were able to process their emotional and physical states and form memories of their accounts that lasted for several years and did so while their physical and mental processes were completely shut down. How is it that individuals return to a conscious state of mind so certain of their experience that they have life-long changes in their personalities? In some cases, the changes are positive and a person flourishes in response. Others have a negative reaction and live the remainder of their life having to seek support groups, psychiatric care, and live in a form of denial while their loved ones and medical staff struggle to understand a suggestive experience while family members, friends, and professionals work to support the experiencer. (Holden)

As a result of the changes and challenges experiencers had, organizations have been formed to assist individuals who struggle to accept what they have experienced. These organizations include the University of Virginia's Division of Perceptual Studies, the International Association for Near Death Studies, Inc., the Near-Death Experience Research Foundation (NDERF), and a multitude of other organizations that provide research articles to the National Institute of Health.

This paper will review NDEs from different perspectives of the Liberal Arts. The goal is to triangulate the perspectives of the disciplines on the phenomena of near-death experiences, thus seeing them with a new and more complete understanding that will not only bring this phenomenon to better

light but hopefully provide you with enough information about what you should expect if a better light focuses itself upon you.

The Domains of the Liberal Arts: Lenses on a Complex Phenomenon

The Liberal Arts have been defined - and redefined - since the command of the Delphic Oracle to know thyself. The term Liberal Arts describes fields of study, with different principles and methods; a set of educational goals related to lifelong learning; and a type of college which is dedicated to critical thinking, rather than vocational education. Through the well-defined principles of study and dedication to critical thinking, several perspectives can be applied to all areas of study through the means reminiscent of the philosophical tradition that works to find the truths that act as a foundation that supports all things. (Sandy)

This review of near-death experiences (NDEs) will explore more than what it means to have an NDE. We will define what it means to study a unique perspective of our humanity and by doing so establish the Liberal Arts as a way of understanding through the Arts and Humanities what it means to experience creativity; through the Sciences, an emphasis on empirical evidence; and through the Social Sciences, observation, inference, and helping others. These lenses provide a clearer view than through any one perspective.

Section 1: The Prototypical Near-Death Experience

Characteristics of NDEs are as unique as the experiencers reliving their accounts (See Appendix Characteristics). Due to the variety of characteristics, the ability to define what a prototypical NDE is can be difficult. However, averages can work to narrow the data. It is possible to assign a statistical probability to the most repetitive characteristics in order to generate a percentage chance of a characteristic's occurrence. This can be completed by selecting several hundred randomly chosen NDE accounts from the NDERF experiencer page. Through the selection

and separating of characteristics from within each narrative, the number of individual characteristics can be added up and then divided by the number of NDE narratives. The result will be a statistical probability chart that can provide what it means to have a prototypical NDE through the generated statistics. But statistics are not the only way to determine what a prototypical NDE is. There is documentation that indicates a prototypical NDE seems to include visual stimuli and/or feelings that include rapid thought processes, a white light, intense feelings of either a positive or negative nature, an out-of-body experience, seeing and speaking with people that have been deceased, seeing one's life played out before them, a decision to return to one's body, or various other characteristics that have been reported by experiencers (Greyson, Bush). Take as an example the NDE shared by Elizabeth Taylor. She claimed that during her NDE she saw herself from outside of her own body. (E. Taylor) Soon after she transitioned into seeing a bright and warming light. (Ibid) She then met with her ex-husband and they shared a conversation about her need to return to life. (Ibid) Then there is the account given from Sir Francis Beaufort that occurred when he nearly drowned. According to him, he was overcome with a feeling of tranquility. (Koch) He claimed his thoughts proceeded in a way that were inconceivable by others except those in his situation. (Ibid) His thinking then focused on a backward review of his life. (Ibid)

The accounts from Taylor and Sir Francis seem to follow the most common characteristics of NDE. Based upon their experiences, the prototypical NDEs can be determined as an experience that may be very similar to those shared by Taylor and Sir Beaufort.

But even with this kind of statistical analysis, there are still very few answers to the many questions regarding what it means to have a prototypical NDE. In fact, even when someone has what is believed to be many of the characteristics shared by experiencers, they may still be classified as a person that did not have an authentic NDE. The denial of a person's account to be an NDE is because

all experiences will not meet the criteria for an NDE classification and there may be other less mysterious mental conditions that can also result in a person's need to embellish upon their experience(s). Issues like these make a verification of a person's NDE very difficult to determine and works against the understanding, researching and maintenance of medical reporting.

In order to identify an authentic experience, there needs to be a way to use the characteristics of an NDE to make a determination. Dr. Bruce Greyson developed a multilayered questionnaire that makes a determination based upon a numerical value scale that not only identifies experiencers, but it also identifies the intensity of the experience. Known as the Greyson Scale, this test has become the benchmark for establishing an authentic experience for NDE research. (Kotler 39)

Section 1.1: The Greyson Scale

The ability to establish a scientific method for the classification of NDEs was a complex process. Difficulty with the ability to make a clear determination may be due to the unique nature of experiences and varying characteristics that each experiencer recounts. Academics and researchers, however, seemed to assume that certain scientific principles could provide the means to determine if a NDE had occurred. Known as the Greyson Scale, it is used by medical practitioners and organizations as a way to make a determination.

The Greyson Scale contains sixteen questions that provide a multilayered determination. The same sixteen questions are also broken down into four components: 1-4 cognitive, 5-8 affective, 9-12 paranormal and 13-16 transcendental. Any subsection with a score of five or higher, without a score of five or higher on any other section, would be established as the dominant NDE component. Each of the 16 questions are answered through a point scale consisting of 0-2 points with a 0-32 score of possible points. A completed Scale with a score of seven or higher is determined to

represent a core experience. This test is claimed to be able to "differentiate NDEs from organic brain syndromes and non-specific stress responses following close brushes with death". (Greyson, 83)

Section 1.2: The Core Experience

Within the NDERF, NDE public account archive of experiencer tales, NDE narratives are provided by experiencers to raise awareness of what it means to have an NDE. Their narratives provide characteristics that people claim to have while in an unconscious state of mind. Most experiencers list characteristics that they claim to have had, but the combination of characteristics a person may have can vary greatly. (Characteristics of a Near-Death Experience)

Questions within the Greyson Scale are accompanied by a Likert scale of intensity. One example of this question-intensity relationship comes from question 8 of section D on a questionnaire located within the NDERF website, "8. Did you see, or feel surrounded by a brilliant light?" The possible answers to this question are " 0 = No; 1 = An unusually bright light; 2 = A light clearly of mystical or other-worldly origin". Through this question it is easy to determine how the relation to the intensity can generate a value score with 0 being no intensity and 2 being most intense. As questions are answered, the score is tallied which provides the characteristics and intensity. The higher the intensity the higher the scale score which can then be used to determine the relationship between a person's NDEs and other factors.

