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## Are Near-Death Experiences Veridical? A Philosophical Inquiry

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree  
in Theory and Criticism

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## Abstract

This project is a philosophical investigation into near-death experiences (NDEs). It attempts to answer the central question: Are near-death experiences veridical? The aim of my work is to defend the veridicality of near-death experiences within the framework of idealism. However, this aim is not achieved simply by adopting an idealist standpoint. Instead, I present arguments for the reason this idealist standpoint is necessary. First, I argue that the traditional way of assessing near-death experiences is often oversimplified and carries an unnecessary bias in favour of a materialist interpretation, which eventually sets it up for a failure to demonstrate that an afterlife state can exist. Once this materialist bias is examined, I make an attempt to level the playing field, so to speak, to see where this equal level can take the discussion. Ultimately, I argue that it is best to fit all evidence and arguments into a theory that best explains near-death experiences; and, the theory that best explains these experiences is philosophical idealism. At the end, I provide examples of this theory and also a synthesized version of the best imaginable theory to show in what way(s) these idealist theories can explain near-death experiences and in what way(s) near-death experiences can be demonstrated to be veridical in nature.

**Key Words:** near-death experiences, death, philosophy, metaphysics, ontology, epistemology, idealism, materialism, dualism, Afterlife Hypothesis, Dying Brain Hypothesis, perception, mind, consciousness, altered states of consciousness, mysticism

## Summary for Lay Audience

This project is a philosophical investigation into near-death experiences (NDEs). It attempts to answer the central question: Are near-death experiences veridical? "Veridical" comes from the Latin words *verus* and *dicere*, which means truth telling. Instead of using the word "real", which may be easily misunderstood, I use the word "veridical" to ask in what way(s) near-death experiences can be said to be truth telling.

The aim of my work is to defend the veridicality of near-death experiences within the framework of idealism. Philosophical idealism, roughly stated, is the theory that reality is consciousness or mind-created and possibly consciousness or mind-dependent.

However, the aim of my work is not achieved simply by adopting an idealist standpoint. Instead, I present arguments for the reason this idealist standpoint is necessary. First, I argue that the traditional way of assessing near-death experiences is often oversimplified and carries an unnecessary bias in favour of a materialist interpretation, which eventually sets it up for a failure to demonstrate that an afterlife state can exist. Here, the materialist interpretation refers to the theory of philosophical materialism according to which reality is strictly made of matter and nothing exists above and beyond matter.

Once this materialist bias is examined, I make an attempt to level the playing field, so to speak, to see where this equal level can take the discussion. Ultimately, I argue that it is best to fit all evidence and arguments into a theory that best explains near-death experiences; and, the theory that best explains these experiences is philosophical idealism.

At the end, I provide examples of this theory and also a synthesized version of the best imaginable theory to show in what way(s) these idealist theories can explain near-death experiences and in what way(s) near-death experiences can be demonstrated to be veridical in nature. Since, according to this theory, consciousness or the mind is the basic building block of reality, simply put, there is life after death.

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## INTRODUCTION: THE QUESTION OF VERIDICALITY

This project is a philosophical investigation into near-death experiences (NDEs). It attempts to answer the central question: Are near-death experiences veridical? This is an unusual project in a sense that most academics engaged in the study of NDEs are psychologists, neuroscientists and doctors who do not approach the subject from a predominantly philosophical point of view. They mainly rely on empirical studies to build their cases. This means that very little or no contribution to the subject has been made from a philosophical viewpoint<sup>1</sup>. This project has been created to remedy this situation.

The critics may suggest that the reason for a lack of philosophical contribution has to do with the fact that the topic appears unimportant to philosophers. The topic does not raise any philosophical curiosity or appeal to any philosophical sensibility. Simply put, it is philosophically unimportant. There is nothing offensive about this argument; not everyone is drawn to the topic of NDEs. However, there are some philosophically inspired individuals who may see the intriguing side of this topic. Near-death experiences appear to belong to a category of anomalous phenomena; it is a category that challenges the scientific understanding of what happens at death. Therefore, it is important to take on this phenomenon on the philosophical level and make a philosophical contribution, at least for the sake of those passionate people who would like to gain more clarification on the topic of NDEs.

The aim of my work is to defend the veridicality of near-death experiences within the framework of idealism. However, this aim will not be achieved simply by adopting an idealist standpoint. Instead, I will present arguments for the reason this idealist standpoint is necessary. First, I will argue that the traditional way of assessing near-death experiences is often oversimplified and carries an unnecessary bias in favour of a materialist interpretation, which eventually sets it up for a failure to demonstrate that an afterlife state can exist. Once this

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<sup>1</sup> A limited number of philosophically oriented works has been produced. An example is Michael Potts's essay. See: Potts, Michael. "Sensory Experiences in Near-Death Experiences and the Thomistic View of the Soul," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion*. No. 49 (2001): 85-100. The only book significant enough to be called philosophical was written by Mark Fox. See: Fox, Mark. *Religion, Death and Near-Death Experience*. (New York: Routledge, 2003).

materialist bias is examined, I will make an attempt to level the playing field, so to speak, to see where this equal level can take the discussion. Ultimately, I will argue that it is best to fit all evidence and arguments into a theory that best explains near-death experiences; and, the theory that best explains these experiences is philosophical idealism. At the end, I will provide examples of this theory and also a synthesized version of the best imaginable theory to show in what way or ways these idealist theories can explain near-death experiences and in what way or ways near-death experiences can be demonstrated to be veridical in nature.

To start off, it is essential to understand the components of the main question, "Are near-death experiences veridical? The components of this question are "near-death experiences" and "veridical". Therefore, the questions I will first try to answer are "What are near-death experiences?" and "What is veridicality?".

### What Are Near-Death Experiences?

Historically speaking, Raymond Moody, often referred to as the father of NDEs, has never provided a definition of his newly coined term in his book, *Life After Life* (1975). He simply starts out his book by asking the question, "What is it like to die?". He then presents a large number of cases where people talk about their experiences near death, which originates from three different sources he identifies in his book (Moody, 1975: 19):

- (1) The experiences of persons who were resuscitated after having been thought, adjudged, or pronounced clinically dead by their doctors.
- (2) The experiences of persons who, in the course of accidents or severe injury or illness, came very close to physical death.
- (3) The experiences of persons who, as they died, told them to other people who were present. Later, these other people reported the content of the death experience to me.

Two important elements can be identified here, which will become important later in my work. First, Moody is interested in people's conscious experiences. It is the phenomenal qualities or qualia that answer the question "What is it like to die?" which is the central issue. Thus, this is

not strictly a type of scientific investigation that is done from a detached, third person point of view<sup>2</sup>. Second, he is connecting these personal, first person experiences to physical or clinical death that is observed from a detached, third person point of view of others around. In addition, Moody entitles his second chapter “The Experience of Dying,” indicating that he is dealing with the process of dying rather than the experiences of life after death. Naturally, this difference, once again, becomes a contentious issue in NDEs that will be dealt with in my work. Here, some argue that near-death experiences are a glimpse into what it is to come after death while others insist that they are simply part of the process of life being extinguished in the body<sup>3</sup>. All in all, in the above quote, Moody is shaping his newly coined term of NDE without providing a clear-cut definition.

Johann Christoph Hampe, who had worked independently and was uninfluenced by Moody, has provided a clearer idea of what a near-death experience is. In his book, *To Die is to Gain* (1979), he claims the following: “They [the dying] tell us about an extraordinarily increased activity on the part of consciousness in the moments before death” (32). This seems like a more precise idea on which a definition could be potentially formed. Unfortunately, it is not a workable definition as it stands. Hampe gives numerous examples of people who were clinically dead for minutes. In one instance, he talks about a man who was clinically dead for 23 minutes (Hampe, 1979). Although, philosophically speaking, it is uncertain at what point someone can be said to be dead, the fact that these people claim to have had experiences for minutes after they are, as far as most doctors are concerned, considered dead makes Hampe's definition rather vague and unusable. Hampe has to either define the word “death” in his

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<sup>2</sup> Of course, this does not mean that all scientific investigations are done strictly from a detached third person point of view. A good example is the difference threshold in signal detection, out of which Weber's Law was born. This threshold is the minimum amount of change required for a person to perceive that two stimuli are different. In the case of light, one dot of light is held in constant while the intensity of the other is changed. A person looking at these dots has to determine when he or she perceives the change. Thus, the first person point of view is required to determine where the scientific threshold is for signal detection. For further information on this example, see: Andrew B. Crider et al. *Psychology*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: HarperCollins College, 1993), pp. 86-88

<sup>3</sup> For more information, see, for example, Michael Sabom. *Light and Death*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervand Publishing House, 1998), pp. 47-51

statement in order to formulate a proper definition for what it means to be dead or he needs to adopt a clearer statement that better reflects experiences near death.

Even though there had previously not been workable definitions coming forth from earlier authors, a picture of NDEs has slowly emerged in this process. A deeply personal experience happens to some dying people. They may be dying of an illness, accident or suicide; yet, they have a story to tell when they return to their waking consciousness. They have visited what Kenneth Ring calls “the brink of death” or have gone “temporarily over the brink into ‘clinical’ death” (Ring, 1980: 87). They have seen what it is like to be part of the dying process.

A picture of a NDE is still just a picture though. Philosophers love having at least a workable definition. Keeping this in mind, perhaps the clearest and the least objectionable definition from the earlier works can be found in John R. Audette’s essay, “Historical Perspectives on Near-Death Episodes and Experiences” (1982). He distinguishes between a near-death episode and a near-death experience in the following way:

A near-death episode occurs when an individual comes very close to physical death, is declared clinically dead, or even merely perceives that death is imminent. Near-death experiences, which sometimes occur during near-death episodes, are altered states of consciousness involving unusual, often mystical visions (Audette, 1982: 22).

This distinction is helpful because it captures the third person point of view of those witnessing the person dying or being close to death and the first person point of view of the person having the experience. From the third person point of view, the NDE gains a timeframe. It clearly shows what circumstances have to be present for a person to have a NDE. From a first person point of view, the NDE gains a qualitative referent. It comments on the person’s state of consciousness and the type of vision experienced. In light of this distinction, Audette’s subsequent clarifications also make sense:

The near-death episode may be defined as one in which an individual is exposed to and subsequently survives an acute life-threatening situation typically

characterized by a loss of consciousness and dangerously unstable vital signs (Audette, 1982: 23)

[I]t may be said that near-death experiences refer to altered states of consciousness described by persons who have recovered from such episodes...In the cases of near-death experiences, altered states of consciousness generally take the form of non-ordinary modes of awareness and heightened perceptions ostensibly independent of conventional sensory processes (Audette, 1982: 29).

On the one hand, Audette talks about life-threatening situations, loss of apparent consciousness and dangerously unstable vital signs. On the other hand, he talks about altered states of consciousness, non-ordinary modes of awareness and unconventional sensory perception. This difference makes sense given his distinction between the third person point of view and the first person point of view. The near-death episode provides a reference as to what is happening to the person when doctors or on-lookers are observing him. From their point of view, doctors and on-lookers perceive the person to be in a life-threatening situation, to be unconscious and to have no stable vital signs. At the same time, Audette's definition for a near-death experience offers an explanation as to what is happening inside the person, as the person perceives it. The person is in possession of a non-ordinary awareness and of unconventional sensory perception that are not part of the person's everyday experiences.

Thus, Audette's definitions manage to capture the essence of near-death experiences more accurately than other previously attempted descriptions and explanations for several reasons. First, he offers a third person point of view where the circumstances and the timeframe of a near-death experience are given. Second, he offers an experiential first person point of view of events unfolding for the person in a specific state of mind. Third, his definitions include all the important elements. The definitions are not too vague and not too narrow. And, fourth, his definitions are metaphysically neutral. He does not favor any specific worldview. His definitions can accommodate any interpretation of reality.

Of course, Audette's definitions also have their shortcomings. Firstly, a third person observation may not be accurate from a medical standpoint. A witness of the near-death episode

may not accurately assess the person's situation in distress. It may be that the witness is mistaken about the person having lost consciousness or having unstable vital signs. Secondly, making a difference between a normal state of consciousness and an altered state of consciousness creates an impression that there is an objectively established normal state, and the experts studying near-death experiences are both fully aware and knowledgeable of the difference between normal and altered states. This is just an impression, though, and it is far from the truth. Finally, the words used in the description are not well-defined. For example, the words "death", "consciousness", "survive", "non-ordinary" and "conventional" are standing on shaky ground. People can basically read into these ambiguous words a number of interpretations. Yet, despite its shortcomings, Audette's definitions from the earlier works on near-death experiences are still the least objectionable. They are capable of offering a solid idea on the subject of near-death experiences and its distinction from near-death episodes.

