

A History of the Study of the Near-Death Experience

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The stories narrated by many people who experienced the Near-Death is being regarded by many scientists as strictly the effects of brain malfunction. Yet, other scientists are interested in collating and attempting to apply scientific methods in the study of the NDE. It is important to note that the study of the history of the phenomenon of the NDE suggests that their experiences may not be quickly shelved as ordinary or as strictly the effect of brain malfunction. The contemporary study of the mind-body relations from the perspectives of a parapsychologist and a modern physicist are beginning to shed light on the view that the NDE may not be ordinary as generally thought but a field of knowledge that has effect on the scientific meaning of death as the total end of life. The method implored in this research is historical and the aim is to highlight that the NDE is seemingly natural, ancient; and a universal phenomenon that is very important in the study of human extraordinary experiences. The researchers sided with the dualists who view the NDE as first, a phenomenon that shows the coexistence and a probable independent existence of the body from the mind; and second, that the NDE mechanism poses a challenge that can hardly be explained by the monist.

Keywords: Death, Dualism, Monism, Percipient, Otherworld, Resuscitation.

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INTRODUCTION

The Near-Death Experience (NDE) is a state of the mind or an experience of a feeling by an experiencer according to which his or her physical body is separated from the mind in a journey that gives the individual an opportunity to operate irrespective of the laws of nature. Experiencers of the near-death have claimed that during their experiences, they saw their mind leaving their physical bodies behind as they gradually float above the earth during which space, time and the force of gravity were subdued; likewise, a sense of greater awareness and ability to decode and detect all circumstances surrounding their environment were spontaneously captured during their experiences (Kock, 2020). Sometimes the feeling of the rising of the mind could be directed through the heavens and sometimes through a tunnel depending on the individual's economic, socio-cultural and sometimes religious background, if any (Kellehear, 1996).

Experiencers of the near-death have often reported of seeing themselves having a spiritual body or a supra body that is different from their physical bodies (Ma'SU'mian, 1996). Greyson cited an example of a 26-year-old lady who described how her mind left behind her physical body while she developed great abilities to notice what was happening in the physical world to her physical body:

I (the real me, the soul, the spirit, or whatever) drifted out of the body and hovered near the ceiling. I viewed the activity in the room from this vantage point. The hospital room was to my right and below me. It confused me that the doctors and nurses were so concerned about my body they had lifted to the bed. I looked at my body and it meant nothing to me. I tried to tell them I was not in the body. Obviously, they did not hear. One of the most outstanding things about this experience is that my hearing became extremely acute. I heard things about the gravity of my situation, some of these from the nurses' station many yards away. I watched the hospital personnel work. I listened to their comments, and I began to feel sorry that they were working so hard, when I felt so happy and feeling no pain where I was (Greyson, 2006).

During the NDE, the experiencers in most cases might be declared clinically dead. In other words, the near-death experience starts by dying and concludes in the resuscitation of the dying person where he or she narrates his or her experiences. Greyson described that the NDE could happen to "individuals who actually died but were able to describe their experiences in their final moments ("deathbed visions"); and by individuals who, in the course of accidents or illness, feared that they were dead" (Greyson, 2006). Sometimes the near-death experiencer may narrate his or her experiences while in the state of unconsciousness and may finally die without coming back to life but listened to by those close to him or her as Agrillo noted that the NDE suggest "... an altered state of consciousness commonly occurring during an episode of unconsciousness, as a result of life-threatening condition" (Agrillo, 2011). On the other hand, others returned to a state of consciousness to narrate their experiences while some remain mute, not willing to talk about their experiences for many cultural or religious reasons. An experience of transformation in the lives of surviving experiencers has been recorded as one of the major features of the NDE (Kock, 2020).

The NDE has been described by many researchers as a universal phenomenon and while many scholars regard it as a brain malfunction, others refute this classification. They thought that the NDE is an independent experience that has nothing to do with brain activity. This contention necessitates the need to study humans in connection with their conscious and their unconscious nature. It is for this reason that the mind-body debate becomes relevant. The NDE also seemed to create an impression as though the mind and body coexist together or operate independently of each other. This research is a record of the history of the study of the

phenomenon of the NDE before, during and after 1975.

The year 1975 is relevant for this study because it was in 1975 that the concept "near-death experience" came into use. This historical approach is relevant because it gives us background knowledge about how researchers in medicine, psychology and philosophy attached value to the subject. The history also enables modern researchers to understand the gap created in this subject of study. Considering the historical study of the NDE as one of the most contentious Out-of-Body Experiences (OBE), the mind-body debate is a *sine quo non* in the study of the NDE. Using some background developments in quantum physics, the researcher argues that the NDE favors the dualist theory of the perception of the human body.