Another example of a change correlating to a higher Greyson score involves the Spiritual Growth Scale. According to the data obtained from experiencers, scores given through the spiritual growth subscale were positively correlated with NDE scale scores. (B.A. Greyson) Then there is the study consisting of 105 participants that scored within the threshold of 7 to 32 with a median score of 17.25. (Holden) This scoring was used to make sure that the participants were validated as to have experienced an NDE. What the study found was that the NDE depth correlated to the Near-Death

Experiencers' Experience of Disclosure Scale (NEEDS) scores. What this means is that the larger the number on the Greyson Scale, which means the greater the intensity of the experience, the more difficult the disclosure of the NDE. (Ibid)

Section 1.3: The Veridical NDE

An old aspect of the NDE phenomenon that is gaining new interest involves what is known as the non-physical veridical perception (AVP). These accounts involve the experiencer's ability to provide information that an experiencer could not have known due to the experiencer's lack of consciousness at the time of the account. One form of AVP includes the accounts of individuals that are blind. According to professional literature, this type of account has been a part of NDE accounts since 1982. (Titus Rivas) These individuals provide accounts of their experience through visual explanations of what they saw. (Long) One blind experiencer told of a beautiful lady dressed in bright white light, seeing the many leaves attached to trees, birds and even telephone poles. (Ibid) One experiencer even told of "seeing far better than 20/20 vision" (Ibid)

Experiences of the blind are very unique in nature and would support the claim that NDEs are a form of transition from one physical form to a spiritual form. But other AVP experiences could be proof of a connection to a universal consciousness. A consciousness whereby information is accessible that has not been provided to NDErs, but the experiencer is provided unknown information during their NDE.

In the case of NDEs that provide unknown information to the experiencer, there seems to be two different aspects for review: the personal flashforward and the prophetic vision. These two aspects of NDEs are explained as "relatively rare occurrences". (Ring) The first is known as a personal flashforward and it seems to provide an experiencer with information that will directly involve them at a point subsequent of their NDE. (Ibid) The other aspect is known as a prophetic

vision and is an experience that involves a vision of what can be determined as preview of events that are planet wide. (Ibid) It is difficult to expect that an NDE can provide such a vision of the future but consider that although these two types of experiences are rare, they cannot be that rare as they occur enough to have acronyms and organization like the University of Virginia, Division of Perceptual Studies involved in the research required to solve the mysteries provided by NDErs and the causation of why NDEs occur.

Section 1.4: Summing It Up

Because of the number of NDE accounts and the different characteristics per account, the ability to define what a prototypical NDE is can be difficult to configure. How are we to define an experience when we do not even understand what the experience is? Even the methods used to determine an NDE can leave researchers wondering as they navigate thousands of testimonials given by experiencers, scales of experience, and false positives spoken as parts of true negatives. However, just as NDEs leave uncertainty, they also provide hope that there is something that we cannot know or understand. In the end, that is what drives the heart and soul of humanity.

Section 2: Echoes of NDEs in the Historical Record

Ancient literature is ripe with near-death experience accounts. Three accounts come from the writings of two of the most well-known philosophers of the ancient world, Plato and Plutarch. Plato wrote his tale of Er within his book *Republic* and Plutarch wrote *the Dream of Timarchus* within *Genius of Sokrates* and *the Vision of Thespesius* within *De Sera Numinis Vindicta*. In *the Myth of Er*, Plato wrote about the adventure of a slain soldier who transverses the afterlife. The soldier was named Er and he was explained by Plato as being killed in battle. However, after a few days he regained consciousness and told a story that has very similar details to modern day NDE accounts. Plutarch wrote extensively about NDE accounts through his writings. One source is from Plutarch's

dialogue *De Sera Numinis Vindicta* which includes a part titled *Visions of Thespesius*. Thespesius was injured while working and afterward he spoke of his experiences that left him forever changed. The other account titled *The Dream of Timarchus* is a part of Plutarch's *Genius of Sokrates*. Within Plutarch told the account of Timarchus. He was injured while in a cave and from that injury he was said to have transcended in a way that allowed him to explore a greater understanding of the universe. As these accounts explain, some of the great philosophers seem to have high regard for those that were told to have died and returned from the afterlife. Although some literary researchers may claim these written accounts to be nothing more than fiction, this can be difficult to believe as the accounts share so many similarities with modern day NDE accounts.

Section 2.1: Plato's Myth of Er

Within Plato's *Republic*, Plato wrote a tale about a Pamphylian soldier named Er. Er was slain in battle and arose from the dead twelve days later. Upon his return to consciousness, Er explained that his soul left his body. This is a very common characteristic of an NDE that is called an out-of-body experience, Stone and Taylor both explained their seeing their body while others worked to revive them. But unlike either of the two women, Er went on a journey with many other soldiers in his NDE. Once again, another characteristic of a NDE is the journey to another place. Taylor went to her ex-husband and Jung traveled away from the earth. But in the case of Er, he traveled to a place of judgement. While there he saw others travel downward in a clean and bright manner. Once again, this is another characteristic of a NDE as the bright light is mentioned by other NDErs. This light is also mentioned later as a line of light that extended "through the whole heaven and through the earth" that is explained as "brighter and purer" rainbow like. (Plato)

Later in the story, Plato told of how judges deemed that Er might do "irremediable wrongs to others and suffer yet worse himself." (Ibid) In order to determine if someone has done wrong to

others, there must be a form of life review, which is also a reoccurring characteristic of an NDE as many accounts tell of seeing their lives flash before their eyes. The story concludes when Er is, unlike the others with whom he traveled, returned to his body.

Section 2.2: Plutarch's the Vision of Thespesius

A similar story involved the account of Thespesius, a man described as having bad habits. (Becker) One day he fell and injured his neck. Thespesius then experiences what is explained as a plunge into the deep like a helmsman thrown off his ship. (Ibid) The injury was believed to have taken Thespesius's life and "... he felt his soul open up like a single eye to see the stars and their size and distance from each other at the beginning of his heavenly journey". (Ibid) Like with the account of Er, there is a transitory state between life and the afterlife. (Ibid) Thespesius saw a brightly colored light that contained "vigorous energy" that was used to travel. (Ibid)

Thespesius is guided through his travels on the "beams of light" by his relative, Orpheus, to a vast abyss. (Ibid) Once again, there is the reference to the journey and the light that is a main characteristic of an NDE. In the case of Thespesius, he is taken on his journey by a family member who guides him. This is another main characteristic of modern NDE accounts when a deceased friend or loved one is seen and interacts with the person experiencing an NDE.