The problem with the earlier works is, though, that they seem to tie near-death experiences to the physiological state of the body. Yet, even from the earlier works it becomes clear that people do not necessarily have to be physiologically harmed to be near-death. The experience can be also brought about by "dangerous circumstances but without any physical harm," (Craffert, 2019), which include death-bed visions and perceived dangers of an impending death. For example, Hampe (1979) cites examples of people buried underground by eroding soil or fallen from great height who were simply sure they were about to die but did not even come close to being near death. Hence, often times the physiological state of the body is not significant because the "physiological details of the close brush with death may play a minor role" (Greyson, 2014). This means that the definition of near-death experiences had to be broadened over time to be more inclusive of the person's state of mind. For example, Greyson and his colleagues have provided the following definition:

Although experts on near-death experiences (NDEs) have not reached consensus on a definition, NDEs are generally understood to be unusual, often vivid and realistic, and sometimes profoundly life-changing experiences occurring to people who have been physiologically close to death, as in cardiac arrest or other life-threatening conditions, or psychologically close to death, as in accidents or illnesses in which they feared they would die (Greyson, Kelly & Kelly, 2009).

This definition does manage to include nearly all possible psychological and physiological circumstances that can bring about the experience. Despite the fact that Greyson and his colleagues have warned their audience that a consensus on a definition has not been reached, it is still possible to object, though, that the definition they have provided may be too broad and it may blur the line between near-death experiences and other types of unusual experiences, such as, for example, mystical experiences and out-of-body experiences. But, as it stands today, no clearer or more precise definition has been given, probably because it is difficult to be clearer or more precise on the subject.

To compensate for the shortcomings of any definition, near-death researchers have provided criteria for near-death experiences. These criteria have been created based on Moody's composite of common elements, which he had provided in order to describe an ideal model for near-death experiences (Moody, 1975). Over the years, the list has been contracted and expanded by several authors, but roughly the following list of elements has been recognized by near-death researchers (see Moody, 1975: 10-12; French, 2005: 352; Long, 2010: 11-12; Greyson, 2014: 335):

- ineffability
- hearing oneself pronounced dead
- feelings of peace and unusual noises
- seeing the dark tunnel
- being "out of the body"
- meeting spiritual beings
- a bright light as a "being of light"
- panoramic life review
- a realm in which all knowledge exists

- experiencing cities of light
- a realm of bewildered spirits
- experiencing a "supernatural rescue"
- sensing a border or limit
- coming back "into the body"

Certain elements also occur as an aftereffects of near-death experiences. These elements include the following:

- frustration relating the experience to others
- subtle "broadening and deepening" of life
- elimination of fear of death
- corroboration of events witnessed while "out of body"

Since not all elements are included in any one experience and since not all experiences qualify as a near-death experience, scales were designed to identify near-death experiences. Ring (1980) has created the *Weighted Core Experience Index* (WCEI), which reduces Moody's common elements to five. Perhaps the better and most recent known scale is the *Greyson NDE Scale* which includes sixteen items (Greyson, 1984, 1999). Using these sixteen items, a person has to achieve a score of seven out of thirty-two for the experience to be considered a near-death experience. Yet, with all the precautions of creating criteria and scales, limitations still exist. For example, people may be clinically dead and report an experience, but the experience they report may be too few to consider it a near-death experience. On the other hand, some people may not even come close to death and they have enough reported items to consider the experience a NDE, even though the experience may stand close to, for example, a mystical experience or an out-of-body experience. Thus, no definition, list of elements or scale can fully capture near-death experiences.



Still, to get a sense of what a person goes through when having a near-death experience, it is best to present one of these lists of elements. For example, as it was stated, an earlier and perhaps one of the best known set of criteria to determine if someone has had a near-death experience was established by Kenneth Ring in his book, *Life at Death* (1980). My reason for choosing to present Ring's list here is simply a matter of practicality. Ring's original list is the shortest and it takes the shortest amount of space to get through it. Ring includes five elements or stages of NDEs: 1) peace and sense of well-being, 2) separation from the body, 3) entering the darkness, 4) seeing the light, and 5) entering the light. By later writers, these elements or stages are referred to as core features. Some of these features or stages are more common; they appear with more frequency in near-death experiencers (NDEers). The later stages appear less frequently. Also, the stages have an order to them. All in all, these stages offer what Ring calls the basic thanatomimetic narrative of the NDE (Ring, 1980: 39).

Ring presents a qualitative description of each stage of a NDE. At the first stage of the experience, the person feels an overwhelming peace and contentment. This feeling is not fully describable, although NDEers try very hard to please the researchers to describe it. For example, Ring cites a woman who attempts to describe the feeling in the following way<sup>4</sup>:

This incredible feeling of peace [came] over me...All of a sudden there was no pain, just peace...I suppose it's because it's so completely unlike anything else that I've ever experienced in my life. So that I've got nothing to compare it to (Ring, 1980: 41).

Another woman explains the feeling in terms of blackness and softness:

I think that probably the next thing I remember is total, peaceful, wonderful blackness. Very peaceful blackness... the only other word I might add is softness. Just indescribable peacefulness, absolutely indescribable... (Ring, 1980: 42).

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<sup>4</sup> All examples quoted in the next few pages are Ring's citations taken from his taped interviews with NDEers. They are word for word quotations, which include all grammatical errors.

In whichever way the NDEers describe it, the feeling they experience is overwhelmingly positive. Peace and contentment is associated with pleasantness, calmness, happiness and joy amongst others. Ring mentions that some people may experience fear at the beginning, but the fear is transient. Overall, the first stage consists of a positive feeling.

The second stage consists of a separation from the body. As Ring suggests, this involves “a sense of detachment from one’s physical body” (Ring, 1980: 45). Most of these people claim that they were detached, but could not see their physical bodies. Some report though seeing their bodies from above, as in the following example: "At that time I viewed myself from the corner of my hospital room, looking down at my body which was very dark and gray. All the life looked like it was out of it..."(Ring, 1980: 47). Even those who do not see their bodies are, however, capable of seeing and hearing. They all seem to adopt an observer-like detachment. They hover above the scene of their dying bodies and observe the objects and events taking place. For example, Ring cites a woman who observed not only the events taking place inside the room, but also outside the room. This woman had watched her sister, who was a nurse at the hospital, arrive to work. The sister learned about her condition and hurried upstairs to see her:

I could see her doing it, I could see her coming up the elevator, telling people that they couldn't...get off the floor, that she used the emergency elevator and she went straight up the floor...Many of the things she came out with first, but there were things that I told her that she didn't tell me that I could not have known...The elevator was one of them (Ring, 1980: 51).

Although it is difficult to determine whether these facts are accurate, there is no reason to dismiss them since the people involved have no reason to lie about them. The out-of-body experience is a puzzling feature that seems to suggest a separation of consciousness and an ability to continue observation apart from the body. Thus, the second stage is a physical separation that may puzzle some, but also offers the greatest hope for empirical studies into the accuracy of observations.

The third stage is called “entering the darkness”. Ring argues that describing it as Moody does, in *Life After Life* (1975)<sup>5</sup>, as a dark tunnel is not accurate. It is rather a black or dark space without dimension. Most people seem to float through it, although some seem to move very rapidly. The following is a young man’s description of it: "I felt as though I was—well, that’s the hard part to explain—like you’re floating. Like you’re there and...it’s like darkness...It was empty. Yeh, that’s it. Space. Just nothing" (Ring, 1980: 55).

This stage seems to be a transition between this world and the next. It is difficult to describe because, as Ring suggests, the participants seem to adopt a non-ordinary state of consciousness. In this context, non-ordinary state of consciousness means that their conscious state is very different from any of the states normally experienced during their everyday waking hours; although, it has to be rightly noted that, as it will be later discussed, it is not clear what an ordinary waking state may truly consist of. Still, people report what they consider an unusual state and a description of this rather unusual state is a challenging task to describe.

The fourth stage consists of seeing a light. P. M. H. Atwater distinguishes three types of light: colourless primary light, dark light and bright light (Atwater & Morgan, 2000: 301). It is a light that, most of the time, signals the end of a period spent in the black or dark dimensionless space. Most people feel drawn to this light and some feel enveloped by it. The light is beautiful, peaceful and inviting. One woman recalls it as a brilliant golden light that makes one feel at peace:

I just seemed to be surrounded by a velvet blackness...And then, sort of at the periphery of the velvet blackness, there was a brilliant golden light. And I don’t remember feeling frightened at all, just perfectly at peace and perfectly comfortable, as if this is where I should be (Ring, 1980: 57).

The transition from dark to light has a symbolic meaning. Ring explains it as the end of the dying experience and the beginning of a new existence. Some NDEers go as far as interpreting the light as God or some other spiritual being. This stage has a definite transcendental quality to it.

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<sup>5</sup> See: Moody, pp. 30-34

The last stage consists of entering the world the light originates from. This world is very different from the world people are accustomed to. It has a preternatural beauty with physical-like structures, landscapes and people. As one man remembers: “I happened to go down this path and it was beautiful. Beautiful flowers and the birds were singing, and I was walking down” (Ring, 1980: 61). This is a beautiful world people are hesitant to come back from. As the same man recalls it, he was upset at his surgeon for returning him to life: “Why, in heaven’s name, did you bring me back? It was so beautiful” (Ring, 1980: 61). To summarize it, at this stage, NDEers find themselves in a different world that is described as immensely beautiful and they are hesitant to return from it.

Independent of the specific stage or stages NDEers reach, there is a point where a decision is made for their returns. Sometimes the NDEers make the choice, other times the choice is made for them. Additional features, such as a life review, an encounter with a presence, and/or a meeting with deceased family members and friends may also be experienced during near-death experiences. Eventually, the person reunites with the physical body. After this time, the person perceives the world from within the body again. It is a return to the previous “normal” conscious state of being.

Again, as with the definition of the NDE, a number of potential problems arise with the description of its stages. Firstly, there is a question as to what it means for an experience to have a main stage, element or core feature. Does it mean the number of times people experience a particular feature or is it about the type of role it plays in the narrative? Secondly, some of the features have been questioned over the years. For example, as early as in 1978, Maurice Rawlings reported an unpleasant, hellish experience, as opposed to a pleasant, happy one (Rawlings, 1978). The unpleasant experiences question the legitimacy of the basic thanatomimetic narrative of the NDE. Another example is the presence of the tunnel within the experience. In non-Western NDEs, Parisha and Stevenson did not find any evidence for a tunnel sensation even in the earliest research (1986). This type of problem questions the legitimacy of the features themselves mentioned within the basic thanatomimetic narrative of the NDE. Naturally, the list could go on with the number of problems that could be discovered in the description of the features or stages of the NDE. Obviously, this means that the description does not represent a fully ideal and all encompassing version of the features or stages. In fact, as

it was mentioned before, there is not any such fully satisfying description possible. But, this is not the important point here. The important point is to get a basic idea about the type of experience people have. Ring's description provides that approximate, crude version of it.

Before moving on, the final and, probably, the most important issue has to be noted here in the introduction in relation to the interpretation of near-death experiences. Based on the study of descriptions of these experiences, traditionally, there have been two basic hypotheses about the interpretation of NDEs. Susan Blackmore names them (1) the afterlife hypothesis and, (2) the dying brain hypothesis (1993: 3-4). According to the afterlife hypothesis, NDEs are a glimpse into life beyond death. Basically, conscious experiences continue after the demise of the body. NDEs are these conscious experiences that are remembered as part of an integral history of the total experiences of the individual. This hypothesis most often leads to a traditional, substance dualist interpretation of reality. A mental substance is thought to be housed inside a physical brain, within a physical world, which separates at death and leaves the physical realm behind. This hypothesis treats NDEs as actual, "real" experiences outside the physical world.

The dying brain hypothesis interprets NDEs differently. According to the dying brain hypothesis, NDEs can be accounted for by the dying process itself that takes place in the brain. NDEs are caused by the biological and psychological processes that go on in the brain. It means that these experiences can be accounted for by the biological changes, psychological stress, socio-cultural influences or the combinations of these factors. Ultimately, NDEs are part of the dying process, according to this interpretation, and it does not indicate the continuation of the person's consciousness or any personal history beyond death. Therefore, this hypothesis does not treat NDEs as actual, "real" experiences outside of the physical process.

The point about the word "real" stirs the conversation in the direction of veridicality. Now that the question about what near-death experiences are has been answered and a clearer picture about them has emerged, the second part of the question, "Are near-death experiences veridical?" needs to be answered: What is veridicality?