The Study of the Phenomenon of the Near-Death Experience before 1975

The term "near-death experience" had not been used before 1975. This, however, does not, in any way, mean that the phenomenon was not known. Many folklores and other writings in ancient European, Middle Eastern, African, East Asian, Native American, Indian and the Pacific cultures have indicated that there were similar or related scenarios comparable to the NDE (Greyson, 2006). The term Near-Death Experience is connected with the concept of resuscitation where a dying person is revived. Dying is a process of death in which the dying person may or may not die (Kubler-Ross, 2010). The concept of resuscitation is a form of a precursor for the NDE except that the NDE required that the experiencer shares or narrates his or her alleged supernatural experiences after getting nearer in the form of an experience with death¹.

An early record of resuscitation is the one recorded in a speech by Socrates and incorporated in Plato's *Republic* around 375 BCE. Socrates wrote about Er (Bremmer, 2002). Er, a Pamphylian by race was slayed in a battle and his

¹ There are some biblical stories that pertained to the early history of resuscitation: the Sidonian widow's son was resuscitated by Elijah (1 Ki 17:7-24; 1 Ki 17:17b; Bacchiocchi 2013:9), the Shunammite widow's son was prayed for and resuscitated by Elijah (2 Ki 4:18-37) likewise an Israel man who died (2 Ki 13:20-21). Jesus also resuscitated the son of a widow at Nain (Lk 7:11-17) likewise Jairus' daughter (Lk 8:49-56) and Lazarus (Jh 11:1-44). Dorcas or Tabitha was also brought back to life by Peter (Ac. 9:36-42). Eutychus who had fallen from a loft was also resuscitated by Paul the apostle (Ac. 20:7-12) (Becker 1993: 82). Jesus himself is said to have died and resurrected (Mt 28:1-20; Mk 16:1-20; Lk 24:1-49; Jh 20:1-21:25; Mt 27:50-54). Of all these biblical stories, none of those that were resuscitated gave his or her experience of the afterlife except Jesus who preached in the otherworld (1 Pet. 3:18-22; Mt 27:50; Ac. 2:31; Jude 1:6; Eph. 4:8; cf. Ps 68:18) and on earth after his resurrection. Roger B. Cook argued that after Jesus' crucifixion, he experienced the near-death. He believed that Jesus only went through a state of coma and did not truly die (Cook 1992: 193-198).

decayed corpse laid upon the Pyre for funeral. But, on the twelfth day, his corpse revived:

He once upon a time was slain in battle, and when the corpses were taken up on the tenth day already decayed, was found intact, and having been brought home, at the moment of his funeral, on the twelfth day as he lay upon the pyre, revived, and after coming to life related what, he said, he had seen in the world beyond (Sluijs, 2009).

In the *Republic*, it is reported that Er said that his soul left his body in a company of other departed souls and passed through a mysterious region where there were two openings side by side in the earth. Above and over against them (the departed souls) in the heaven are two other openings.² Judges were sitting between the two openings judging people and directing the righteous to the right and upward to heaven carrying alongside their rewards while the unrighteous were led left-sided and downward with signs of punishments and displeasures. These sceneries happened after seven days of their [Er and other departed ones] presence in the otherworld where they were required to continue the journey through the afterlife (Sluijs, 2009).

When it was Er's turn to be judged, he was rather asked to return to the earth and be a messenger who will tell the people of the world about a better thereafter. He was given an ample of time to listen and to observe every activity in the thereafter. He never knew how his life returned to his body, rather he just saw himself lying down on the funeral pyre when he was resuscitated.³ At the end of writing the story of Er, Plato suggested that the human soul (whether good or evil) is immortal (Bacchiocchi, 2013).

Another contentious ancient Grecian description of a visit to the otherworld through a near-death experience pertained to the story of Aridaeus, also known as Thespesius of Soli written by Plutarch around 46 to 119/120 AD. Thespesius went to the otherworld by death and met a kinsman who died a child. The child welcomed him into the otherworld with these words: 'Greeting, Thespesius.' (Sluijs, 2009). The story started when Thespesius fell from a height and broke his neck thus resulting to his death. He was resuscitated on the third day when he was to be buried. He taught that he left his physical body on earth and his soul ascended to another world where there were many souls. He was able to identify only one among many souls. A guide was assigned to take Thespesius through the various regions of the otherworld which included a place of punishment and a place where souls were forced to return to earth through

reincarnation or transmigration. The story continued that while Thespesius was journeying through the various locations of the otherworld, a woman suddenly pulled him away using a cord and by releasing a strong wind that pushed him, leading to his return to his physical body. He found himself back to earth almost interred into the grave (Sluijs, 2009).