Thespesius is joined by the souls of people that are deceased. His relative accompanies Thespesius, along with the other souls, to "the place of Lethe" where Thespesius and the other souls are deposited by the beams of light to a place of "Dionysiac" that is described as a place of "...paradise with laughter, play, pleasure and flowers". (Becker)

As Thespesius continues his journey he is able to hear the Sybil prior to journeying to the place of "Horrendous Punishment" where Thespesius meets his father who was a criminal.

Thespesius wants to leave after seeing his father, only to want to look upward toward the “Oracle of Light,” but he is unable to do so as the light is too bright. (Ibid) Thespesius then attempts to change his direction but is “forbidden.” (Ibid) Thespesius is returned to his body prior to its burning and lives the remainder of his life in virtue. This change of life is another common characteristic of experiencers which is best explained by Stone when she told of how she is no longer afraid of death and feels that death is always near. (Stone)

2.3. The Dream of Timarchus:

The Dream of Timarchus is another of Plutarch’s tales reminiscent of the classic NDE account. Explained as a friend to a son of Socrates, Timarchus of Chaeroneia was on a mission of understanding. (Verdicchio) To acquire his additional understanding, Timarchus was claimed to have taken a shamanic ritual. (Ibid) During the ritual, he experienced a head injury that resulted in his soul leaving his body and then his soul moved into the air. (Ibid) Plutarch wrote that as he journeyed into the air, he heard a sound above. (Ibid) As he looked up, he saw islands that were lit with a light that would vary in color. (Ibid) He then saw a large body of water that was a mix of glorious light. (Ibid) This image was supposedly a representation of the universe with the islands being planets and all of the planets move in a swirling manner reminiscent of the celestial sphere. (Ibid) Within two points there was a river of light which changes from blue to white. (Ibid) After looking down upon what was a nightmare experience of human sounds, he heard a voice that he cannot identify that explained the structure of the universe and told him of the souls. (Ibid) Soon after, the voices went silent and the source was not identified but considered to be a daemon. (Ibid) This tale provides several of the same characteristics shared by NDErs. There is the journey to the afterlife, the explanation of light is a major theme, a voice that cannot be identified and a universal understanding that exceeded what a normal person would experience.

Each of these three stories share similarities to each other and to modern accounts of NDEs. When compared to each other, it is reasonable to assume that the stories provided are similar enough to share a common work older than each of their works. This is because certain details are without certainty; but other details seem descriptive. One example is the way each of the three characters, Er, Thespesius, and Timarchus, initially lose their lives. Er was slain in battle, Thespesius fell on his neck, and Timarchus suffered a head injury. In this case, it is not the cause that seems to negate their credibility but the lack of details of the cause that does. One minute they are alive doing lively things and all of a sudden, they are initiating their NDE journey. This is unlike the characters return as their return is detailed and there is a clear understanding of why they are being returned. Due to the unbalanced nature of these tales, they seem to be made to tell something to the reader rather than enlighten the reader about the perils of one's demise and the possibility of one's return.

Another issue with the tales involves the way all three of the works detail a judgement where souls will suffer for actions taken upon another. In the case of Er, just souls were sent to the right so as to enjoy their time in heaven and the unjust souls were sent to the left in order to spend their sentences in a place they would dislike. In the case of Thespesius, he would travel to a place of Horrendous Punishment where he would meet his father. And Timarchus would look into a sphere that was explained to experience trouble and disturbances. He would go even further by explaining "a thousand howling's and billowing's of beasts, cries of children, and groans of men and women..." (Massimo Cacciari)

In this way, each of the stories push for a person to live a just life out of fear of the repercussions in the afterlife. Doing so makes the stories seem more like moral lessons to be taught and not like real life experiences. But in the same way these tales show their purpose to teach the

importance of a moral life, they also provide doubt of their story time status by sharing the same types of details that are provided by modern day NDEs.

Er was described as having an out-of-body experience. Stone and Taylor both spoke of their seeing their body from an outside source. Er was told to have traveled with other soldiers who would speak to each other. Stone stated in her interview that there are people with you, and they talk to others. (Stone) Taylor told of conversing with her husband and did not want to leave when the time came for her to return to life. (E. Taylor) From those accounts there does seem to be a commonality shared among each of them. But the reality is that there is more than one commonality. Each of the individuals spoke in detail about the light they saw.

Light seems to be the most significant commonality shared among each of the experiences within the experiencer's accounts. In the case of Timarchus the light was said to vary in color, and he would then see a large body of water that was a mix of glorious light. (Verdicchio) Jung said that he saw the earth bathed in a glorious blue light. (Winston) Er traveled to a place of judgement where he would speak to others. While there he would see others travel downward in a "clean and bright manner". (Plato) Er also saw a line of light that extended "through the whole heaven and through the earth" that is explained as "brighter and purer" rainbow like. (Ibid)

Section 3: Physiological Explanations of NDEs

The possible causes of NDEs are just as mysterious and numerous as the accounts of experiencers. Currently there are nearly 1,613,915 articles listed within the National Center for Biotechnology Information that involves NDEs. Even with all of that research, there are still very few answers to the cause(s) of NDEs. There are, however, several theories that seem to point in the correct direction. Some of the more prevalent theories include the PetCO₂ scale of carbon dioxide release, another possibility introduced by researchers includes what has come to be

known as REM-sleep intrusion. This involves an abnormal transition from wakeful consciousness into a REM sleep state. One such factor involves the study made by Martial, Charlotte and colleagues during which it was determined that while under hypnosis, experiencers memories of their NDE included a higher measure of alpha activity in both the posterior and frontal regions when compared to those that did not experience an NDE. (Martial and Charlotte 2019)

Finally, there is the theory that a flood of neurotransmitters introduced between the axions and dendrites of brain cells may cause brain cells to react in unpredictable ways. Each of these possible causes may seem to answer some of the questions as to why NDEs occur, but each possibility also has its detractors that prevent the possible answers from being accepted.

3.1. The PetCO₂ Possibility

Carbon dioxide (CO₂) is a colorless, odorless gas that consists of two oxygen atoms and one carbon atom. Its creation in the human body is caused through the process of metabolizing carbohydrates in cellular respiration. With regards to NDEs, a study found "Higher initial PetCO₂ and higher arterial blood pCO₂ proved to be important in the provoking of NDE's..." (Zalika Klemenc-Ketis) In order to understand how a higher initial PetCO₂ and higher arterial blood pCO₂ may initiate an NDE, researchers began to investigate the similarities that make this possibility a realistic candidate.