## What is Veridicality?

My work is focusing on the veridicality of near-death experiences, but it should be mentioned that it is possible to make other contributions to philosophy. Having found a satisfactory definition for and description of NDEs and also a basic metaphysical position the experts usually take, it is possible to see some of the potential contributions philosophers could make in this field<sup>6</sup>. Based on the findings about NDEs, philosophers can reexamine, for example, the definition of death and consciousness, the importance of the use of first person and third person points of view, the struggle between the afterlife hypothesis and the dying brain hypothesis, the problems with a religious understanding of NDEs and the ethically important question about the time of harvesting vital organs. Hence, philosophers could potentially make a large contribution to the near-death study in several areas. Yet, one central issue unites all possible contributions that could potentially be made. This central issue has to do with the veridicality of NDEs: Are near-death experiences veridical? The reason this question becomes the central issue is because any philosophical contribution, large or small, made in this field will have to encounter this issue. The definitions of death and consciousness, the available points of view, the metaphysical approaches, the religious interpretations, the ethical struggles and all other potential contributions eventually have to face the question of veridicality. Simply, the veridicality of NDEs shapes the response to all issues raised in relation to NDEs. This is the reason that this project of veridicality is so important to undertake and, therefore, I will be undertaking in this work.

Historically speaking, even in the early stages of near-death studies, the question of veridicality has been asked by using the word "real". For example, Moody asks his interviewed subjects about the reality of the experience. Most insist that the experience is real. To illustrate this point, one man says:

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<sup>6</sup> The list of potential contributions can be very long. For a more thorough examination, see: Mark Fox, *Religion, Death and the Near-Death Experience*. (New York: Routledge, 2003), (especially chapters 2, 3 and 7)

But it was real...My mind wasn't at that point where I wanted to make things happen or make up anything. My mind wasn't manufacturing ideas. I just wasn't in that state of mind (Moody, 1975: 62).

Ring also asks his interviewed subjects if the experience is like a dream. With the exception of one person, all deny this possibility. They insist that it is not a dream but, instead, it is real. Some make comments, such as, "It was too real. Dreams are always fictitious" or, "It was very real. It's as real as you and I are" (Ring, 1980: 82-83). Hence, it is natural for anyone to inquire if the experience is real. However, the question then becomes, "What do they mean by this statement?"

In what sense are NDEs real? Looking at some parts of the experience, it is difficult to deny the reality even if no effort is made to define it. For example, in stage one of Ring's description, NDEers speak of a feeling of peace and contentment. It would be difficult to insist that they are wrong about their feeling. It would be rather strange to say to someone: "You are wrong about feeling content." The validity of other parts of the experience are easier to question, though. For example, did some of them actually enter another world? This means that, intuitively, some parts of an experience seem to be easier to pronounce real than others. It is more difficult to judge the whole experience though. Looking at the entire experience, there does not seem to be a clear intuition that one can be guided by. Some people question the value of the whole experience, some people just question the source, while others accept the experience as real, despite the difficulty of believing some parts of the experience. This means that if the question of reality were asked, some people would want to say that the experience as a whole is real while others would deny it.

It is important to notice that people who had near-death experiences use the generic word "real" to describe the experience. It is most probably so because the word "real" comes closest to describing the experience in everyday language due to its close relationship with the concept of reality. For this reason, instead of the word "veridical," it may seem that the word "real" could have been better to express the concern of the central question asked in this work. Upon reflection, though, it becomes clear that this is not the case. There is a reason for avoiding the word "real" and I will avoid it in this project as much as possible. Basically, the word "real" has

too many meanings in philosophy and, therefore, it can confuse the readers. For example, there is a realist versus nominalist distinction. Or, a perceptual description of the outside world also exists in terms of direct or indirect realism. Since philosophers have used the words "real" "realism" and "reality" in a great number of ways, it is better to replace the word "real" with "veridical". The word veridical is normally used in relation to perception and mostly within the discussion of conscious, anomalous phenomena, such as religious experiences.

Unfortunately, the use of the word "veridical" is complicated by the fact that NDE researchers have used the word in a non-traditional way. Janice M. Holden uses the term "veridical NDE perception" to refer to "any perception--visual auditory, kinesthetic, olfactory, and so on--that a person reports having experienced during one's NDE and that is later corroborated as having corresponded to material consensus reality" (Holden, 2009: 186). In addition, she speaks of "apparently nonphysical veridical NDE perception" or AVP in the following way:

In AVP, NDEers report veridical perception that, considering the positions and /or conditions of their physical bodies during the near-death episodes, apparently could not have been the result of normal sensory processes or logical inference--nor, therefore, mediation--either before, during, or after those episodes (186).

Her aim is to argue that it is possible to perceive objects and events in the material consensus reality without the use of the physical body. The problem is that the word "veridical" is not used entirely correctly here. "Veridical" comes from the Latin words *verus* and *dicere*, which means truth telling. Truth telling is not necessarily limited to the material consensus of reality. The issue in this instance is that NDE researchers, such as Holden, use the word "veridical" in relation to a narrowly conceived correspondence theory of truth which is strictly related to material consensus of reality, while NDEers describe the entire experience as real in the veridical sense, as truth telling, and not just a part of the experience that can be related to material consensus of reality. An additional problem is the arbitrary pick of the correspondence theory of truth of all truth theories and its resulting idea that material reality is a matter of consensus, which may or may not be so. Of course, there is nothing wrong with the potential use of the



correspondence theory. The problem is that this theory is automatically assumed to be the correct truth-theory without a previous philosophical examination of its legitimacy.

The point is that, since near-death experiences are a first person experience, it is best to follow the original idea of the NDEers' claim that their experiences are veridical, truth telling, not just in relation to material consensus of reality, but in a greater sense. Veridicality simply means that it has a close relationship with the truth. Something is veridical when it speaks or expresses the truth. Unfortunately, even though this definition seems loose and vague, a narrower definition cannot be provided yet. The reason for the impossibility of a narrower definition will become apparent during the investigation into the subject of veridicality of NDEs. Simply put, for now, the subject area is closely linked with the understanding of the nature and structure of reality. This understanding appears to be standing on shaky ground because it largely depends on the metaphysical system that a person adopts to interpret near-death experiences. The examination of these systems will show the potential biases and issues with the understanding of veridicality.

Given this preliminary information, I will focus, in this project, on a historical analysis of the veridicality of NDEs in Chapter 1. Historically, the most common way of evaluating veridicality has relied on the use of empirical research. Here, the focus of an attempted explanation is on the continuation of consciousness after the death of the brain, based on the timing of NDEs. There are several issues with this type of evaluation, which will become apparent by the end of the chapter. Ultimately, the result is that, using the historical approach, the evidence for veridicality of NDEs turns out to be weak at best.

It is crucial to understand the reason for the weakness of the evidence and this weakness of evidence can be shown to be the result of an underlying assumption about the nature of reality that guides its historical evaluation. This will be the topic of Chapter 2. Here, I will show that the evidence is often framed within a materialist interpretation of the world. Often times, the quest for an ideal case for veridicality is driven by the desire to satisfy the sceptics of an afterlife who demand to see the utmost supporting evidence that is capable of failing the entire material assumption about the world and this causes the evidence for an afterlife to be very weak. I will spend time on finding out how the material world came to be favoured, based on which these

extreme demands are made. After an examination of the issue, I will show that the mistake ultimately lies in the treatment of materialism as an ahistorical fact. Essentially, the evaluators of the veridicality of NDEs make a false start when they treat materialism as a default position against which they have to argue and prove their case. Their entire project of setting up safeguards against possible, physically provided, alternative explanations is a false way of going about evaluating veridicality. It is not necessary to prove that consciousness can exist outside the brain first in order to establish the veridicality of NDEs.

As a next step, in Chapter 3, I will examine the veridicality of NDEs without any metaphysical assumptions, technically, turning it into an epistemological project. Identifying all assumptions and biases that normally go into the evaluation of veridicality of NDEs means levelling the playing field and creating a situation that resembles an empty and blank epistemic ground. Here, the question becomes where one could start an examination of veridicality and an argument is made that an epistemic foundation is necessary. The following questions will be discussed. Can people just suspend judgment about near-death experiences? Can they just trust their experiences? How confident can they be about the veridicality of their experiences? What epistemic rationality can they use to be confident? How can one evaluate evidence without any metaphysical assumptions? What convinces people and where is the force of conviction coming from? What does reality look like without any preconceived ideas about it?

The last step in the explanation of veridicality of NDEs will be the development of a metaphysical system, a system of reality, that can fully account for these rather convincing human experiences. In Chapter 4, I will defend philosophical idealism as the best choice for a metaphysical system to adopt. I will explain the reasons and the advantages for adopting idealism as a solution.

In the last chapter, Chapter 5, I will provide examples of idealism that can explain and fit near-death experiences into their theories. At the end, based on these examples, I will provide a synthesized version of these theories that can offer the greatest hope for explaining near-death experiences. I will also provide an explanation of veridicality by pointing out in what way or ways near-death experiences could be understood as veridical.

This project is created mainly for an audience who have a philosophical interest into the topic of veridicality of NDEs from a more subjective and perceptual angle. It is designed to dwell into the deepest metaphysical and epistemological questions about veridicality in general and about the veridicality of NDEs in particular. It is specifically meant for adventurous people who would like to visit the abyss of mystery that shelters the secrets of human existence, reality and the unavoidable exit from life as people know it.

## CHAPTER 1: THE TRADITIONAL APPROACH TO ASSESSING THE VERIDICALITY OF NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

"What are you writing about?" she finally broke the silence.

"I am writing about a personal experience where something seemingly impossible happens." I really did not know how to sum it up without offering too many details. The book is about a thorough analysis of a deeply personal experience.

"Seemingly impossible happens? What does that mean? If it is impossible, it cannot happen. If it happens, it cannot be impossible," she provided her careful analysis into the matter. She spoke slowly but confidently.

--M. J. Mandoki (2014a, p. 137)

Most experts on near-death experiences would probably argue that they are familiar with the traditional arguments on veridicality because a great number of people have already expressed their opinions about the veridicality of these experiences. Traditionally, these opinions have been formulated in terms of the Afterlife Hypothesis and the Dying Brain Hypothesis. Probably, most of these experts would say that going through these traditional arguments are redundant. They are right--it does not make sense to repeat them. For this reason, I have no intention of repeating any of these arguments as they are usually presented.

Instead of going through the list of arguments for and against the Afterlife Hypothesis and the Dying Brain Hypothesis, I am going to analyze the traditionally provided line of argumentation for two reasons. First, all arguments carry built-in assumptions and biases that need to be pointed out. Some arguments carry major philosophical assumptions while others simply have unexplained steps and logical flaws. Nevertheless, they all add to the problematic assessment of the veridicality of NDEs these traditional arguments offer. Second, the arguments seem to favour the Dying Brain Hypothesis and provide very weak evidence for an afterlife. It is important to show that the weak evidence is due to an unbalanced view, which is provided by the built-in assumptions and biases created in the arguments. The overall point is to show by the end

of this chapter that the traditional assessment fails on several levels and creates an unbalanced view with an unfair result.

In what follows, I will go through the analysis of the traditional line of arguments by starting with the differences of the Afterlife Hypothesis and the Dying Brain Hypothesis in order to show the senses in which near-death experiences can be thought to be veridical using this line of arguments. Essentially, it can be shown that these senses are objectionable for a number of reasons. Ultimately, the major sticking point is the time that near-death experiences take place. Using the traditional line of argumentation, for the Afterlife Hypothesis to be successful, near-death experiences have to take place when the brain and the body in general can no longer support any conscious mental activity. To demonstrate that the Afterlife Hypothesis is essentially not successful to establish such a conscious mental activity through this line of argument, a few detours have to be made in the argumentation before this lack of success can be demonstrated. It is crucial to clarify what dying, death and the afterlife mean; to clarify what the brain criterion for the time of death is; and, to clarify the attempted scientific calculations of the time near-death experiences take place. Naturally, all these points will be shown to have unresolved issues. Eventually, the discussion will end with the conclusion that there is not one truly ideal case that stands up to the scrutiny of the scepticism of the proponent of the Dying Brain Hypothesis. This entire exercise will demonstrate the ineffectiveness of the traditional line of arguments and its devastating result for the Afterlife Hypothesis. Basically, the way the entire line of argument is built sets up the Afterlife Hypothesis to fail!

### The Afterlife Hypothesis versus the Dying Brain Hypothesis

The decision to join one or the other group has often depended on the type of evidence for NDEs an individual was willing to rely on. The fact that Raymond Moody's first book, *Life After Life* (1975), has become a best seller and a sensation in some countries speaks to the truth that a large segment of the general population is content to rely on anecdotal evidence. Moody's book was composed of fifty cases of stories about NDEs; a fact, which he was very frank about throughout his book. The popular book has convinced many readers worldwide that, since people who have experienced near-death experiences insisted that their experiences were "real",

there had to be a life after death. Thus, the Afterlife Hypothesis was largely favoured by the public.

Naturally, anecdotal evidence is not necessarily looked upon favourably by the scientific community. Anecdotal evidence cannot be independently verified the same way that scientific evidence can be using stricter protocols; scientific evidence, which relies on techniques such as rigorous observations, accurate measurements and often times well-designed experimentations. The scientific community avoids the use of anecdotal evidence to pronounce verdicts on a subject matter, craving something more. The urge is to create a scientific study to come to a proper conclusion. Near-death experiences are not different. From Kenneth Ring's first systematic study (1980), the emphasis has always been on scientific research to gain more scientific insight into NDEs in general and also into veridicality in particular.