Moving to a more recent time, particularly the eighteenth century, there have been several other records indicating some types of resuscitation, some of which are verifiable while others are not. Philippe Charlier wrote about one of the oldest reports of the NDE in France. The report is about an individual by the name Sir L.C. who suffered a malign fever that resulted in many bloodlettings. Sir L. C. is said to have become extremely unconscious after the last phlebotomy was conducted on him and it was at this point that he claimed to have lost all external sensations. He said that he saw himself in a place full of light that is so welcoming to the point that it was the best place and the best experience he ever had in his lifetime. He thought he was in heaven among the blessed. The first writer about Sir L.C. is Pierre-Jean du Monchaux (1733-1766), a military physician from North France who said that there were many other people of various ages and different sexes that reported about similar death-experiences to Sir L.C (Charlier, 2014).

The scientific gathering of information pertaining to the phenomenon of the NDE might have started sometime around the nineteenth century AD when Albert von St Gallen Heim wrote about his experiences after he fell from a mountain height and went into a state of comma. Heim began to collect information from people who had similar experiences. In 1892, Heim presented his findings to the members of the Swiss Alpine Club (Corazza, 2008). In his lists of Near-Death experiencers are mountain climbers who had fallen in the Alps, accidents victims who nearly died; individuals that were drowned and soldiers that were wounded in wars. Gallen Heim's writings were translated into English by Noyes and Roy Kletti in 1972.⁴

Corazza reported about Ernesto Bozzano (1862-1943), an Italian psychical researcher who did not work with people that had experienced the near-death, rather, he worked and interviewed people that were closed to and had observed other people who experienced the near-death in terms referred to as "death-bed vision" (DBV) (Corazza, 2008). The DBV explains the paranormal experiences of dying people in hospital rooms or on nursing beds, and in medical sciences the DBV is often described as "death-related sensory experiences" (DRSE). After his research about people that might experience the NDE, Bozzano came to the conclusion that there is an "etheric body" that survives somatic death.⁵ Greater attention and interest into the subject of the NDE

² Bremmer (2002: 90; cf. Plato 1946: 493).

³ Bacchiocchi (2013:7) cf. Bremmer (2002: 90) cf. Sluijs (2009: 224).

⁴ Greyson (2006: 394) cf. Ring (2011: 420).

⁵ Corazza (2008: 26-27) cf. Becker (1993: 82).

was given by more scholars from 1975.

A Study of the Phenomenon of the Near-Death Experience from 1975

The writing of the history of the NDE would not have made a complete sense without noting the contributions made by Dr Raymond Moody, a philosopher-psychiatrist. Although the term “Near-Death Experience” only came into use in 1975 proposed by Dr. Raymond Moody, the scientific study of the NDE indicates that the experiences might have been as ancient as humans (Moody, 1975). Moody thought that no one dies and returns to narrate his or her experiences of death and he assumed that the experiencers of the NDE could be regarded as those that came close to death thus the use of the term “near.”⁶ His view of the human body is dualistic suggesting that the body and the mind could at some instances operate dependently and independently of each other:

Let us, therefore, hypothesize that death is the separation of the mind from the body, and that the mind does pass into other realms of existence at this point. It would follow that there exists some mechanism whereby the soul or mind is released upon death. One has no basis upon which to assume, though, that this mechanism works exactly in accordance with what we have in our era somewhat arbitrarily taken to be the point of no return (Moody, 1975).

Raymond Moody obtained records of 150 people who experienced the near-death. He believed that the near-death experience is not evidence for life after death but an experience that leads people to be *close to death*.⁷ Moody

⁶ cf. Moody (1975: 240).

⁷ Moody was born on 30th June, 1944. In 1966, he obtained a Bachelor of Arts and a Masters of Arts in 1967. His PhD in philosophy was obtained in 1969 from the University of Virginia and afterwards another PhD in psychology from the University of West Georgia. At the University of Virginia, Moody read about classic Greek texts which describe Greek psychomanteums, a practice through which people consulted with the spirit of the dead. The Medical College of Georgia awarded him a Medical Degree in 1976. After 1976, he served as a forensic-psychiatrist at maximum-security Georgia state hospital and chaired the *Consciousness Studies* at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas in 1998. His academic background and work experiences likewise his meeting with Dr George Ritchie; a psychiatrist influenced his later life. Moody built a prototype psychomanteum in Alabama called the *Dr. Dee Theatre of the Mind* where people gaze at mirrors to create some sort of spiritual

met Ritchie in 1965 while Moody was still an undergraduate student at the University of Virginia. Ritchie narrated to Moody about an afterlife experience he had when he was just 20 years old.⁸ Since then, Moody began to document several accounts of similar experiences. He also claimed to have experienced the near-death when he attempted suicide in 1991.⁹