PetCO₂ is the measurement used to explain the level of CO₂ being expelled during respiration. Individuals with higher PetCO₂ have a greater release of CO₂ from the body. To generate a high PetCO₂, which means greater CO₂ quantities being exhaled, a person needs to have cardiac function strong enough to push blood through the pulmonary system and across the alveoli within their lungs. A study used to explain the possible correlation between PetCO₂ and NDEs included 52 patients that experienced a cardiac emergency while not in a

hospital (Klemenc-Ketis) Researchers found that "patients with higher arterial blood partial pressures of CO₂ had significantly more NDEs." (Klemenc-Ketis) This rationale makes sense when attempting to solve a mystery, but there is a common phrase in science that may discredit the PetCO₂ theory: correlation does not prove causation. The PetCO₂ study may lead the way to explaining the causes of NDEs in people that are suffering a cardiac emergency, but there are issues that make this theory unlikely. The first issue involves the history of NDEs.

With modern life-saving techniques like cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), which uses chest compressions to force additional blood flow through the cardiac system, only being used over the previous seventy or more years, there would be a remarkable jump in the numbers of NDE verses numbers prior to the implementation of CPR. This study may determine that something as simple as good quality chest compressions during the loss of consciousness may initiate an NDE, but the cause-effect correlation does not seem to validate the hypothesis.

Another issue associated with the PetCO₂ possibility involves the lack of information about the individuals used for the study. For instance, there is a possibility that individuals within the study had respiratory or high blood pressure issues that would cause a person to have restrictions of blood flow or oxygen exchange mentioned within the study.

Because of the limitations of the study used to connect the two events, the possibility of a correlation between the PetCO₂ exchange and the initiation of NDEs seems unlikely. But maybe the initiation of NDEs is more of a development issue rather than blood flow.

3.2. REM Intrusion

A second possible cause of NDEs involves REM Intrusion. The reasoning for this theory involves the wiring of the brain and may occur because some people may have a brain that "disposes them to blend REM and wakeful consciousness." (Nelson) What this means is that there

may exist in some people a tendency for their "arousal brain" to "blend" their consciousness and their REM switch together. (Ibid) This theory was put to the test when researchers asked experiencers questions involving their transition to and from sleep and a wakeful state. Through their efforts, the researchers learned that experiencers did not go from one state to the other but instead transitioned between the two states in a way that left both states temporarily active during the transition between the two mental states, a blended transition. (Ibid) Because of their blended transition, some were more likely during the REM intrusion to experience "dreamlike visual imagery, auditory hallucinations, or paralysis." (Ibid) These findings were replicated when 106 out of 1,034 respondents reported to have had an NDE. (Kondziella)

Section 3.3: Neurotransmitters

One of the main studies that serves to discover the causes behind NDE occurrences involves the accounts that people tell upon being revived. Some experiencers tell of a warm-white light and a feeling of euphoria like in the case of Stone. Others, as in the case of Hausheer, tell of feeling the presence of a higher power, and some like Jung talk of places that leave them with glorious images from beyond those seen in life. These accounts may lead people to look for answers in two distinctly different possibilities, either people are separating from their bodies during an NDE, which allows them to see white light, feel euphoric, embrace a higher power and/or experience universal imagery or the people who are on the cusp of death continue to maintain a measure of psychological functionality even when no functionality is supposed to occur. As ghosts are notoriously difficult to work with, researchers began to research cerebral functions. Through their research, the study of neurotransmitters has come to the forefront of NDE research.

Scientists have known about neurotransmitters since the year 1921. These chemical

messengers are used by the human brain to regulate and influence actions and reactions.

However, some neurotransmitters cause different effects when circumstances cause the brain to act in irregular ways. An example of these changes can be studied through people who use recreational drugs or cognitive problems. One of the most noted drugs for this type of effect is known today as Ecstasy or Molly but has a scientific name of Methylenedioxymethamphetamine or (MDMA). MDMA causes a release of serotonin within the human brain. The release of serotonin in a high enough level can have any number of effects on the functionality of the brain but one of the more common characteristics is a feeling of euphoria. Another example of how neurotransmitters can influence the mind in ways similar to NDE accounts involves schizophrenia. Thought to be caused by the interactions of neurotransmitters, schizophrenia is another example of how neurotransmitters can alter a person's perception. (Schizophrenia) Individuals that suffer from the changes in the mind as a result of neurotransmitters being irregular are said to experience delusions and visual and auditory hallucinations. (Ibid) This is not to explain that people that have an NDE are schizophrenic, only that changes in the brains chemical messengers can cause changes that take the same form as those that experience an NDE.

The actual NDE is only the beginning of the NDE phenomenon. With so many people working to answer the question of why some people have them, one might think that finding an answer as to why they occur would be close at hand. Unfortunately, that is not the case. In reality, the answers that medical science provide are more like guesswork than answers based upon the scientific method as each possibility is also plagued by uncertainty. With the PetCO₂ possibility, there may be a foundation for carbon dioxide being a reason for the initiation of NDEs, but once one looks deeper into the rational, the theory falls apart because the experiences have happened for several thousand years while processes like CPR have only been around for a few

decades. Another point of the PetCO₂ that fails to justify itself as the cause of NDEs is that since the PetCO₂ possibility has been introduced, there has been no measurable increase in how many of the experiences happen each year since automatic respiration and CPR have been introduced as a medical option for people during a medical crisis.

Other possible explanations of NDEs as development issues are based upon REM sleep and wakefulness; it seems like the same problem exists as would involve explanations detailing mental states that being that it is very difficult to prove the REM-Sleep theory through a mental explanation involving what is partially a blending of two different states of mind, the conscious, and the REM sleep state.

Finally, there is what could be the strongest possibility for the NDE phenomenon. As brains work through a transfer of electricity and neurotransmitters; actions that occur to create NDEs may be associated with those electrical and chemical transfers. Many of the subjective experiences that are reported by experiencers are also reported when people take certain drugs that alter the chemical makeup of their brain,

The mystery of why a human being may have an NDE is one that humanity has been familiar for a few thousand years but the answer eludes understanding. Two aspects worthy of inspection include the fact that NDE experiences have been occurring since recorded history and that the experiences exist in our heads. Based upon those two aspects, we can tell that the process fueling the experience is one that is a part of our brain that has not changed and that the process does not seem to cause severe permanent physical damage to the mental processes as people have experienced the process only to have residual aftereffects.