The scientific studies have largely been focused on the brain, its operation and its relationship to dying. The studies have inspired some scientific-minded researchers to come up with a materialist explanation of NDEs, supporting the Dying Brain Hypothesis. They suggested a number of possible physiological causes for NDEs: hypoxia (Blackmore 1993; Lempert 1994), hypercarbia (Blackmore 1996; Jansen 1997), endorphins (Blackmore 1993; Saavedra-Aguilar and Gómez-Jeria 1989), ketamine (Rogo, 1984) and temporal lobe seizure (Saavedra-Aguilar and Gómez-Jeria 1989). They also cited a number of possible psychological causes: reliving birth trauma (Sagan, 1979), depersonalization (Noyes and Kletti, 1976), fantasy proneness (Wilson and Barber 1981) and cultural influences (Zaleski, 1987). For those researchers who support the Dying Brain Hypothesis, material causes are enough to explain NDEs. The experiences are veridical only in the sense that the brain causes these experiences for people to partake in them. They are metaphysically or ontologically not significant.

Other scientific-minded researchers have not been satisfied with the materialist explanation of NDEs. They see serious shortcomings with this explanation. Jeffrey Long and Paul Perry nicely sum up the evidence that points to the merit of embracing the Afterlife Hypothesis (2010: 46-51):

1. It is medically inexplicable to have a highly organized and lucid experience while unconscious or clinically dead...
2. NDErs may see and hear in the out-of-body (OBE) state, and what they perceive is nearly always real...
3. NDEs occur during general anaesthesia when no form of consciousness should be taking place...
4. NDEs take place among those who are blind, and these NDEs often include visual experiences...
5. A life review during the NDE accurately reflects real events in the NDEr's life, even if those events have been forgotten...
6. Virtually all beings encountered during NDEs are deceased at the time of the NDE, and most are deceased relatives...
7. The striking similarity of content in NDEs among very young children and that of adults strongly suggests that the content of NDEs is not due to pre-existing beliefs...
8. The remarkable consistency of NDEs around the world is evidence that NDEs are real events...
9. NDErs are transformed in many ways by their experience, often for life...

These points supposed to respond to and counter all physiologically and psychologically created materialist explanations for NDEs. The result is the rejection that these experiences are veridical only in a sense that the brain causes these experiences for people to partake in them. Instead, NDEs are accepted as metaphysically and ontologically significant. In fact, Long and Perry boldly state that "NDEs provide such powerful scientific evidence that it is reasonable to accept the existence of an afterlife" (2010: 44).

The battle of the scientific-minded experts is continuously going on. The battle line is drawn and, the experts push back and forth publishing a great number of articles and books to defend either the Dying Brain Hypothesis or the Afterlife Hypothesis. As in many battles, what seems to be missing is the philosophical examination of the basis on which the battle is fought. Veridicality is directly related to philosophy since inquiry into the nature and the structure of reality has always been the job of philosophers. Hence, what is missing is the proper foundation

for the battle of veridicality the experts are engaged in even in their traditional line of argumentation that is, instead, heavily based on empirical, scientific research. What is this line of argumentation? In what way is it lacking the proper foundation? It is worth exploring these questions by following along the details of the line of argumentation this traditional approach takes to veridicality.

### Possible Ways To Interpret Veridicality

The intuitive starting point of veridicality of NDEs is the sensory model. This is the model that the scientific-minded experts often unknowingly follow because of the nature of NDEs. It can be argued that NDEs follow the sensory model because NDEers are capable of at least seeing and hearing during their experiences. This model produces three possible components: subject, content and object. The subject can be thought of as the conscious self who is aware of a content through the act of seeing and hearing<sup>7</sup>. The content is also related to an object in a such a way that the object or objects fill the content of which the conscious self is aware.

However, this intuitive starting point of establishing these three components is already contentious. For example, some people might immediately zero in on the object and want to know more about the status of the object. What kind of an object is the object in question? Is it an imaginary object a subject has created or is it a publically accessible object? This distinction brings with it a number of assumptions. First, there is a basic assumption that there is a difference. It is expected that some objects, the imaginary ones, are only accessible to the subject while others, the publically accessible ones, are accessible to those present in the environment. Second, it is usually assumed that the subject is responsible for the creation of the imaginary object while she is not responsible for the creation of the publically accessible object. Finally, some people may also assume that an imaginary object does not exist apart from the subject's mind while a publically accessible object does. Although these assumptions may be intuitive to most people, they are assumptions nevertheless. The first assumption establishes a

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<sup>7</sup> The meanings of the words "conscious" and "self" in the sentence can be questioned and debated. However, it needs to be sidestepped for the moment to stay on track.



non-solipsistic world where subjects other than the subject in question exist who have access to the publically accessible object in question. The second assumption offers the power of creation to the subject for certain objects but not for other objects. Finally, the third assumption splits the world into two: 1) the mind, which is private and has creative power and, 2) the world, which is public and not created by subjects. These assumptions are already carrying a particular worldview and affects the way people understand the role of sensation. But beyond the part the object plays overall, perhaps the greater issue has been the relationship between the content and the corresponding object, which is indicated in the third assumption.

The relationship of the content and the corresponding object has always been a contentious issue in philosophy. The issue arises out of the question about the accessibility of the non-imaginary object (Pojman, 1993). Does the conscious self have the ability to directly access this type of corresponding object? The question can be answered with either a "yes" or a "no". Direct realism responds with a "yes". It maintains that the object of perception is immediately available to the conscious self and it exists independently of the conscious self's awareness of it in the outside world. Indirect realism responds to the question with a "no". It holds that the object of perception is a sense datum or sense impression available as a content of the mind. In the case of indirect realism, philosophical opinions split between representationalism and phenomenalism. For representationalists, the object independently exists of the conscious self's perception of it as a content and, the sense impressions are caused by this independently existing object. The phenomenologists believe that the object is a construction from sense impressions and nothing else exists independently of these impressions. Ultimately, in the case of indirect realism, the question is whether there is anything beyond the sense impressions that makes up the content of the mind. If simply the sense impressions exist, there is no reason to speak of an object separately existing from the content. But, if something exists beyond the sense impressions, then, it is legitimate to distinguish between the content in the mind and the corresponding object in the outside world.

Since scientists accept representationalism more than any of the other available options (Pojman, 1993), most scientists would accept the subject, content and object distinction. It certainly appears to be true when the experts are talking about near-death experiences. Firstly, they discuss the presence of the conscious self and its relationship to the brain and the outside

world while dying. For example, as Long and Perry previously pointed out, the lucid and highly organized presence of the conscious self becomes an important factor in the argument for the Afterlife Hypothesis. Secondly, the experts heavily rely on the content the person perceives, then, remembers and reports. For example, the accuracy of the content during the out-of-body portion of the experience becomes important when trying to compare it with other people's perceptual content who were present at the scene. Finally, the object that fills the content becomes the ultimate battle ground between the defenders of the Dying Brain Hypothesis and the Afterlife Hypothesis. The question becomes whether anything corresponds to the content of the experience in the outside world during NDEs. To be more accurate, the question is how much actual sense impressions the NDEs consist of. How much of these sense impressions, if any, correspond to objects apart from the mind for the conscious self to potentially share with other conscious minds in the midst of any near-death experience?

Overall, this means that, with all its difficulties, the veridicality of NDEs can still be understood on the basis of the three components of the subject, content and object. Within this traditional approach to NDEs, the argument can be made for the development of three senses of veridicality from these elements. A near-death experience is veridical in some way if the following points hold true:

1. The person who has a near-death experience is conscious at the time the person alleges the experience has taken place.
2. The near-death experience has the content the person later remembers and reports.
3. The source of the near-death experience corresponds to an actual object behind the sense impression.

All of these senses of veridicality have been previously doubted by defenders of the Dying Brain Hypothesis at some points in time, casting doubt on the veridicality of NDEs. Some of their arguments have been valid while others have been more than questionable.

Starting in reverse order, the source of the experience has been questioned, as it was previously stated. The defenders of the Dying Brain Hypothesis argue that the source is largely

the person's mind, not an object behind the sense impression. The defenders of the Dying Brain Hypothesis basically think that the sense impressions are caused by brain activities and are largely taken from memory, mixed in with the limited sensations available to the dying, conscious self. Basically, they are largely creations of the mind; strictly speaking, some sense impressions are directly available to the conscious self at the time of dying, but they are extremely limited. As opposed to this reasoning, the defenders of the Afterlife Hypothesis argue that most of these sense impressions, over and beyond the sense impressions that are available to the body of the dying person, largely correspond to actual objects in the world independently of the mind that could potentially be shared with other conscious minds during NDEs. In plain terms, these objects in some form are actual objects the people see and hear during the duration of their experiences; they are not the creation of the dying brain.

Philosophically, there is a fundamental problem with the entire argument that undermines not just the Dying Brain Hypothesis, but any hypothesis built on the belief in the existence of objects that are independent of the mind. Basically, the argument relies on an unproven presupposition. Under normal circumstances, most scientific-minded experts with a materialist orientation defend the representational theory. They believe that the conscious self gains visual and auditory information from objects in the outside world. They take it for granted that the conscious self, during the waking state of consciousness, actually is in contact with an outside world of objects through sense impressions. Of course, they believe that this privilege strictly extends to the waking state of consciousness and never beyond this state. However, this belief has never been proven to be correct in the first place. In actuality, it cannot be proven that the external world of objects exists at all in any state. John Hicks explains this problem in the following way:

None of the philosophical arguments that have been advanced has proved generally convincing; and all the empirical evidence might be taken as confirming our ordinary belief in the reality of the perceived world-- such as the fact that the belief works successfully both in daily life and in the sciences--are circular, presupposing the reality of that world (1989: 213).

This means that existence of the objects behind the sense impressions is itself based on pure conjecture. Yet, many scientific-minded experts rely on this presupposition. Not only that; but, the scientists with a materialist orientation are willing to normally hold this belief while sharply denying the possibility that objects behind the sense impressions exist beyond the waking state such as during NDEs. This is an excellent example of proverbial cherry picking. Although all experts are guilty of relying on this philosophically dubious belief, the materialist-oriented experts are going a step further. They arbitrarily choose to believe in the unproven idea that the external world of objects exists during waking consciousness but deny this possibility in other instances.

Hence, the distinction between the belief of objects behind sense impressions in the waking state and other states is arbitrary. Simply, there is no proof that any objects behind the sense impressions ever exist. In the case of NDEs, the irony is that the materialists who usually defend the representational theory under normal circumstances behave similarly to the phenomenologists in their defence of the Dying Brain Hypothesis. They think that there are no objects behind the sense data during NDEs because they are largely constructions out of sense data without an independently existing world behind this data. And, they draw this distinction between the waking state and the state of near-death experiences without any serious philosophical justification. Of course, the materialists should not be singled out in this instance. Ultimately, the questionable belief in independently existing objects in the outside world during the waking state potentially undermines all theories for or against the veridicality of NDEs in the third sense.

In the second sense that NDEs can be potentially veridical focuses on the content. An NDEer may remember and report details about the experience that match up with eyewitnesses' accounts who were present at the scene of the dying experience (Moody 1975, Clark 1984; Sabom 1998; Holden 2009). This type of evidence is used to suggest that the NDEers may have been actually observing the scene, just as others were around them. The difficulty is that there are alternate explanations for the accuracy of content. For instance, Susan Blackmore has analyzed one of Michael Sabom's examples from his collection (Sabom, 1982). The example is an account of a man who had had a massive heart attack and cardiac arrest. From a point of view

outside his body, the man saw the doctor resuscitating him using a defibrillator. In his recollection of the event, he turned his attention to the defibrillator, describing it in detail:

I remember they asked for so many watt-seconds or something on that thing, and they gave me a jolt with it...I remember it had a meter on the face. I assumed it read the voltage, or current, or watt-seconds, or whatever they program the thing for...[The meter] was square and had two needles on there, one fixed and one which moved...It seemed to come up rather slowly, really. It didn't just pop up like an ammeter or a volt-meter or something registering (Sabom, 1982: 141).

Sabom checked the medical record. It showed that the man had been successfully revived. Unfortunately, no mention had been made about the type of machine used. However, there was unexpected evidence found. At the time of the interview five years had passed. The defibrillator the man described was no longer in use. Five years before, in 1973, though, that particular machine had still been in use. The man stated that he had never seen this type of machine in any other context before, and he had no knowledge of that machine or its discontinued use. Yet, he seemed to have remembered the information correctly. Whatever he may have remembered wrongly or was uncertain about, he correctly identified a previously not seen defibrillator.