In addition, all the 150 people Moody interviewed had certain coherencies during their experiences to include: a vision of the being of light, the life review process, the tunnel experience, a feeling of peace, hearing of strange sound, a feeling of being out-of-the body, presence of a border or a limit, a process of rising into heaven, a unique form of supernatural rescue from disasters during their experiences, an experience of coming back into the physical body to narrate their experiences, and sometimes a form of reluctance to return to the body, meeting others or meeting spiritual beings known or unknown to them, visions of being in cities full of light and a realm of bewildered spirits. He later added other experiences which near-death experiencers had: sadness in discussing their experiences, deeper appreciation of life, less fear of death and corroboration of out-of-body experiences.¹⁰

In order to compile his knowledge on psychical and out-of-body experiences, Moody wrote many other books like *Reunions: Visionary Encounters with Departed Loved Ones* (1994) in which he discussed the techniques of summoning the dead, *Life After Loss* (2001) in which he discussed how people pre-cognate death and accompany the dead to the afterlife and return to their physical bodies afterwards. He also wrote *Coming Back: A Psychiatrist Explores Past-Life Journeys* (1991) where he discussed how an individual's past-life experiences can be explained and *The Last Laugh: A New Philosophy of Near-Death Experiences, Apparitions, and the Paranormal* (2005) in which he examined various responses to his researches by some parapsychologists, Christian fundamentalists and sceptics.

The book that got him famous is *Life After Life* where he coined the words *Near-Death Experience*.¹¹ The contribution of Moody to the study of the near-death experience cannot be underestimated. Most importantly, after him, many other researchers picked interest on the subject and began a further study. Notwithstanding, Moody's work is not regarded as the ultimate in this field of study. Arnette said that Moody's researches lacked scientific evidence: “Moody's investiga-

apparitions (see “Raymond Moody” on <https://near-death.com/raymond-moody/>; Moody (1975: 164-200); Ma'SUMian (1996: 121).

⁸ George Ritchie documented his experiences in a book *Return from Tomorrow* published in 1978.

⁹ Discussed in his book *Paranormal*.

¹⁰ Moody (1975: 164-200) cf. Greyson (2006: 395).

¹¹ Moody (1975: 200-203).

tion, while a crucial first step in near-death research, lacked the scientific precision and statistical analyses that could have given his work more credibility.¹²

Another important personality that contributed to the study of NDE is Johan Christophe Hampe, a Lutheran minister. He was born on 23rd January, 1913 in Wroclaw, Poland. He collected information on the experiences of dying people and victims of different accidents. He came to believe in the dual existence of the human body through which one of it survives bodily death (Hampe, 1979). In his book *To Die is Gain*, Hampe classified three fundamental features or events surrounding the experiences of dying: firstly, “escape of the self” which signifies the “I” factor or a kind of self-personality.¹³ Secondly, the “Life panorama” similar to the NDEs “life review”¹⁴ and thirdly, the “expansion of the self,” which signifies an increased consciousness, knowledge, mental capacity and a clear understanding of the dying experiences.¹⁵

Hampe argued that the transformative impact of the dying experiences allows an individual to live a more valued or appreciative life both physically and spiritually. He thought that the NDE is relevant in both theology and in medical or health sciences. He reiterated that, because of experiences like the near-death, it is logical to assume that life does not end after death; therefore, death ought to be seen as a *gain* because it releases one from the pains and sufferings experienced by the physical body.¹⁶ Fox said that Moody and Hampe were contemporaries, yet Hampe wrote independently of Moody (Fox, 2003).

Dr. Kenneth Ring’s contribution to the study of NDE deserves a special recognition. He was born on 13th December 1935 in San Francisco, California and became an emeritus professor of psychology in the 70s at the University of Connecticut. After reading Moody’s *Life After Life* in 1977, he became interested in the subject and interviewed 102 near-death experiencers for relevant information. He published *Lessons from the Light, Heading towards Omega* (1984) and *Life at Death* (1980) in which he analyzed the experiences of 24 people who attempted suicide. Their near-death experiences were truncated or cut-short and this is associated with their suicide attempts. Ring also authored the *Omega Projects, UFO Encounters and Lessons from the Light* (2000). His outstanding work pertained to NDE among blind people in *Mindset: Near-Death Experiences in the Blind* (1999). He coauthored *Methods of Madness: The Mental Hospital as a Last Resort*.¹⁷

Professor Kenneth Ring is a co-founder and the former president of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) and also the founding editor of the *Journal of the Near-Death Studies* (Ring, 2011). Greyson described Ring as an individual who expressed serious concern on the transformative aspects of the near-death experiencers (Greyson, 2006). Ring identified 10 arbitrary items which he used to scale the depth of the NDE. Greyson questioned Ring’s scale or his criteria for determining the NDE “Weighted Core Experience Index” (WCEI), (Greyson, 1983) but Kenneth J. Arnette described Ring’s work on the NDE as more scientific in comparison to that of Moody’s work. Ring contributed immensely to the scientific study of the NDE as a global experience and to the study of the NDE as a reproducible psychological phenomenon (Arnette, 1992).