Section 4: NDEs Exist in the Arts

Humanity has the tendency to perceive the Arts on the most basic level. But to someone well-versed in the power of the Arts, a myriad of discovery is possible. These discoveries are made through historical research and details within the works being studied. The unique characteristics of NDEs (See appendix Characteristics) make the identification of these experiences in the arts ideal. Through the historical timeline, artworks can be used in conjunction with other works to provide weight to the existence of NDEs. Through the research of Bosch's *Visions of the Hereafter* from 1505-1515 and Schiavonetti's engraving of *The Soul Hovering over the Body at the Moment of Death*, from 1765–1810 associated with a Robert Blair poem *The Grave* the argument for NDEs being a human theme can be established through 300 years. (Schiavonetti)

Section 4.1: Transitions

One of the most frequent characteristics of the NDE phenomenon has to do with transition. Many NDE accounts speak of leaving one's body in such a way and both Taylor's and Stone's NDE accounts detail such transitions in the same way. In the image by Bosch and words engraved by Schiavonetti, an observer can easily see a very similar depiction of transition that the observed is undergoing and both works depict very similar accounts.

If transition is one of the main characteristics of a NDE, then the work by Bosch details that transition with perfection. Within Bosch's work, several forms are depicted. Take as an example the characters within that are in motion. These characters are not only moving in elevation; they are also moving from one state of existence to another through their travel within the illuminated tunnel. Taken one step further the characters are also transitioning from a dark bleak existence to a well-lit area. The work by Schiavonetti depicts similar transitions as the main character is not only in

transition of elevation as the word hovering is used but has traveled from one state of existence to another as the use of the word soul depicts death.

Section 4.2: A Separated Perspective

Another well-known characteristic of the NDE phenomenon involves a feeling of separation of oneself from oneself. This is another common theme that runs within both works of art and can be determined to be a direct aspect of both works.

The work by Bosch can be viewed in two different ways. In one way, the characters within can be seen as separate characters that are all sharing in the same experience as they transition from one existence to another. However, individuals within the image all look the same only with a difference in scale of perspective. But the applied visual representation can also be determined to be the same character at different stages of movement from one existence to another. If this is the case, then the work by Bosch is actually a visual representation of a character being separated from self as he/she is still able to look upon another aspect of themselves. The context maybe different within the work by Schiavonetti.

In the image create by William Blake for the poem *the Grave* by Robert Blair there is also a separated perspective through the way the character in the image is portrayed. (Schiavonetti) If looked upon, the character within the image is hovering above her body while looking downward upon herself. This visual depiction provides its viewer with what can be understood as a separated perspective that is exactly like the explanation of what NDE accounts have provided. (Ibid)

Stone, Taylor, and Jung described a separated perspective. With Stone, it was a separation of oneself from the medical staff working to revive her as she lay there nearly lifeless. (Stone) Taylor felt a separation from her deceased husband and how the separated perspective she experienced impacted her with heartfelt despair. (E. Taylor) Jung experienced his separation from humanity as he

was floating above the earth and seeing all of humanity through far off ball of brilliant blue light.
(Winston)

Each of the experiencers have some kind of characteristic that involved a separation and the artworks reviewed have the same characteristic included within their work. But there is another main factor that must be included within the artistic work that makes them a true work that depicts NDE. For the works to be representative of a NDE, there needs to be an aspect of returning to life. And if a viewer takes a long look at both works, they may discover something that completes the cycle.

Section 4.3: The Return to Life

NDEs have one critical requirement that must be a part of the experience. The individuals undergoing the experience must have reference to returning to life. This requirement may seem to be missing within the artistic works being compared. However, they are there for discovery.

Within Schiavonetti's work there is an interesting play on the words used to depict the character's perspective. Considering closely the explanation of the character, one can determine that a person is floating above their body through the word choice of "hovering" that means the newly deceased person is looking down in the same way that modern out-of-body experiences are explained. (Schiavonetti) There is also the caption connected to the image, *The Soul Hovering over the Body, Reluctantly Parting with Life*, explains a reluctance to leave the body. (Ibid) In this way of depicting the image, there is a possibility of the soul to return to the body, as to be reluctant means to question one's actions. Choice is also a characteristic of NDEs and presents itself in the case of Taylor when she explained that she was told that she would have to go back, but she shared her reluctance to return to her body. (E. Taylor)

The work by Bosch is a little more direct but still requires a good eye for the details. In the same way that the accounts of experiencers need to detail a return to life, the work by Bosch could

be depicting the same return to physical existence. Looking at the image, a viewer sees the psychopomp going with the main character in a series of steps to and through the tunnel together. But at the very end of the tunnel, one can see a single entity at the end of the tunnel moving without a spirit guide. If a spirit goes with someone traveling to the afterlife and there is someone towards the end moving without a guide, that could be a symbolic way of explaining that the person at the end of the tunnel is now transitioning out of the place they were brought by a psychopomp. They are returning to the same place they began rather than going further into the light at the end of the tunnel or their afterlife.

Some experiencers that remember their return to their body explain their return. Stone explained that she made a choice to return and Taylor explained that she was told by her ex-husband that she had to return but she was reluctant in her decision making to depart. Like the characters within the images, they are taken away and then return.

There is an old saying "Art imitates life." Both images work in nearly the same way and were completed by separate artists living hundreds of years apart. But the imagery and message depict the same point of perspective to the viewer. By taking their message and comparing it to well-known NDE characteristics, we can determine through the historical record and the artistic expression that NDEs are not a new kind of human experience. If those experiences have existed throughout human history, then the phenomenon is real and warrants further psychological, medical, and philosophical study.

Section 5: Philosophy and the NDE Problem

One of the main questions surrounding the mystery of the NDE phenomenon has to do with whether or not it solves a long-standing philosophical debate known as dualism. The foundation for this debate involves a simple question of whether our human body and consciousness survive

without each other. This debate is difficult to answer as there is no way to test the two parts as separate entities because of ethical issues that exceed the ability of testing procedures. And this is where the NDE plays into the debate because of the nature of the experience of the mind ostensibly separating from the body. Taylor explained that during her NDE, she saw herself separate from her body. (E. Taylor) As that is the case, NDEs allow for a kind of avoidance of the ethics rules and allows for direct study of the claims of the experiencer. With that in mind, philosophers may take the experiencer's account as support of the premise that NDEs prove that the mind and body are separate entities that exist without an unbreakable bond between the two. However, NDEs can provide an actual answer to the mind-body problem that does not conform to the answer a typical philosopher may come to when considering both sides of their argument.