Blackmore has analyzed this example in her book, *Dying to Live* (1993), and has concluded that the observation the man made about the machine is not conclusive evidence that the person was conscious and perceiving the world from a point of view outside of his body at the time he was dying. Her explanation is that the man may have picked up the information about the particular defibrillator after the incident. He may have talked to the doctors afterwards and received information about the resuscitation procedure. He may have paid particular attention to books and movies where this machine was described or shown. Blackmore's conclusion is: "Without consciously intending to he might have incorporated small details from such later knowledge into his memory images, so adding to their plausibility" (Blackmore, 1993: 119).

This means that accurate observations may have been a result of a coincidence. If they are indeed a result of a coincidence, there is a question about the significance of the accuracy of

the content. It is true that the near-death experience has the content the person later remembers and reports in this case. In this sense, the experience may be argued to be veridical in this second sense. However, if this type of veridicality is due to a matter of coincidence built on constructed images from memory, it loses its significance. It is significant only if it is due to an actual memory that is the result of a previous observation that took place during a near-death experience. This observation means that the accuracy of the content of the experience in itself may not provide conclusive evidence for consciousness at the time of dying. This weakens the case for the veridicality of NDEs in the second sense because, although the experience has the content the person later remembers and reports, it becomes insignificant if the content is just the result of a coincidence. In this case, it is possible to argue that the definition itself in the second sense needs to be strengthened.

The argument from content takes one to the first sense NDEs can be potentially argued to be veridical. In the first sense, the person who has a near-death experience is conscious at the time the person alleges the experience took place. In many cases, a person alleges that it took place outside the body and outside the possibility of a physiological explanation. However, it is quite possible that the remembered experience did not take place at the time it was claimed to take place. As Blackmore has suggested, it could have been the result of false memory, created from information a person acquired earlier or later. For the content of the experience to be veridical, it has to be an accurately observed and remembered experience that has taken place during the alleged time, even if this alleged time is outside the body and outside the possibility of any physiological explanation. Here, the emphasis is on the time that the experience took place. The person has to be conscious during the alleged time the individual claims it has happened and it has to be a conscious experience that does not take place before or after this time of incident, to use Blackmore's vocabulary.

Philosophically, the uncertainty around the content has to do with the time delay between experiencing, on the one hand, and remembering and reporting the event, on the other hand. René Descartes has been the first philosopher to make a serious point about the certainty of mental activity available in the present tense only (Descartes, 1993). Descartes recognizes the certainty of his own existence, but he wonders about his own ability to last: "I am; I exist--this is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking; for perhaps it could also come to pass

that if I were to cease all thinking I would then utterly cease to exist" (19). Hence, outside the present tense, existence is always uncertain. The future is unknown and the past can only be accessed through memory. For Descartes, both the future knowledge and the past knowledge are dependent on judgment and judgment can be faulty. Modern psychologists also recognize the limitation of such first person-methodologies (Pekala & Cardena, 2014; Barušs & Mossbridge, 2017). For example, Pekala and Cardena argue that amongst other limitations; forgetting due to repetitions of recalling, construction errors and description challenges; distortion through inferences, self-censoring and audience-pleasing effects; and, lack of any independent verification of private events will produce inaccurate judgements. The lesson from both Descartes and modern-day psychologists is that any past existence at a particular time needs to be proven. In the case of NDEs, a content cannot be claimed to be significant unless it has been connected to the appropriate time NDEs have allegedly taken place, according to the NDEers.

Thus, it can be concluded that all potential senses of veridicality outlined above run into some philosophical difficulties. The traditional line of argumentation that gave rise to these senses fails because of the many built-in assumptions and other philosophical difficulties these senses rely on. It seems that the traditionally fought battles between the Afterlife Hypothesis and the Dying Brain Hypothesis are riddled with philosophical problems right at the start.

However, not all is lost. An important point arises out of the discussion of these three senses. It becomes clear that the difficulty with the first sense of veridicality becomes the most important sense to focus on. If the person is not conscious during the alleged time the person claims to be, the accuracy of the content is coincidental and the source of the content becomes the memory of previous sense impressions with some marginal observations available to the limited five human senses. This means that it is absolutely crucial to establish a timeframe for consciousness in the hope of defending veridicality according to this traditional line of argumentation that will offer an ontologically and metaphysically significant status.

### The Time of Near-Death Experiences

When do near-death experiences happen? Ingenious researchers have come up with a way of trying to prove that at least some of the content of NDEs are gained through observations.

In controlled experiments, they placed objects near the ceiling, invisible and unknown to the hospital staff working in operating rooms (Holden and Joesten 1990; Parnia et al. 2001; Sartori 2004; Lawrence 1996; Greyson, Holden, and Mounsey 2006). The theory is that if the person is truly out-of-body during a near-death experience, he can observe the object near the ceiling and remember it later on. Since the information is only available to the NDEer and not to the staff working in the operating room, the information cannot be gained in any other way other than an observation outside the body while hovering near the ceiling. To address the issue of exact time, Greyson, Holden and Mounsey (2006) have included a three-second time display after every twenty second animation displays on a computer screen, located in the hidden place. The hope has always been that a person undergoing a near-death experience would report both the computerized display and the time display while being out-of-body. To this day, there has never been a reported sighting either of any objects or displays (Holden, Greyson & James, 2009).

Unfortunately, a sighting would not have eliminated all controversies. The materialist-minded researchers, grasping at straws, could still point to the arguments of research errors, lucky guesses or deliberate fraud. For example, Sam Parnia's research experiments in Southampton have suffered from unintended mistakes when curious people in the hospital have figured out the truth about his experiments (2007). Word got around about his structures near the ceiling that he tried to sell to the public as a dust collection study. Curious people climbed up to see what those structures held. This type of curiosity has practically ruined the experiments because public knowledge of the items near the ceiling defeats the purpose of gaining information without the use of five senses and without the sharing of this information. Thus, the ingenious experiments with hidden objects do not prove with absolute certainty and eliminate all doubts that the person was conscious out of body and without any physiological support when the event took place.

Of course, near-death experiences can also be adventitious where physiological events happen to be monitored. Imants Barušs and Julia Mossbridge (2017) cite and defend such an event. A patient was pronounced dead after a heart surgery when he could not be resuscitated. In the confusion, the medical staff forgot to turn off the heart monitoring equipment. While the patient was without a heartbeat, the doctors stood in the doorway discussing the surgery. After about 20-25 minutes, a faint heartbeat was detected and the doctors successfully revived the



patient. He was in a coma for several days, before waking up. The patient was able to successfully reveal the details of what happened while his heart was at a standstill, including notes on the computer monitor that have been placed there during the surgery and the doctors standing in the doorway with folded arms talking with each other.

Barušs and Mossbridge defend this case as an example of a non-physical veridical perception: "In our judgement, from what is known about these cases, it is reasonable to draw the conclusion that genuine apparently 'non-physical veridical perception' did occur" (Barušs & Mossbridge 2017: 114). However, is this adventitious event a real proof of being out of body without physiological support from the brain? Barušs and Mossbridge claim that such events to be convincing, amongst other things, one has "to look for low-probability events that an experiencer reports as having occurred during the out-of-body portion of her experience" (112). So, do these events count as low-probability? Actually, they do not really pass the threshold for low-probability events. Notes on the computer and doctors standing in the doorway with folded arms talking about their unsuccessful surgery are not low-probability events that can defeat a sceptic who is convinced that a rational psychological explanation of guesswork or medical gossip can account for the information. After all, a patient in a coma may be able to hear and pick up information from others that he may later mistake for a memory. In other words, these types of adventitious cases are fascinating but not necessarily strong enough cases to remove any serious doubt.

In short, the time of near-death experiences retains a question mark behind it. In truth, philosophically speaking, it can be argued that these empirical experiments actually do not go deep enough to see what is required to gain insight into the possibility of consciousness during the crucial time people who had near-death experiences and the defenders of the Afterlife Hypothesis allege that the NDEs happened. There are plenty of unanswered questions, the first of which is about the question of consciousness itself. The meaning of consciousness is not entirely obvious and this is part of the reason that the researchers end up disagreeing about the time NDEs take place. Most people studying near-death experiences assume that the word "consciousness" has an obvious interpretation. After all, everybody knows what consciousness is, right?

It takes an expert to clarify the possible meanings the word "consciousness" can have. Turning to such an expert, Barušs distinguishes four meanings of the word "consciousness" (Baruss, 2003: 6-7). He numbers them with subscripts. He defines consciousness<sub>1</sub> as "the registration of information and acting on it in a goal-directed manner" (6). The point is to distinguish between an organism that is normally functioning and an organism that is unresponsive. Behavioral consciousness<sub>2</sub> is defined as "the explicit knowledge of one's situation, mental state, and actions demonstrated behaviorally" (6). This consciousness is not just a realization that an organism is normally functioning but that it can show knowledge of itself in terms of its situation, mental states and action. Subjective consciousness<sub>2</sub> is defined as "the experiential stream of events that occurs subjectively for a person" (6). This is the content of consciousness an individual experiences that includes thoughts, feelings and sensation. Finally, consciousness<sub>3</sub> is defined as "the sense of existence of the subject of the experiential stream" (6). This is a sense of being that allows for the content of experience to occur for the person. Baruss uses the example of a driver noticing the traffic light turning red to explain the distinction (2003: 7):

Noticing the changed light and stopping the car would be consciousness<sub>1</sub>. If we demonstrated that we explicitly realized that the light had turned red and that we had stopped the car, for example, by saying that the light had turned red and that we have moved our foot from the gas pedal to the brake pedal, then that would indicate the presence of behavioral consciousness<sub>2</sub>. Whatever is going on in our experiential steam at the time would be subjective consciousness<sub>2</sub>. Perhaps we are thinking about the changed light and the pedals. Or perhaps we are having a conversation and thinking about what we are talking about, not about the light or the pedals. Consciousness<sub>3</sub> refers to the fact that we experience an experiential stream at all, irrespective of what we are thinking about.

Both the definitions and the example suggest that consciousness<sub>1</sub> and behavioural consciousness<sub>2</sub> approach a conscious experience predominantly from a third person point of view. In the case of NDEs, these two meanings of consciousness would represent the view of near-death episodes. For example, it could be argued that a person collapsing of a heart attack and not moving or breathing would demonstrate these two meanings of consciousness. Unfortunately, these

meanings would have limited use for near-death experiences since it is also possible to argue that being unresponsive and having an inability to demonstrate information processing show the absence of consciousness in these senses. Yet, it has been recognized that a person unresponsive to the outside world could potentially be aware and have mental functioning.

Consciousness<sub>3</sub> and subjective consciousness<sub>2</sub> are more critical for the study of NDEs because these two meanings, just like near-death experiences, approach consciousness from a first person point of view. Therefore, these two meanings are more useful distinctions. They represent the difference between a sense of existence a person may experience, which Barušs and Mossbridge (2017) refer to as "existential qualia" (15), and a content of the experience the person may be able to describe. For example, a person may insist that he remembers having a definite sense of existence during a near-death experience. In addition, he may also claim having gone through some of the stages of his NDE where he may have seen his body from above, entered a dark space or seen the light.

The distinction between consciousness<sub>3</sub> and subjective consciousness<sub>2</sub> also shows an important point. Just like in the example of the traffic light, in the examples of NDEs, while subjective consciousness<sub>2</sub> focuses on the experiential stream, consciousness<sub>3</sub> focuses on the fact that there is an experiential stream underway. Here, it does not make any difference what the stream is about. This means that even if the person is mistaken about the content, the relevant factor is that the person had a sense of existence which allowed for the content to take place, mistaken or not. The distinction is important for understanding the proof that is necessary to say that the person was conscious during a near-death experience at a crucial time. Although it is true that accurate content may help proving that a person was conscious at some point in time before, during or after the NDE, it does not ensure the time for the presence of consciousness<sub>3</sub> at the crucial time that proves veridicality of the experience. However, proving that consciousness<sub>3</sub> was present throughout the experience offers the type of proof necessary to show to the materialist oriented experts that consciousness can function when the brain is no longer capable of supporting any type of consciousness, irrespective of the accuracy of the content subjective consciousness<sub>2</sub> is focused on. In short, accurate content does not prove that the person had a sense of existence at the crucial time, but the person's existence at the crucial time shows that consciousness is capable of existing without the brain, whether or not the content of

consciousness is mistaken. This means that it is, ultimately, the presence of consciousness<sub>3</sub> that the NDE experts need to establish to defend the Afterlife Hypothesis.

Is it possible to show that consciousness<sub>3</sub> is present when the brain cannot support any type of consciousness? It is possible to at least attempt to show that this may be the case. However, to do just that, there have to be some more ideas examined and clarified beforehand, mainly about the definition of death, the time of death, and the relationship between consciousness and the brain during near-death experiences.