Bruce Greyson was born in October 1946. He is a professor of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences at the University of Virginia. He coauthored *Irreducible Mind* (2007) and *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences* (2009). He has published several articles on the near-death experiences and is now one of the heroes on the study of the subject. In one of his articles, “*Near-death Experiences and Spirituality*,” he elaborated on the theological implications of the NDE in which he discussed the non-interest of many theologians in the study of the NDE. Greyson carefully worked and identified a seemingly developed scale that determines the criteria for assessing the depth of NDE. His criterion for determining the efficacy of the NDE is widely accepted.¹⁸ Dr. Maxwell J.F. Cooper, for example, applied Greyson’s criteria for assessing the depth of NDE to conduct a study on the responses of an African man who went through torture that led to his experience of the near-death. Greyson also served as an editor of the *Journal of the Near-Death Studies* (Greyson, 2006).

Another relevant person in the study of the NDE is Michael Sabom, an American medical doctor and a cardiologist, born on 28th September, 1954. He is an authority on NDE researches and he published *Recollections of Death: A Medical Investigation* in 1981. He has been criticized by other scholars for tampering with the report of his NDE witnesses. He also published *Light and Death* in 1998. In this book, he investigated many NDEs through a research process or motivation he founded Atlanta Study in which he analyzed the value of NDE to those who experienced it. The Atlanta Study targeted the recording of all sceneries and activities of about 50 individuals specifically in the operating rooms and in hospital beds who were alleged to have died and returned. He is a profound born-again Christian who attempted to study the NDE in the light of what the Bible teaches.¹⁹ There are many other contemporary

¹² Arnette (1992: 8)

¹³ Hampe (1979: 33-48)

¹⁴ Hampe (1979: 50-51).

¹⁵ Hampe (1979: 65).

¹⁶ Hampe (1979: 99-100,102).

¹⁷ cf. Ring (2011: 419-424).

¹⁸ Greyson (1983: 369-373).

¹⁹ “Michael Sabom,” <https://www.near-death.com/science/experts/michael-sabom.html>.

scholars that are contributing to the study of the NDE like Carol Zaleski and many more.

The Dualistic Interpretation of the Near-Death Experience

The monistic view regard the human body as a single entity suggesting that the mind and body are just a single entity, and that the human thoughts and cognitive abilities are simply and strictly controlled by brain processes centered on the human head. In other words, monism is a view according to which without the managerial abilities of the brain, the human mind and mental processes would not exist (Theodore, 2022). There are many reasons and arguments that supports the view that NDE correlates with dualism.

Carol Zeleski, a former lecturer at Harvard University and a professor of world religion taught that the NDEs are religious experiences that are preconceived and as a result, the use of religious and cultural symbols are significant in describing their experiences (Zaleski, 1988). However, people without any religious background have been found to have experienced the near-death. Kenneth J. Arnette noted that the NDE "...did not depend on a person's religious faith or lack of thereof" (Arnette, 1992) and Kristof Kock said that "NDEs are no more likely to occur in devout believers than in secular or nonpracticing subjects (Kock, 2020). You do not need to have a religion or to belong to a particular belief system in order to experience the near-death. The near-death experiencers researched by Moody and others were not in any way artificially induced by religion or by any medical stimulant (Ma'SU'mian, 1996). Harpur stated that "for every pathological condition presumed [by critics] to cause near death visions, one can find subjects who were demonstrably free of its influence, therefore no single psychological or physiological syndrome can account for near death influence" (Harpur, 1991).

Some critics further assumed that the NDE can be influenced by drug-intake (Corraza, 2008). For example, it has also been confirmed that amnesic are drugs taken before anaesthesia and the aim is to make sure that the concerned patient does not remember any event during his or her experiences under anaesthesia. Harpur said that people that experience the near-death through anaesthesia could still recall fully what transpired during their experiences of death (Harpur, 1991). Unlike drug patients who in most cases are very imaginative and vaguely romantic in their experiences and utterances, Near-Death Experiencers do report *logical and well-calculative events* (Corraza, 2008).