One of the problems that philosophers fall into when considering how NDEs solve the mind-body problem involves the accounts of the experiencers themselves. Within their accounts they do state that they see their body at a lower elevation as they are floating above their body as they watch the medical staff work to revive them. Stone explained that when she spoke of her experience on the Oprah Winfrey Show. (Stone) But the reality seems to be quite the opposite when one listens to what experiencers say in greater detail. During her account on the Oprah Winfrey Show, Taylor stated, "I could see the people around me...." (E. Taylor) She continued by explaining "I could hear them." (Ibid) And also "My Todd was there. He had been dead for about three years." (Ibid)

If the statements made by Taylor are any justification for consciousness existing outside of the body, why then are the physical senses still such a big part of the interpretation of the sensory process? If the conscious is separate from the body, why is there a constant reference to physical aspects of existence? This well-known experiencer explained that she could see, and she could hear and most importantly, she was able to identify her ex-husband that she claimed was there. If she

were at that time capable of recognizing her deceased husband, she would have to have seen him to do so. During her interview, she did not mention knowing it was him on a spiritual level. She referenced him through physical means familiar to her. Accounts like the one provided by Taylor are not new to the experiencer accounts. Stone made similar comments, stating that "you see people that have passed on and they talk to you." (Stone) So if other people that are deceased have bodies that are identifiable and can speak to others, while also hearing the things that are said by other deceased spirits, why then is the person's body referenced in so many different ways that explain it to be present?

Within the NDERF page that maintains several thousand NDE accounts, there are numerous references to people who are wearing clothing. These accounts bring about a very interesting aspect of both the Mind-Body Problem and NDEs as a phenomenon. These aspects of interest fall into the realm of logic in such a way that there may be a completely new philosophical debate based upon the question of what people believe the afterlife means to them.

Assuming that NDEs are a real and the conscious leaves the body to roam non-physical existence, then why are people's consciousnesses wearing clothes? Does that mean that clothing has transcendental presence in the afterlife? One experiencer (4717) claimed that he saw a lady wearing a dark colored robe. (NDERF Archives 7-1-2019/12-31-2019) Another experiencer (4716) claimed to see a tall man wearing a long off-white robe. (Ibid) If people are to believe that the consciousness leaves the body at the time of death, does that mean that robes have a consciousness that moves into a transcendental place once their usefulness has concluded or maybe our clothes come with us when we pass through that transcendental portal of white light? (NDERF Archives 7-1-2019/12-31-2019)

Through the claims made by experiencers, the belief in a separation between consciousness and body has solidified over time in the mind of many people within the general public. However,

extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence to prove their validity. But maybe there is another way to look at the Mind-Body problem through a NDE lens that can provide a final answer to this long-standing philosophical debate in a way that does not require physical evidence nor a leap of faith but rather through Occam's Razor. What this involves is looking for answers by making the fewest assumptions possible. An example of this line of thought could be best explained through a narrative: the bushes in that yard never look any different and no one is ever seen trimming them. Someone must come out late at night, they may set up a light, carefully trim each bush till they look exactly like the others and then they must clean up quickly and go back inside before the sun comes up. No, the bushes are probably made of plastic.

Some experiencers claim that they leave their body, and during their experiences away from their bodies, they can see and hear from a conscious perspective, but not as a physical person. Jung claimed that he saw the earth from afar; Taylor had a conversation with her deceased husband; and Hausheer saw a spherical light and heard a non-binary voice without being spoken. Their claims indicate we can understand that sight and hearing are aspects of a NDE and can therefore be used as aspects of a separate consciousness as experiencers' bodies are supposed to be in a deceased state. So, if the human consciousness is wandering the universe, meeting familiar people that are deceased, and seeing white light while hearing voices, why then are they going places that they already know, meeting people they know well, and hearing voices that they understand? Maybe the real question is how did Taylor know where in the afterlife her former husband was, or did he have a spiritual schedule of those that would die that day and where the newly deceased could be found in the afterlife? Or in the case of Jung, if a deceased person can travel the universe without a limit of time and space, why would Jung appear to see the Earth from above? With more stars in the universe than grains of sand on a beach, why see something so familiar when he could have seen anything in the

universe? And if Jung were not given a choice of where he was going, which is understandable due to his account providing no statement about his choice of where he could go, who chose were he went and why?

After listening to the claims of some NDErs, several questions arise in relation to their experience. Rightly so, as some parts of their account seem to be questionable in nature and are on their own very questionable as they seem to stretch any real substantiation beyond the point of actual realism. Perhaps there is a universal scheduling department that plans an itinerary for those lucky few that get to meet their loved ones in a universal place of judgment and maybe there is a deciding body that allows experiencers to see the earth in ways we can never see in the flesh. In an ideal universe all those possibilities would be available to the visitors of Universe X, but here on terra-firma there needs to be more concrete proof in our evidence of the great beyond. Because without proof of those universal departments and places from afar, we can only use what logically comes to the minds of those evaluating our claims. And our logical perspective looks to a well-established and tried method of investigation, Occam's Razor.

Section 5.1: Caveats and Questions

Since we have taken the time to study the philosophy of the NDE phenomenon, there is a serious philosophical problem that should also be considered. With all of the books that have been written, research hours spent, and resources allotted to answer the NDE phenomenon, has anyone considered that we are wasting those resources on something that will answer itself to 100% of us? Each of us in time will have an answer to the individual NDE questions we seek about our afterlife and it will cost us nothing. With that being the case, is it such a good idea to put so much time, money, and effort into the possible snapshots of the afterlife that we might be provided every now and then? It seems a better use of our time to put those resources to use finding a cure for childhood

diseases so those without a knowledge of life can grow up having a full life to see flash before their eyes. And rather than spending our lives studying NDEs in so many ways, it would be better to live our lives instead of researching the claims of others that may only be experiencing a massive release of neurotransmitters as their lives begin to slip into the precipice. Yes, humanity's tale on earth began with the tree of knowledge, but it is our decision, like whether to take that first bite of the apple, of what we decide to study.

The NDE phenomenon provides several questions for us to ponder. But the one question that is missed by philosophy is the question of worthiness. We are provided only so many sunrises and sunsets, but rather than living in the moment, we tend to exist in wonder about the past or future. Maybe we have been misinterpreting the function of NDEs because of our practices and maybe we should take a different perspective with regards to the NDEs. Rather than perceiving them as a challenge to answer, we should see them as warnings about what is to become of us all so we can put down those attention diverting practices and just exist.