### Understanding Dying, Death and the Afterlife: The Definition of Death

To pinpoint the time that a person is conscious, in terms of having a sense of existence in relation to near-death experiences, it is crucial to have a definition of death. Without a definition, it is not even certain whether near-death experiences take place while people who had near-death experiences are alive, dying or dead. For example, Blackmore has argued that NDEs are produced by the dying brain (Blackmore, 1993). Since she favours the explanation that the brain is responsible for all mental events, her understanding is that NDEs cannot be produced by a dead brain. Hence, any person who has a near-death experience, must be alive to a degree and in the process of dying, but not yet dead to have the experience. But, it is not just experts leaning in the direction of a materialist explanation who have argued this point. Michael Sabom, a non-materialist expert, has also suggested that NDEs happen during the dying process and only a religious faith can ensure that life continues after death (Sabom, 1998). This means that in order to locate the time of NDEs, it is important to cut through the confusion and clarify what it means to die and when it actually occurs.

The problem is that this task is not as easy as it seems. The challenge starts when one tries to ask questions about life, death and the afterlife. For example, what does having a life after death mean? According to Jay F. Rosenberg, the question about life after death is not clear (1998). It is not just that the answer to the question is not clear but the question itself is ambiguous. In his work, *Thinking Clearly About Death* (1998), he has analyzed the question of life after death to gain some clarity. It is worth going through his argument to learn about this problem.

Rosenberg begins by stating that the main question has always been: “Does the person survive his death?” (Rosenberg, 1998: 30). He says that this question is similar to asking if a person can survive a collision of two supersonic aircraft. In such an incident the person who survives death is the person who does not die. Since “dead” and “survive” seem to be opposite concepts, asking if someone survives death does not represent the meaning of the originally intended question. According to Rosenberg, another question possible to ask is if there is a life after death. Unfortunately, this question yields a similar result to the previous question. This question is comparable to asking whether the road continues after the road ends. The person simply cannot go on living once he ceases to live. Death marks the end of life. Therefore, this question makes no sense either.

The reason this latter question does not make sense, according to Rosenberg, is because ultimately there is a difference between life and a life. Life is a term that refers to an organism being in the state of living, while a life belongs to the history of a particular person. The question of death is not about the end of life in general but about the ceasing of the life history of the particular person<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, the question that makes sense is the following: “Does a person’s history necessarily come to an end with that person’s death?” (37).

If the person’s history does not come to end, then, death is a passage between two conditions. Rosenberg uses the example of the wake and sleep cycle to demonstrate his point. He argues that it is true that falling asleep is an event but it is also a process. According to him, falling asleep is gradual that starts with going to bed and closing the eyes and ending with being in sleep. There is no specific limit a person arrives at which he can suddenly be said to be asleep. Under normal circumstances, a person gradually passes over from one condition to the next. Rosenberg claims that death works the same way. It is true that death is often talked about as an event, but it is also a process. There is no specific limit at which point the person enters an

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<sup>8</sup> Rosenberg distinguishes between the continuation of a person’s history and the continuation of the history of the person’s body. The body can be buried, for example, but this is not part of the person’s history. The burial phase belongs to the history of the person’s body. The same applies to receiving a posthumous prize, such as a posthumous Nobel Peace Prize, for example. It is not part of the person’s history. The person no longer exists. It is the memory of the person people cite that exists.

irreversible decline. However, once the process begins, it ends with death. The difference between sleep and death is, though, that in the case of the wake-sleep cycle there is an obvious transition between the two conditions and in the case of life to death process this transition is not obviously present:

But this time it is not a boundary condition of a person, or at least not obviously so. For we have found good reasons to conclude that no condition of a person answers in our experience to the “far side” of this boundary. What answers in our experience to the far side of this boundary is a lifeless corpse—and a corpse is not a person, but merely a person’s remains (Rosenberg, 1998: 47).

It is not certain at what point the person becomes the corpse because it is a process rather than an event, but eventually the corpse is all that is left of the person. At the end, death is a change "of kind" not "of condition" (47). It is not a person’s life that is changing into death, but it is the person that changes into a corpse. Therefore, Rosenberg concludes that the person’s history does not continue beyond death. The person’s history ends and the corpse’s history begins.

Rosenberg’s analysis is rather remarkable in a sense that he is capable of showing that even the question about the afterlife is not clear. Most people are unaware of the difficulty with what it is they are asking for when they demand answers for dying, death or the afterlife. However, Rosenberg’s analysis has its own problems. First, concluding that death is the end of life based on the vocabulary used to express it is not legitimate. To claim that survival does not make sense because survival means being not dead is ignoring the fact that words have double meanings. Survival in this sense is not tied to a biological existence. It means survival in a more psychological, spiritual or ontological sense. Therefore, the complaint that survival of death does not make any sense may be an exaggeration. Still, the discussion itself highlights the confusion even about the terminology used to describe death and its related concepts. It shows that death is not an easy subject to deal with.

The second problem is that Rosenberg seems to be unaware of the fact that he often switches between perspectives in the midst of his analysis. At the beginning of his analysis, he talks about people’s experiences from a third person perspective. For example, he visualizes two

aircraft colliding and watching people die. In the middle of his writing, this third person perspective turns into a first person perspective. When he creates his argument about the wake-sleep cycle, he follows the process into sleep from a first person viewpoint. For example, he says: "There is no customary procedure for deciding when, after tossing and turning for several minutes, I finally begin to fall asleep" (Rosenberg, 1998: 46). He continues to argue the sleep-wake cycle from this internal viewpoint, ending up concluding that the sleep-wake cycle is a change in the person's condition. At the moment he starts talking about the life-to-death process, however, he views the situation, once again, from an outside perspective. In fact, he even switches perspectives in the middle of the sentence. He says: "What answers in our experience to the far side of this boundary is a lifeless corpse..." (47). He takes the internal view when he talks about the person's phenomenal experience and jumps to an external view when he points to the corpse on the other side of the boundary. In Baruš's terms, he jumps from consciousness<sub>3</sub> to consciousness<sub>1</sub>.

Basically, Rosenberg demonstrates the great challenge of discussing dying, death or the afterlife with the switching of perspectives. Since perceptual knowledge is so widely used and often trusted, it seems natural to adopt the first person perspective. For example, everyone experiences the phenomenon of falling asleep. Talking about it from an experiential point of view is natural because everyone can so readily relate to it. However, the introduction of death complicates things. An experiential point of view is unavailable in the case of death. It is not a natural occurrence to experience dying; people do not regularly experience this process. Martin Heidegger has made this observation in relation to one's being, he calls Dasein, when Dasein is faced with death "there" in the world (1966, 46. H237, 281):

When Dasein reaches its wholeness in death, it simultaneously loses the Being of its "there". By its transition to no-longer-Dasein [Nichtsmehr dasein], it gets lifted right out of the possibility of experiencing this transition and of understanding it as something experienced. Surely, this sort of thing is denied to any particular Dasein in relation to itself.

Therefore, as Heidegger also points out, adopting the first person perspective in talking about dying, death or the afterlife is normally not possible. This is the reason that most people

inadvertently jump to an outside, third person perspective when talking about death. As Heidegger argues, since others die around the person, "...the termination [Beendigung] of Dasein becomes 'Objectively' accessible" (46. H237, 281). Hence, there is a natural inclination to make the jump from consciousness<sub>3</sub> to consciousness<sub>1</sub>.

Basically, it is easy to relate to another person while alive. Inferential knowledge allows one person to relate to another person's experience. This is not so when it comes to death. There is no inferential knowledge to relate to a dead person's experience. For this reason, philosophers often jump to an outside, observational point of view when death occurs. Simply, they are making a jump outside the available common sense rule and this jump is illegitimate because it does not properly follow the available knowledge of dying. This first person point of view is switched over to an imagined viewpoint of another being who is left alive to objectively observe the body.

This constant switching between perspectives demonstrates that there is a genuine confusion about the way one understands death. It is not clear whether the experiential first person point of view or the more detached third person observational point of view is more legitimate in a given circumstance. The constant switching also muddies the water in a sense that assumptions are made from a particular perspective that may be overstating the amount of knowledge available on the topic of death in general. For example, to take an observational perspective and to assume that all is left is the corpse is an assumption from such a detached view. If there is psychological continuity to the person's history, it may not be available to an observational perspective. Therefore, to make a final conclusion about someone's psychological continuity after death based on a limited, third person, observational perspective may not be wise at the end.

In addition to the vocabulary issue and the challenge of perspectives gained from Rosenberg's analysis of the afterlife through dying and death, there is also a conceptual issue with death. It is difficult to determine what it means for someone to be dead. For example, Sabom has argued in relation to one of the most cited cases in NDE literature, the Pam Reynolds' case, that Reynolds was never dead (Sabom, 1998). Reynolds was a 35 year old woman who went through a medical procedure called hypothermic cardiac arrest. The procedure was



necessary to remove a brain aneurysm. This procedure requires that the patient's body temperature be lowered significantly and her breathing and heart be made to come to a standstill. The outcome is a flat brain wave for about twenty-five minutes. This was all done for the purpose of draining her blood from her head in order to remove the aneurysm with no blood pressure present. Reynolds' condition was fully monitored. Once her heart was stopped, her brain wave fell flat. For all purposes, she was considered clinically dead. After the operation, she recalled having had a near-death experience, and she was flat-lined for at least some of the time she supposedly had the experience.

Sabom has argued that, although she was considered clinically dead, she could not have been dead if her life was restored. He says: "Since she did live, then by definition she was never dead. Doctors can save people from death and rescue some who are close to death, but they cannot raise people from the dead" (Sabom, 1998: 50). Sabom's argument certainly shows that there is a conceptual problem with what it even means for a person to be dead.

To tackle this last, conceptual issue, two distinctions can be made. First, it has to be acknowledged, just as Rosenberg did, that death might be thought of in terms of an event and a process. Steven Luper has used the analogy of falling from great height to get this point across (2009). When the person begins to fall from a great height, it takes time to reach the ground. Once he reaches the ground, however, the falling suddenly ends. Similarly, death takes a while to occur as a process. Once the person reaches the end of the process though, the event of death occurs. From this analogy of falling, Luper distinguishes three types of death. First, integration death refers to the irreversible disintegration of the physiological system. Second, threshold death occurs at the point of no return to life. Finally, denouncement death means complete extinction. This happens at the end of the process. Although some of these types of death may overlap, the process in this argument is linear. Luper's point is that the dying process occurs in degrees where the event of death occurs sometime during this process.

The distinction between the event of death and the process of death is important in order to find out what it means for someone to be dead. If death is thought of as an event, Pam Reynolds, for example, was in fact dead provided that the event of death is conceived in terms of the absence of heart and brain functions. In this case, Sabom is wrong about insisting she was

never dead. However, if death is thought of as a process, which was reversed in time in the case of Reynolds, Sabom is right to say that she was never dead.

It all depends on whether death is thought of as an event or a process. Or, perhaps, some may even argue that it has to be the combination of both. If death is treated as an event, the argument can be made that one needs to be without a heart beat or brain function in order for a person to be qualified as dead. In the dying process, the argument can be made that all that really has to happen is to get to the threshold death where no return is possible in order to move toward integration death and eventually to the end of the road where denouncement death occurs. Of course, the argument can also be made that a person has to reach denouncement death to be truly considered dead in this process. Or, the argument can be made as well that reaching denouncement death in the process is necessary for the event of death to occur. Basically, the jury is out on what kind of a death is dead enough to consider a person to be truly dead.

A second distinction that can be made is between a revived life and a restored life. Luper takes the example of an embryo to show the difference (2009). Upon the freezing of an embryo, its vital processes are suspended. Its life is temporarily ended, but it is not dead. Its life is simply at a halt until it is revived. As opposed to revival, the restoration of life would mean reversing the decline of life. Once an organism ceases to exist, freezing it will only slow the decomposition process. The demise of a frozen embryo can only be slowed if it already ceased to exist. This means that revival is possible only as long as the embryo has the capacity to maintain its vital processes. Luper says that restoration of life is, scientifically speaking, not yet possible. For now, scientists can simply revive a suspended life. According to this distinction, Reynolds' life was revived. Her life was temporarily suspended. She maintained her vital processes. Her life was not restored because there was no irreversible demise. The doctors simply returned her into life after the suspension of it that lasted for about twenty-five minutes during surgery.

This last distinction would certainly lead one to believe that Reynolds was never dead. Unfortunately, this is not so straightforward either. First, had doctors not put in an extra amount of effort and technologically advanced equipment to restart Reynolds' vital processes, she would have been dead. In fact, she should have been retroactively pronounced dead at the time her vital

processes were stopped by the doctors. Therefore, it is not clear at all whether she maintained her vital processes after they were artificially stopped. Second, it is dangerous to rely on the abilities of scientists to retain the distinction between revival and restoration. Scientists have more and more advanced knowledge and equipment to return a person to life. To call every scientifically successful saving of a life a revival means pushing the boundary of revival continuously. If scientific advancement continues, it is not clear whether it will make sense to uphold the distinction between revival and restoration. Hence, calling Reynolds' return to life a revival may be an overstatement. All one can say is that she never reached the point of threshold death from which no return would have been possible.