In addition, some critics classify the NDE as a form of hallucination caused by mental disorder called schizophrenia (Harpur 1991; Kock, 2020). Unlike schizophrenic patients who find difficulty in gathering their thoughts, the thoughts of the Near-Deah experiencers are more often improved, organized and universally coherent, happening once or very

few times in a person's lifetime.²⁰ Corazza wrote about an experience that was narrated by Allan Pring who described the feeling of a sound mind or vividness or a seeming accurateness during and in the reportage of the near-death experience:

On Monday 6 August the preparation for surgery was routine and I lost consciousness within seconds of being injected with an anaesthetic. All perfectly normal. But the manner in which I regained consciousness was anything but normal. Instead of slowly coming round in a drowsy and somewhat befuddled state in a hospital ward I awoke as if from a deep and refreshing sleep and I was instantly and acutely aware of my situation. Without any anxiety or distress, I knew that I was dead, or rather that I had gone through the process of dying and was now in a different state of reality. The place that I was in cannot be described because it was a state of nothingness. There was nothing to see because there was no light; there was nothing to feel because there was no substance. Although I no longer considered that I had a physical body, nevertheless I felt as if I were floating in a vast empty space, very relaxed and waiting.²¹

The near-death experiencers do share a lot of coherencies in reporting their experiences.²² Arnette noted that the near-death experiencers are rich and seemingly accurate in detailing their experiences to their listeners.²³ In other words, experiencers of the near-death do not always regard their experiences as fantasy but something real and life changing: "[t]o the person undergoing it, the NDE is as real as anything the mind produces during normal walking."²⁴ Kock reported about an experience of admiral Sir Francis Beaufort whom in 1971 had almost drowned and had a near-death experience and his report was vivid: 'A calm feeling of the most perfect tranquillity succeed the most tumultuous sensation.... Nor was I in any body pain. On the contrary, my sensatio were [sic] now of rather a pleasurable cast...' (Kock, 2020). The life review feature of the experiencers of the near-death that allows them to remember and discuss clearly their experiences suggests that their experiences might not be

²⁰ Ma'Su'mian (1996: 126-127).

²¹ Corazza (2008: 41-42).

²² Moody (1975: 206-215)

²³ Arnette (1992: 8)

²⁴ Kock (2020: 5)

fake.²⁵

One of the purposes of this argument is to indicate that the NDE may not be connected with any form of mental disorder. In 2017, two researchers from the University of Virginia interviewed 122 people who had an experience of the near-death. They were asked to compare the activeness of their memories during their near-death experiences in relation to possible advanced brain cognition before and after their NDEs. The outcome of their research indicates that their NDEs remembered with clarity, vividness and were detailed and specific in recalling and dispensing information more than when they had no near-death experience. Christof Kock said that the 122 people interviewed remembered their experiences as being 'realer than real' (Kock, 2020).

There is another view that the NDE is strictly a biological event caused by the non- functioning of body cells and body organs which do result to a lack of Oxygen (anoxia) (Kock, 2020). However, Moody recorded that there were few NDE cases where the experiencers had no injuries, yet they went through death-experience that are similar to those that had injuries.²⁶ Another argument against the near-death phenomenon is that, the NDE is viewed not as an independent experience but a recollection of childbirth phenomenon involving the passage of a baby from the stomach to the world. This has been equated by critics to the tunnel experience of the NDE and that the emergence of light in the NDE is also equated to the passing of the child from his or her mother's womb to the world. According to Harpur, during childbirth, the baby transits from the state and place of warmth, affectionate, and security to a place of individual existence and that is why the baby experiences pain when coming out from a woman's womb. The first breath of the baby is accompanied by a cry. This childhood experience contradicts the NDE which is often accompanied by a sense of repentance, peace, painlessness, spiritual transformation, and sometimes out of tunnel experience. All of these

arguments suggests that the near-death experience supports further study on the dualistic nature of the human being.

The Contribution of the Mind-Body Debates to the Study of the NDE

It is difficult at this stage to have a universal definition of the mind. The mind is not a physical object that can be studied scientifically and objectively. It is not surprising that the radical behaviorists and biologists think that the mind does not exist because it cannot be seen or touched. They think that anything that cannot be studied through observable and physical calibrates are unscientific (McLeod, 2007). Yet, generally, it is known that the activities of the mind can hardly be disconnected from the brain. Wilhem Jordaan and Jackie Jordaan cited a definition of the mind originally made by Ambrose Bierce according to which the mind is a matter whose activities must be coordinated by brain processes: "[The mind is] a mysterious form of matter secreted by the brain" (Jordaan and Jordaan, 1989). Saul Mcloed noted that the mind consists of all mental activities including the human thoughts and consciousness (McLeod, 2007).