Section 6: Social Sciences Explanations of NDEs

Societies are changed through human experiences. In the social sciences (psychology, sociology, and education), there have been historical shifts in views about NDEs. During the past 45-50 years, American society seems to have changed its attitude towards and acceptance of synchronicity. These changes have provided experiencers with various levels of moral support and understanding. In one way, people have worked for several years to create social organizations that work to prevent human pain and suffering related to NDEs. Two such organizations are known as the International Association for Near Death Studies (IANDS) and the Near-Death Experience Research Foundation (NDERF). These organizations provide various forms of assistance to experiencers, family, and researchers seeking information. Other changes include the way medical

staff treat experiencers. In the past people who experienced an NDE were made to suffer through their difficulties because there was no training implemented to bridge the gap between medical staff and experiencers. This lack of patient support has begun to change as additional information and training have become more mainstream. The internal frustration of experiencers and the external structure that supported the schism between the two are realizing their mistakes and have begun to work together to better all individuals involved in both the medical and support functions.

Section 6.1: Psychology

NDEs have had an impact on the psychology of their patients. This change is partially because of how experiencers were treated in the past by healthcare professionals. According to information obtained about the treatment of NDErs, 19% told of negative experiences that stretched across a broad spectrum of health services. (Holden) Health providers doubted experiencer's reports, concluded that they were hallucinating, or made other negative conclusions. (Ibid) As a result of this information, researchers came to the conclusion that in order to do no harm healthcare providers need to have additional education about NDEs in order to minimize the risk to the experiencer that can occur as a result of the disclosure to healthcare professionals. (Ibid) Having this open dialogue can be very important to both the researcher and the experiencer alike. One subject related to NDEs that is very beneficial as a source of discussion includes the positive changes to those who have experienced a close brush with their death.

NDEs are linked to certain changes in a person's state of being. Several of the noted changes have been very beneficial to experiencers and take the form of changes in their personal values, their attitudes about life, and their spiritual beliefs. (Hausheer) Some of the most commonly discussed changes reported by experiencers include: changes to one's self esteem, increased compassion, a

new sense of purpose, greater appreciation for life, less desire for material possessions, greater feelings of purpose, and a search for knowledge. (Ibid)

Section 6.2: The Needs Scale

In order to assist experiencers, there needed to be a way to determine how experiencers were received by medical staff, to make that determination possible, researchers created what is known as the Near-Death Experiences' Experiences of Disclosure Scale (NEEDS), through this device, researchers can assess to what extent an experiencer's experience is met with by others. Factors include the recognition of their experience if it was stated to have been a real experience and whether the confidant treated the experiencer with a positive or negative attitude.

Section 6.3: Sociology of IANDS and NDERF

NDE experiencers have undergone a purely subjective experience that some find very difficult to accept. As an experiencer attempts to adjust to their account, they tend to put a strain on themselves, their family, their friends, and even medical staff. As a way to help alleviate the social strain while also learning from those that know first-hand, organizations have been formed to promote understanding of experiencers and to help experiencers understand themselves. Two of the most well-known organizations are IANDS and NDERF. They are at the forefront of near-death social sciences.

The mission of these two organizations is unlike most others, as these organizations are connected by an uncommon human experience that is understood as religious, supernatural, and medical at the same time. According to the IANDS website, IANDS is "...an educational nonprofit 501(c)(3)" (About IANDS) Its mission is to provide various forms of information about the NDE phenomenon. IANDS also provides its assistance through the use of social groups, a newsletter, peer-reviewed articles, meetings, conferences, and the television media. (Ibid)

Another aspect of IANDS involves the NDE accounts of individuals willing to share their accounts in an anonymous and safe manner. Through the collection of experiencers, researchers are able to ask questions that allow for valuable insight into the NDEs characteristics. These organizations also allow an outlet for communication and introduction of their NDE account. If their accounts are accepted, accounts can be included within information requests sent to either or both organizations for use by researchers and medical staff.

Like IANDS, NDERF is an informational based community that works to share information and experiences about NDEs. It was formed by a doctor-lawyer husband and wife team. They created NDERF to study conscious experiences which is an unusual statement when considering a person is unconscious when undergoing a near-death experience. It provides the same information and collection functions as IANDS through its many pages and information sources. NDERF also has 4,700 NDE stories along with NDE artistic works and links to other sites for exploration. Through these other options experiencers are supported by having additional organizations and material that reify an ephemeral phenomenon through presence. Take as an example the concept of extra sensory perception (ESP). Many people understand what ESP is, but how many know what ESP is because they had experienced it? When the same logic is applied to the NDE phenomenon, the question arises as to whether the reifying method created the NDE phenomenon. Considering that the characteristics have existed for several millennium and term NDE was created through Raymond Moody's book about NDEs, *Life After Life*, and did not already exist, one could consider the reify creating the justification, but then again, the experience has been reported since the time of ancient Greece.

Section 6.4: Education

Another change involves the way people share information about their NDE through social media. Doing so has provided experiencers with the opportunity to share their experiences with others. In the past, researcher and author Moody wrote a book that introduced the term NDE into society and aided with sparking the interest in NDEs. From that book, society grew with the electric age to provide a perfect medium for anonymous accounts and safety for all of those who want to share their experience in ways that will allow their anonymity and prevent their being met with a dangerous sect of American society. But, in retrospect, electronic means can also allow for others within their societies to seek assistance from the many websites like NDERF and IANDS that specialize in playing a professional supporting role while other smaller social media groups provide their assistance as support groups.

Online sources have become a one-stop-shop for individuals looking for assistance after a traumatic situation. One site named Meetup is one of those such organizations. Through Meetup people who have suffered from traumatic situations can communicate with others suffering from similar trauma (this is not a recommendation and all websites provide risk of others looking to take advantage of people with weakened defenses). Other websites include Reddit, Instagram, and, to a much lesser extent, other social media sites. Each of these electronic resources is its own assistance center that can be accepting of NDE experiencers and can provide little risk of negative judgement that was once associated with healthcare providers.

One of the most noticeable changes in the medical profession involves the way experiencers have become a foundation for others. This is no small change as every year nearly 17 percent of people who find themselves on the cusp of death will have an NDE. (Long) Because of the subjectivity of their experience, seeking assistance with the difficulties that an experiencer may have to work through can be difficult. It seems that understanding the unique difficulties of those

struggling with what they have experienced takes a great level of expertise to be of benefit to the experiencer, as the aftereffects of NDES may be mistaken as mental issues. This misunderstanding can occur when the most common after-effects resemble what could be mental conditions that have nothing to do with the base cause of their current state of mind. In the case of NDEs, mania seems to be a common misdiagnosis. (Griffith) But some experiencers may also feel their lives have change, causing family and friends to be confused by the changes in attitude towards their life. (Insinger) As a way to bridge the gap between all parties, medical school students are being exposed to the topic through peer to peer, experiencer, and colleague interactions. (Sheeler 2005) As a result, there seems to be positive outcome as students become more collegial and professional. (Ibid) Previous religious impact being an influence for the NDE of an experiencer seems to be without justification. However, it was determined that religious influence did have an influence on how the experience was interpreted. (McLaughlin)

Special organizations, trainings, and family support have been created to allow experiencers to tell of their experience(s) in a way that can enlighten others interested in their accounts but who are unable to understand the complexity of these subjective experiences.