All of the above observations about death point to the difficulty of understanding death, dying and the afterlife. There are obvious problems with the vocabulary of death and the perspectives used to look at death. And, the distinctions between process and event, on the one hand, and between revival and restoration of life, on the other hand, show the difficulty of deciding what it means for someone to be dead. This discussion points to the fact that it is not at all clear what it means to be alive, to be dying or to be dead. This lack of clarity makes the interpretation of those experiences very difficult that are by their very label thought to happen near death. It is very much a possibility that they happen far from death as opposed to near it, either on this side of life or beyond death, depending on the definition.

Despite this setback it is still important to find a criterion by which one can define death because a criterion is needed to locate consciousness<sup>3</sup>, a sense of existence, at death, around death or after death to answer the original question of the time NDEs actually take place. Since, philosophically, it is difficult to tackle death and its related concepts, it may be worthwhile to see if medical science can help. The reason to turn to medical science is simple. If the brain is not in a condition to support any type of consciousness, a person should not be conscious, should not have a sense of existence, whether, or not, a proper philosophical understanding of death exists.

#### The Brain Criterion: The Time of Death

It almost seems that the previous discussion on the definition of death was unnecessary. After all, philosophers often have long discussions that usually end with their favourite mantra: *It*

*depends on how you look at it!* However, it was important in the case of NDEs to demonstrate the experts' futile labour when they try to depend on the word "death" to locate near-death experiences. Since there is no real definition that everybody equally relies on, the understanding does depend on how one looks at death. This conclusion puts a special urge to focus on what matters in this traditional approach to build a case for the veridicality of NDEs--a sense of existence, consciousness<sub>3</sub>, being present after the brain shuts down and can no longer support any type of consciousness. If this can be established, the Afterlife Hypothesis wins the argument because consciousness<sub>3</sub> is present after the brain is incapable of supporting any type of consciousness. If it cannot be established, the Dying Brain Hypothesis wins the argument. But, how does one determine if consciousness<sub>3</sub> is present after the brain shuts down and can no longer support any type of consciousness? Is there a method?

In an effort to help along the line of argumentation of this traditional approach, it can be argued that it is possible to make a philosophical case based on medical science. Luper's definitions of death offer a clue. An integration death is an irreversible disintegration of the physiological system. Denouncement death is a complete extinction that happens at the very end of the process. In between these two types of death is the threshold death from which there is no return to life. For near-death experiences to happen, the person cannot reach threshold death; otherwise, the person cannot come back to talk about it. The clue is in the word "threshold". Just like some kind of a threshold exists for death and, thereby, an ability to have NDEs simply by not surpassing that threshold, a threshold must exist for consciousness not being able to be supported by the brain. Basically, the philosophical argument is that once the brain has gone through this threshold, consciousness of any kind should not happen. So, where is the threshold?

Many brain scientists would argue for the importance of the higher brain function when determining a person's death. Jeff McMahan, for example, has defended the idea that, since survival of the person requires survival of personal identity, those parts of the brain that allow for maintenance of personal identity, the cerebral hemispheres, are the crucial parts for determining the survival or passing of the person (McMahan, 2010: 112)<sup>9</sup>. McMahan's argument on personal

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<sup>9</sup> The purpose of this article is to comment on the moral implications of brain death. Still, the main portion of the article is spent on locating consciousness and personal identity in the brain. See: Jeff Mahan, "The

identity may seem to be a departure from the argument on consciousness at first sight. However, it is not a departure if one focuses on the person's sense of existence. Although it is controversial<sup>10</sup>, to have a sense of existence may be interpreted as having a sense of self or having a sense of self-identity<sup>11</sup>. To argue for the preservation of personal identity in this case is to argue for the necessity of brain function for a sense of existence.

To make his argument work, McMahan goes through a series of steps to show what is needed for a sense of existence in terms of a sense of self or self-identity. First, he shows that the argument that equates the whole brain with the existence of the person is flawed. He does this in order to dispel the notion that the brain is the person. The first step is to show that death of an organism does not mean death of the brain (McMahan, 2010). McMahan makes the simple observation that the brain is just one of the many organs in the body. Organs can survive without the organism's survival. It is possible that in the future the brain can be harvested from a recently dead human being and transplanted into another person. This would mean that the brain remains alive while the human being dies. The opposite is also true. The death of the whole brain does not mean the death of the organism. The human body can be kept alive even in brain dead patients. In addition, human embryos are alive inside the mother's womb without a seriously developed brain they could rely on. The conclusion McMahan draws is that the traditional understanding of death in terms of linking the brain with the organism is misguided.

The next step in the argument is to dispel the notion that persons are simply physical organisms. McMahan argues that there is no identity of which one can speak. Monozygotic

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Metaphysics of Brain Death” in *Philosophy and Death*, S. Brennan and R. J. Stainton eds. (Peterborough: Broadview Press 2010), pp. 109-142

<sup>10</sup> This point is controversial because a sense of existence may not be equated with a sense of self, at all. For example, some mystics argue that during the experience they have a sense of existence but not a sense of self. See, for example, Walter T. Stace, (1960). *The Teachings of the Mystics*. New York: New American Library.

<sup>11</sup> It is possible to argue that being conscious and being self-conscious may not be the same. For example, Jean-Paul Sartre has made this point by distinguishing between pre-reflective consciousness and reflective consciousness. See: Sartre, J. P. (1958). *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology*. (transl.) Hazel E. Barnes, (intr.) Mary Warnock, Methuen: London. However, it is not necessary to make such a distinction in the argument for a threshold. This detail can be sidestepped for now.

twinning shows that twins do not come into existence until 14 days after conception. This means that at least one of the two people who will come to be is not identical with the organism for two weeks. At the opposite end, the human organism does not cease to exist when it dies. This means that to argue identity of the person and the organism, one either has to insist that the corpse is identical to the dead person or admit that the person ceases to exist when the organism becomes a corpse. In that latter scenario, the argument fails because there is a definite admission that the person is not identical with the organism after death. Thought-experiments involving brain transplants also show the very likelihood of the preservation of personal identity in brain transplants. The organism that receives the implanted brain will probably end up with the identity of the person who donated the brain. According to McMahan, these examples clearly show that persons are not identical with specific physical organisms.

In his final step, McMahan also argues for what a person needs to possess in order to be considered alive (2010). He claims that the key is to locate the mind. In order to locate the mind, he reflects on what the human mind is. He thinks that the mind is certainly not a nonmaterial Cartesian substance. Yet, it is a substance; it seems to be at least some kind of brain matter. However, it has to be more than brain matter because a dead brain is absent of the human mind. Therefore, he thinks that the best way to think about the human mind is to think of it as functioning brain matter. The final verdict is that in order for the same human mind to continue to exist, those parts of the brain have to survive that have the capacity to support consciousness and mental activity.

McMahan finds that, normally, if the ascending reticular activating system is damaged, consciousness and mental activity cannot occur because this system is the on-off switch of consciousness in the brain. With the switch turned on, though, this part of the brain does not seem to contribute to mental activity. It is the upper brain, certain parts of the cerebral hemispheres, that contributes to the mental life of the person. Therefore, this is the part that needs to remain undamaged. Properly intact, the off-switch position of the ascending reticular activating system has no effect on the crucial parts of the cerebral hemispheres. If the reticular activating system were damaged, the brain could still retain the capacity to produce consciousness and mental activity in a sense that, if the system were restored or repaired, the

same human mind continued to function. Hence, the damage would only be a technical problem. McMahan states it in the following way:

Because the lack of capacity is contingent rather than necessary, we say that in practice the brain lacks the capacity for supporting consciousness and mental activity. If, by contrast, the tissues of the cerebral hemispheres were destroyed, the brain would necessarily or in principle lack the capacity to support consciousness (2010: 121).

This means that McMahan locates the locus of consciousness in the cerebral hemispheres. Since mental activity takes place in the hemispheres, they are the crucial parts to retain for a person to be alive. Although the on-off switch is important, it is not the locus of consciousness. The locus is where the mental activity happens. According to him, this amounts to the cerebral hemispheres.

McMahan ends up arguing that, for a person to exist, that part of the brain has to be saved that is essential for the person's mental life. This part ensures the survival of the person in the form that allows for the continuation of mental functioning of the same individual. This does not mean psychological continuity, though. McMahan wants to avoid the problem associated with mental illnesses, such as Alzheimer's disease, where the person's psychological continuity is in question. Instead, he puts an emphasis on the generation of consciousness and mental activity. He argues it in the following way:

The criterion of personal identity must therefore be the survival, in nonbranching form, of enough of the cerebral hemispheres to be capable, in conjunction with relevant support mechanism, of generating consciousness and mental activity. Call this the Continuity of Mind account of personal identity<sup>12</sup> (McMahan, 2010: 128).

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<sup>12</sup> The requirement for nonbranching, here, is an attempt to deal with the issue of thought-experiment on brain transplants where each of the hemispheres is implanted into a different person.

The definition of personal identity offers a better understanding of death. When the relevant parts of the brain no longer function, the person can be pronounced dead. The death of the relevant parts means the death of the person. As long as the relevant parts of the brain function properly, the brain ensures the existence of the mental life of the person. If McMahan's theory turns out to be correct, it is certainly a progress toward determining existence during a near-death episode. It appears that a person is present as long as the appropriate brain parts are functioning, which, in the case of NDEs, has to include the parts responsible for consciousness.

The first point to note about this theory is that McMahan's analysis carries a larger issue that should not be ignored. McMahan seems to tie the person's mental life to brain functioning. He seems to be suggesting that without cerebral functioning, a person has no mental life. He naturally sides with the philosophical materialists on their view that consciousness and mental functioning are the result of a brain process. However, it has to be kept in mind that such conviction does not advance the main question at hand. It does not tell whether the person was actually conscious at the time the experience near death has allegedly happened. If the question is whether conscious activity can take place after the person reaches the threshold beyond which the brain can no longer support any conscious activity, the assumption that consciousness is brain dependent ends up begging the question. One cannot assume the answer to the question one is asking because the exercise becomes pointless. Overall, this means that McMahan's conviction only tells one whether a person should be conscious according to McMahan's chosen belief system. Yet, the question is actually asking whether there is consciousness after the cerebral hemispheres stopped functioning. This question can certainly not be answered by pointing to the cerebral hemispheres.

In spite of his metaphysical bias, McMahan's analysis is extremely valuable with regard to the question of threshold. The goal of his paper is to find a point where a person can be pronounced dead. Assuming for a second that he is right about the cerebral hemispheres being the requirement for the continuation of the person's mental life in the body, then, the lack of cerebral hemisphere functioning should provide a threshold after which a person should not have a conscious event taking place if the person's life history, as Rosenberg would put it, truly does not continue after death. If mental functioning of the same individual is not possible anymore, the person cannot have mentally produced experiences afterwards. If there is any mental activity



after this point in time, then, this activity is evidence for the continuation of a mental operation after the brain function to support consciousness has ceased.

Is the answer to the question of threshold the cerebral hemispheres? There is a possible alternative option to the cerebral hemispheres being the locus of consciousness. Luper points out that consciousness requires multiple parts of the brain for its functioning (Luper, 2009). The brain stem is responsible for the wake-sleep cycle, awareness and attention. The cerebral hemispheres depend on the brain stem for the on-off switch of consciousness. Despite McMahan's insistence on the cerebral hemispheres' functioning, it has to be acknowledged that, with consciousness turned off in the brain stem, the cerebral hemispheres cannot produce any content. If this is true, perhaps the brain stem's operational capacity is more important for determining the threshold beyond which a person should not have conscious experience if the mind's dependence on the brain is true. At the end, the answer depends on the importance of the content. The threshold can be established in the brain stem if one argues for an experience of consciousness without any content. If one argues for a consciousness with a content, though, the functioning of the cerebral hemispheres may be necessary. It seems that consciousness<sub>3</sub> requires the brain stem while subjective consciousness<sub>2</sub> requires the cerebral hemispheres.

Yet, there is one element that seems to be overlooked in this discussion. Near-death experiences are remembered events. A remembered event requires the capacity for memory. Even the fact of being conscious whether there is a content and whether the content is true or false requires a functioning memory. For a person to be making a statement that the person remembers being conscious, the person had to have the capacity to record this fact. Hence, the part most involved in memory retention is the best candidate for the threshold NDEs need. It is often suggested that the hippocampus of the limbic system is essential for storing information into long-term memory (Crider, 1993). A person needs this part of the brain to function if the person wants to retain memory of having been conscious at a certain time in the past. For this reason, it makes sense to choose the shutdown of the hippocampus of the limbic system as the threshold. It is true that this is not the threshold beyond which a person should not have any conscious experience. Probably, the brain stem provides that threshold. However, the limbic system is the threshold beyond which any memory of a conscious experience, true or untrue,

even in the most basic existential sense should not be possible. Any memory recorded at this time requires that the brain record memory, if the brain is responsible for the experience.