The renowned Plato (427-347 BCE) emphasized the view that what is unseen and what are strictly ideas are the most important aspect of humans. He meant the soul or the mind is the only good in humans and not necessarily the body (Boer, 1976). Plato explained that the soul or the mind survives bodily death (Jordaan and Jordaan, 1989). This idea is against the monist view that at death, the mind ceases to exist. The study of the exact mental and body mechanism that controls the near-death experiences are still ongoing. Yet, the experiencers of Near-Death and other researchers that show empathy on the NDE as real experiences have made several efforts to convince scientists that the NDE shows a possible separation between the mind and the body at certain instances. At some instances, the experiencers of the Near-Death are declared clinically dead yet, they *return to life* to narrate their experiences and the activities that transpired within their environments as though they were conscious when actually they were not.

The unique and super consciousness of the Near-Death experiencers during their experiences made them to think that the body and the mind are different entities especially when they recall their experiences of the feeling of leaving their physical bodies behind. This view has always kept the monist in discontent to the point that the exact brain processes that controls NDEs are attempted to be explained. Christof Kock said that the NDE is a dying process and when the experiencer is resuscitated, he or she expresses the visions of his or her brain activities in what is popularly regarded as a near-death experience. He added that for whatever reason that makes a patient starve of brain blood flow (ischemia) and oxygen (anoxia), the patient loses consciousness with his or her EEG (electroencephalograph

²⁵ Moody (1975: 214-225). In most studies of the near-death experience, it has been established that after the life review process, there have been reports of persistence by the Supreme Beings who supervised the life review process to ask the experiencers to "come back" [that experiencer should return back to the world or to life] and a kind of reluctance on the experiencer's not to come back. There are different reasons why some experiencers do not want to return while others do. For example, some say they do not want to return because they were just approaching the charming and embracing being of light and others say they do not want to leave because of the peace they experience in the otherworld. Others claim that they still have a mission they want to fulfil on earth thus the need to return, while some say the love and prayers of others here on earth pulled them back despite their wish to stay in the otherworld to complete their experience (s). Others reported that someone shouted their names and they had to return through the dark tunnel, after their return, they might "want to sleep" immediately or might experience a state of unconsciousness for a while (Moody 1975: 100-107).

²⁶ Moody (1975: 214-225)

testing) reading flat. It is during these weak-brain processes that the neurons which were responsible for controlling body electrical activities gets offline and as a result, it sees visions and stores memories that are shaped by the patient's cultural background interpreted as an NDE (Kock, 2020). The monist medical and scientific regard for NDE as strictly a result of the weaknesses in the functioning of blood cells or blood drain or Oxygen insufficiency cannot explain the high level of awareness experienced by the NDE experiencers in the narration, the orderliness and in the composition of their experiences.

Another aspect of the monist view called subjective idealism or phenomenalism emphasized that everything is a matter including the mind and that the mind controls the activities of the body. In other words, the view has it that even the body we have is defined or interpreted to us by the mind. The view equally suggests that the mind ends when the body is dead:²⁷ "... destruction of the brain ends the existence of the mind..."²⁸ Considering the features of the NDE that pertained to its universality, its coherencies, its modern empirical study, and most importantly its current unscientifically and unexplainable positioning or functioning of the mind in connection with the body during the experiences; the monist is left with more questions than answers. The clear articulation of the visions and the memories of the NDEs controlled by the mind over the weakness of the physical body present a serious problem to the monist.²⁹ Arnette noted that "... no monistic model yet proposed could account for the details of the NDE."³⁰ The memories of Near-Death experiencers have been proven to be more stable (Agrillo, 2011). The questions which are raised by the monists in connection with mind-body debates and the NDE seemed to favor the dualists.

The dualists recognized that the mind works hand in hand with the body but that there are instances where the mind may work independently of the body. Rene Descartes (1596-1650), a dualist taught that the mind connects with the body at the pineal gland.³¹ To him, humans are the only creatures that are created with physical body and mental mind that worked directly together yet the other is capable of developing features independent of the other (Jordaan and Jordaan, 1989; Theodore, 2022). While the NDE seemed to suggest a possible dualism, yet it cannot be proven that the mind works independent of the body during NDE.

What is clear is that both the monists and the dualists do not at this stage have a satisfactory explanation for the NDE in connection with the body-mind relations except that using common sense or simple logic, the NDE seemed to favour

the dualist "[t]he NDE evidence itself is strongly suggestive of dualism, and when combined with the results of relativity [quantum physics] the arguments becomes[sic] compelling."³² Cooper also noted that dying and resuscitation are highly connected to the idea of dualism (Cooper, 2011).