Section 7: Synthesis of Commonalities and Disagreements

If we listen to Stone, we will understand from the perspective of someone who has been there, that death is not something that happens to us but is more like humanity's companion through life. It is not our friend, yet it is not our enemy. It is merely a consequence of life that we must all experience subjectively. Some consider death as a finality, as the death of our bodies means the loss of connection to those we leave behind. So, we leave our understanding in our artworks and historical literature to be passed down from generation to generation. And like we do with life's companions; we figure out unique and insightful ways to study its affect upon us. Some search for

the reason in our blood, our waking dreams, and our motivations. And when those searches fail, we look to our philosophy to save us from our inability to answer the final question. Others push forward in constructive ways to create a humanistic understanding through new organizations like NDERF and IANDS. Such is the purpose of humanity to learn from the unknown while it is the purpose of the universe to deny our curiosity as we now have more questions than answers.

When researching the NDE phenomenon, several aspects give the experience a religious, supernatural, or spiritual flavor. What person would not stop and consider the nature of death while listening to another person speak about their death from behind the veil of transcendentalism or seeing themselves from above an operating table while doctors and nurses go full code-blue trying to revive them? Yet, as exciting as those accounts may be to some, the reality of their NDE brings up many questions that help to show issues that may discredit the experience as a whole. This is not to say that people who experience these accounts are weak-minded or easily fooled, but once some of these accounts are broken down to their individual parts, a person may find it difficult to consider NDEs as a real experience. This could be because the illogical nature of NDE characteristics can lead a logical person down a rabbit hole of denial or over acceptance of research material based on NDE accounts.

One of the most recognized aspects of the NDE phenomenon involves the accounts of individuals talking to the deceased. They seem to be familiar people seen by experiencers during their NDE. Other accounts seem to interact with deceased in the same language. Take account of Hausheer; she heard a voice without words being spoken, but she did not explain that she heard a voice that she could not understand. (Hausheer) Stone said that she saw people in the afterlife, and they talk to others. (Stone) But she did not explain any kind of strange or different language(s). With so many deceased entities existing in that transcendental place, one might think that at least one of

the accounts would explain that they tried to speak to someone, but they spoke different languages. The same can be said about people who see God. There are several reports from experiencers that explain that they saw and spoke to a higher spiritual power. But are there NDE accounts that explain that God was not what they expected? Christians seem to see one spiritual form. Another experiencer depicted "Up from the earth's centre through the seventh gate I rose, and on the throne of Saturn sate, And many Knots unravel'd by the road: But not the knot of human death and fate. Rubaiyat". (Purkayastha) This person's account has aspects of his cultural belief structure. This account is not the only account that describes the afterlife in terms of their personal and cultural perspectives prior to their NDE. Another account states: "There was the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva but even they were in hierarchy 'junior' to 'Om' an apparition of light." (Purkayastha) There is a lot to be understood about the social, cultural, and even religious perspectives related to existence and after existence. Maybe there are several places that we can consider afterlife.

After reviewing the NDE accounts, there are two different possibilities. One possibility is that everybody's God is waiting for someone that worships them to pass on. The other possibility is that these experiences are projections of the mind that are created, and interpreted by humankind throughout the centuries, to defend the dying person's subconscious from the fear of death.

Section 8: Conclusion

The alluring mysteries behind the NDE phenomenon are as secretive as they are fruitful. On one side of the mysterious phenomenon there are many dedicated healthcare professionals that are curious and dedicated to teasing out the secrets of humanity's place in the universe as a way to answer humanity's greatest question about the continuous existence of humankind. On the other side of the NDE phenomenon, there are those that have experienced what they believe to be the continuation of humankind. Reminiscent of a symbiotic relationship, each side has its own quest to

find the truth about human existence while also in need of each other to advance their efforts. Since medical research into the causes of a NDE can easily become an ethical concern, researchers must obtain their answers from those that know first-hand what those symbiotic experiences can tell us. Unfortunately, even with current research provided, the possible causes are numerous. But humanity is a very curious lot and as the question of NDEs is one that could explain the fate that we all will face; it does not seem like curiosity into our fate will disappear.

With our interest in NDEs comes the need for experiencers to work their way through the challenges that come with having such a subjective experience. Brilliant minds like Bruce Greyson helped the cause by providing material like the Greyson Scale that can differentiate between a NDE and an experience, but these tests cannot aid family members and friends that are confused by the changes in the person they once knew. A person who is now someone completely changed in ways that could transform their beliefs, actions, and personalities in many quality ways or cause changes that may result in prolonged medical or psychological care. Although, with each change, we get a little closer to finding out if the cause involves CO₂, REM-Sleep physiology or even neurotransmitters. Regardless of the reason, NDEs and the people that have them will always be a source of wonder and contention as philosophers attempt to answer their own questions regarding the separation of body and mind.

In the end, all we can do while the answers are unavailable is look to the best way to mitigate our brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, and mothers and fathers in the best way possible with our acceptance, patience, and desire to keep them with us for a little longer because the trust is that we are human and as we are born, we will die. And rather than spending all of our time looking to answer the questions of the universe, maybe we should use that time to live our lives in celebration - so when our time comes and our lives flash before our eyes, we will have a great show to cherish

and fond memories to remember as our external light transitions into an internal light that will guide us through our eternity thereafter.

Near-Death Characteristics

Additional Consciousness / Alertness
Being Told to Return / Choice to Return
Bright Light
Light of Mystical or Other-Worldly Origin
Changes in Thought Speed
Content Peaceful / Distressful
Darkness
Dark Tunnel
ESP
Ethereal Figure
Family Member(s)
Feeling of Anxiety
Feeling of Calmness
Feeling of Fear
Feeling of Happiness
Feeling of Joy
Feeling of Love
Feeling of Peace
Greater Understanding
Life Change
Life Review
Fear of Death
Others
Other Realm
Out-of-Body / Separation from Body
Time Speed Changes
Vibrant Colors
Vivid Senses
Warmth

4776,4775,4774,4773,
4772,4771,4769,4768,4763,4757,4748,4746,4719,
4650,4613

Appendix: Characteristics

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