Einstein theory of relativity suggest that motion and velocity are relative quantities that are determined in respect to the observer's point of view or stand point or reference point (Arnette, 1992). The relativity of space and time can be illustrated with the force of gravity which is expected to attract objects to itself but the theory of relativity suggest that gravity is not absolute but warping or curving from varied reference points of view. In other words, where the mass of an object is more, the space around it would also warp or curve more (Falk, 2018). The theory demonstrates that the more distant two people are, the different the reading or the positioning of their time and interpretation of time "... the motion of clocks is influenced by gravity, so that time depends, for example, on the height of the observer above the earth."³³

Furthermore, developments in modern physics and particularly in the study of the theory of relativity gives the observer a pivotal role in determining the speed of light which is said to be constant irrespective of the position or movement of the observer. This suggests that the mind or human intuitive abilities can determine experimental inferences irrespective of the position of the body. The dualists regard this view as a support for the possible operation of the mind whilst independent of the body (Harpur, 1991). The theory of relativity supposed that space and time can be negligible in any form of motion or travels (Arnette, 1992). The percipients of the Near-Death have reported about their travels or the feeling of leaving their physical bodies behind while they pass through a tunnel that might be dark until they reach a location of light.³⁴ Kenneth J. Arnette referred to the human consciousness that is assumed to leave the physical body during the NDE as the human 'essence' and this is so because of its unique cognitive abilities in storing and recalling clear information regarding an experience:

The theory of essence, then, states that human nature is dualistic. ..., we are composed both of a physical body and an essence, which is the seat of consciousness and thought. Upon the death of the body, the essence is disengaged from this space-time and travels via a connecting wormhole to locales imperceptible to us while in the physical form. Furthermore, rather than defying

²⁷ McLeod (2007: 2).

²⁸ Arnette (1992: 6).

²⁹ cf. Arnette (1992: 8).

³⁰ Arnette (1992:10).

³¹ McLeod (2007: 2).

³² Arnette (1992: 16).

³³ Arnette (1992:12)

³⁴ Harpur (1991: 60); Ma'SUMian (1996: 133).

scientific understanding, the essence has some attributes and makes observations that are consistent with known principles of science and with predictions of modern physics.³⁵

Arnette's view suggests that science supports the view that humans possess special abilities that allow the mind to exist differently or independently of the body at some instances, especially when the body system is tampered with. More so, using knowledge derived from the theory of the conservation of the energy which states that an energy can neither be created nor destroyed but can be converted from one state to another. Polkinghorne, a theoretical physicist taught that there is another universe that exists and cannot be ascertained by the physical senses but the mind. This is necessary because to him, life or the mind is a form of energy that does not end at death but that can exist in another universe after the death of the physical body:

The atoms of which we are made are completely changed energy for years. It is the pattern they form that provides continuity and preserved our identity. There is then no special difficulty in conceiving of that pattern being recreated after death with 'physical' component in a different world (Polkinghorne, 1985).

Polkinghorne thought that human carcasses break up into the air as atomic particles, and in turn the air changes into a body and such chemical and mechanical processes continues thus becoming a kind of immortality.³⁶ Allen echoed a similar idea when he noted that life continues even after bodily death "nothing actually dies in the sense of going out of existence. What is lost to the past is the high probability of detecting event" (Allen, 2017). A scientist and medical doctor, Robert Lanza also taught about the existence of many universes where humans live after the body's death. He said that the physical sense or the universe we live-in cannot comprehend the other universe where the mind or the soul comprehends or lives-in after bodily death. He taught that the human mind is immortal (Lanza and Berman, 2018). These types of debates supported by physicists, psychologists and philosophers are arguments for the dualists view and a plus for the study of the NDE which proposed that the mind at some instances can exist without the full and strict control of the body or the brain.

³⁵ Arnette (1992: 17).

³⁶ Polkinghorne (1985: 180-184).

CONCLUSION

The historical study of the NDE suggests that the subject was and is relevant for study throughout many ages. It also shows the importance of the study of the NDE to peoples of various professions especially philosophers, psychologists and medical practitioners alike. The contribution of the study to the mind-body debates in connection with the NDE enhances the cultural view of a possible existence of the body different from the mind, yet this cannot be proven but motivated to be studied further. Scientific interest and the theory of relativity is beginning to shed light on the study of the mind as a possible mysterious entity that exists hand in hand with the body or that might have its own abilities to carry out certain functions without the full articulation of the brain otherwise the NDE might indeed be a brain function that cannot be fully explained by medical sciences thus the need for further research. This contention regarding the unknown mechanism that fully controls the NDE is a plus to the dualists who believes that though the body works hand in hand with the mind, yet there are instances where the mind could act or operate irrespective of the popularly known order coordinated by the body or by the human brain. There is an "autonomous intelligent agent" responsible for all actions and phenomenon of the NDEs, a kind of an individuality that never dissociates itself from its mind but only from its physical body. A further study is required to understand other aspects of humans that enable them to see, act and narrate experiences that are out of the reach of the ordinary senses.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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