The overall point is that the threshold that counts is the functioning of the memory system that records information into long-term memory. It is not even important whether this location is the hippocampus of the limbic system and other related memory systems. It is possible that the location is elsewhere in the brain. The crucial point is that if the systems responsible for these memories fail, the person should not have any memory of being conscious. If the person has memory of being conscious, even though the crucial brain systems have failed, it is evidence that mental functioning continues without a functioning brain. This is basically conclusive evidence for the fact that mental functioning is not entirely brain dependent. The question is whether there is such evidence available. In short, the question is whether the person has an actual remembered conscious experience from beyond the established threshold.

#### The Question of Survival: The Time of Near-Death Experiences

Blackmore has denied the possibility that a conscious experience is present beyond the threshold. As she explains in relation to the remembered defibrillator machine, the solution to this problem lies within the information that is picked out and later recalled by the person. She sees the key to the presence of this information the gradual shutdown of the senses in the dying brain (Blackmore, 1993). Apparently, according to her theory, hearing is the last sense to go. Upon hearing certain sounds and bits of conversations, the person builds interpreted images of the event. Since people have concrete memories and do not think in abstracts, the theory is that the individual ends up with concrete visual images of the incident. Blackmore states: "It does not take much information from such sounds for a person to piece together a very convincing and realistic visual impression of what is going on. This will provide the best model they have and seem perfectly real. They may have no idea that the model was constructed primarily from things that they heard" (124). Hence, Blackmore contends that hearing is responsible for the memory of the events near death. With this information kept in mind, it can be comfortably stated that she denies the possibility of remembering beyond the threshold where conscious experience should be no longer possible.

Unfortunately, instead of offering a simple solution to support the Dying Brain Hypothesis, this theory introduces a further philosophical complication by the way Blackmore presents her theory. She argues that the person is aware of events happening because the dying brain offers this vision to the person, mostly through hearing. Supposedly, these events are the last effort the dying brain makes before ceasing to operate. Blackmore speaks of the observer of the event as if he were fully aware during this disintegration. Basically, she treats the observer in her theory as if he were fully intact. The person, as a self, seems to be an isolated observer watching this disintegration from a safe distance. There are two problems with this portrayal of the event. First, McMahan has already argued that the enduring self requires the functioning of the higher brain. This moves the desired threshold back from the memory system, such as, for example, the proposed limbic and related memory system, to the cerebral hemispheres. After all, the presence of the self requires the functioning of the cerebral hemispheres in addition to the memory system.

The only way to counter this argument is by insisting that the self constructs the event long after it registers the information from the dying senses. It basically reconstructs the information from memory once the self is operational again. This way, the threshold can remain within the memory system. This may be a potential solution for this particular problem for the Dying Brain Hypothesis. It is unfortunate that this is not the way Blackmore seems to present the theory. She seems to suggest that the reconstruction of events happens when the brain is dying, and it is later recalled.

The manner in which Blackmore presents the theory leads to a second larger problem though. This second problem has to do with the apparent dualism created in this argument. On the one hand, there is an isolated observer existing in a safe distance, watching the events unfolding. On the other hand, the brain is disintegrating. If the brain is identical with the mind, as in an identity theory, or if the brain causes the mind, as in a causal theory, the preservation of an intact isolated observer at the time of brain deterioration is difficult to argue for. There are two possible explanations one can use for the presence of an isolated observer. The isolated observer can either be equated with, or argued to be caused by, a part of the brain and possibly events in that part of the brain or, it can be equated with the whole brain and possibly events in the whole brain.

If the isolated observer is equated with or argued to be caused by a part of the brain, the observer can watch the rest of the brain disintegrating. In this case, two things need to be shown. First, this unique part of the brain needs to be identified. This is potentially conceivable since some scientists are involved in identifying the location of consciousness within the brain. As it was discussed before, the on-off switch is usually located in or near the brain stem. Joseph Bogen identifies, for example, part of the thalamus called the intralaminar nucleus as the seat of consciousness (Bogen, 1995). Lesions in this part of the brain result at least in the loss of consciousness<sub>1</sub> that distinguish between an organism that is normally functioning and an organism that is unresponsive, and behavioral consciousness<sub>2</sub> where an organism can show knowledge of itself in terms of its situation, mental states and action. Hence, the observer could potentially be this unique part as long as it can be demonstrated in the future that subjective consciousness<sub>2</sub> and consciousness<sub>3</sub> are also lost if this part is gone.

However, once the unique part of the brain responsible for consciousness is identified, be it the intralaminar nucleus or something else, a second thing has to be also shown. Researchers, such as Blackmore, need to prove that this part of the brain is the last one to shut down in the system and it does so suddenly. It has to be the last one to shut down because otherwise the person could not observe the disintegration of the rest of the brain. It also has to shut down suddenly because otherwise the person would have memory of sporadic events instead of a highly organized and lucid experience. As it stands today, this is just a speculation. Nobody knows in exactly what order the different parts of the brain shut down because the electroencephalogram (EEG) can only measure the surface activities of the brain. Nevertheless, the shutting down of this part of the brain, together with the parts of the brain responsible for memories, at the end of the dying process could potentially solve the issue of dualism. It has to be shown, however, that this is in fact the way it happens, which has so far not been done.

The other option is to equate the conscious self with the whole brain in some manner. This may be more desirable for many scientists since conscious activities seem to take place throughout the brain. Some researchers have suggested ways of equating the conscious self with the brain. An example is Roger Penrose's theory of the involvement of microtubules in the brain (Penrose, 1994), a theory also suggested by Stuart R. Hameroff (1987). Microtubules are one part of the cytoskeleton, which is a cellular skeleton contained within the cytoplasm. Cytoplasm

is part of the cell. They are long tubular structures that connect along the outside of the cells. Penrose worked out a quantum theory based on microtubules, suggesting that consciousness arises with the help of these tubular structures (1994). Since these structures exist throughout the brain, this is an example of the manner in which the whole brain can be involved in supporting a conscious self. However, this interpretation of the conscious self has a disadvantage. Researchers cannot claim that the conscious observer is an unaffected observer of events during NDEs. Here, the observer should be disintegrating with the rest of the brain. While disintegrating, consciousness should show signs of confusion and discontinuity. The narratives of NDEers should be incoherent and, consciousness should be at least flickering like a damaged fluorescent light.

However, this is not what is happening. As Long and Perry have already suggested, people undergoing NDEs perceive events with crystal clarity, a great sense of well-being and a heightened sense of understanding. Also, consciousness does not flicker. The conscious observer does not show any signs of a breakdown in the process of dying because the events experienced are not sporadic events suggestive of discontinuity. This makes it difficult to equate the whole brain with the conscious observer. This means that the dualism Blackmore creates cannot be properly explained by turning to the solution of either equating consciousness with part of the brain or with the whole brain. Equating consciousness with part of the brain can only be supported by sheer speculation and the narratives of NDEs do not support equating consciousness with the whole brain.

On that account, denying the possibility of conscious experience beyond an established threshold is not as simple as providing a story about the deterioration of senses in the dying brain. The brain story, as it was revealed, does not answer the question of timeline within the dying brain. The timing of NDEs, therefore, needs a different kind of strategy. To time NDEs, both the brain event and the phenomenal experience have to be related to the outside world. If there is phenomenal experience just in case there is a brain event, NDEs have to take place either before the person reaches the threshold beyond which she could not have remembered being conscious or, after her brain recovers enough to have her consciousness and memory operating again. In this case, Blackmore's theory works with the addition of the idea that the conscious self reconstructs the event out of bits of information it has collected once the conscious self is

operating again. Going back to McMahan's argument, this reconstruction has to happen when the higher brain is in operation. On the other hand, if there is phenomenal experience in the absence of brain events after reaching the threshold, this is conclusive evidence that conscious experience is not tied to brain deterioration and recovery.

#### A Scientific Calculation: The Timing of Near-Death Experiences

I have previously suggested that it would be possible to at least make an attempt to show that consciousness<sub>3</sub> is present when the brain cannot support any type of consciousness after the examination and clarification of the definition of death, the time of death and, the relationship between consciousness and the brain during near-death experiences. The time has come to make this attempt by relating both the phenomenal experience and the brain event to the outside world in order to determine whether at least consciousness<sub>3</sub>, if not subjective consciousness<sub>2</sub>, is present beyond the established threshold.

Michael N. Marsh tries to determine the time of NDEs using a technique from dream research that relates both the phenomenal experience and the brain event to the outside world. First, he observes that what he calls Extra-Corporal Experiences (ECE) cease at the moment consciousness is regained in the body (Marsh, 2010). Marsh means by this claim that ECE is over when the person returns to the waking state. This offers an end limit to the timeframe of the experience. Second, he applies the technique of word count borrowed from dream research. In dream research, a person recounts the entire dream from beginning to end. The number of words the person uses to tell a dream offers an approximate duration of the dream. Hence, based on this ideation, Marsh estimates using word counting most often used in sleep laboratories that Pamela Reynolds' experience must have lasted no more than a few minutes (Marsh 2010). Finally, he takes this calculated period of time and places it before the person's full recovery of consciousness. He argues that this is the time when near-death experiences happen.

At first sight, it does not look like he is doing the job of relating the experience or the brain function to the outside world even though this is what he sets out to do. However, he actually does this by providing supporting data to his theory. He uses three examples. The first example comes from suicide. He takes the interviews of eight survivors of the Golden Gate

bridge suicide attempts to show that their NDEs had to happen before regaining consciousness. Since the drop is 260 feet, it takes four seconds to reach the water at the speed of 80 mph. Marsh points out that six of the eight people did not remember the impact. Thus, he concludes that the experiences had to happen between the impact and the regaining of consciousness.

The second example comes from experience from fainting. People fainting during hyperventilation often experience images and sounds similar to NDEs. Since this type of fainting only lasts a few seconds, NDEs should only last a few seconds before regaining consciousness in the body.

Marsh's third example focuses on loss of consciousness in centrifugation experiments done in military aviation centers. At high levels of acceleration that cause a high level gravitational force, soldiers appear to lose consciousness for up to 20 seconds according to witnesses. From a first person perspective, these soldiers experience visions and floating. The experience happens right before regaining consciousness. Therefore, based on these examples, Marsh concludes that people have to have a near-death experience or any similar phenomenon before regaining consciousness in the body.

There are several issues with Marsh's analysis. The first issue is his great trust in people's memory. In his first example, he heavily relies on the memory of suicide survivors. He concludes from their testimonies that their NDEs had to happen before awakening because they could not remember the impact. However, it is well known that some traumatic events are repressed by memory. For example, victims of severe physical or sexual assaults often block memory of the assault for possibly as long as the rest of their lives. Hence, the memory loss of an impact at a speed of 80 mph into a large body of water does not say much about the timing of NDEs. Any number of these survivors may have blocked the memory of the impact and be left merely with the memory of the NDE at the end. In short, it is not practicable to rely on the memory of traumatic events in order to locate NDEs within the available timeframe.

The second issue has to do with the available timeframe itself. In case of a loss of consciousness either due to fainting spells or military centrifugation experiments, the available time for NDE-like images to occur is only a few seconds. This is too short a time to determine

whether the experience takes place at the beginning or the end. In fact, based on Marsh's description, it might take up the whole time. Basically, merely a few seconds of time is not enough to account for longer NDEs. Marsh himself calculates Reynolds' experience to have taken about a few minutes. Consequently, based on the available short time, no conclusion can be reached about the location of NDEs within the given timeframe.

The third issue is the contradiction between the perceived experience and Marsh's claim. Firstly, in instances of fainting, most people locate their experiences at the time the witnesses observed them to be unconscious. Secondly, after recovery from fainting, these people compare their experiences to drug induced states and not to dying simply because they do not know what dying is like. Thirdly, in instances of centrifugation induced unconsciousness, the soldiers denied being unconscious at any time. Finally, these two groups have denied that they were thinking of being near death.

Most of these points contradict Marsh's conclusion about these experiences. Marsh claims that the experiences take place after during recovery and not during the seemingly unconscious period. He compares the experiences to NDEs rather than drug induced states. He insists that the people were unconscious for a time even if they deny any period of unconsciousness. The only point Marsh admits to is that victims of fainting and centrifugation experiments did not perceive themselves to be near death. Yet, despite all these facts, Marsh manages to lump these people in with those having near-death experiences. Hence, Marsh's claim is contradicted by the perceived experiences of participants.

The greatest issue with Marsh's analysis is, though, his main reason for locating NDEs to the time before awakening. He simply states that it could not have occurred in the absence of any brain function. He says, "An ECE cannot occur when the brain is 'dead', or 'down', or at its most hypoxic or ischaemic. If that were the case, then there could be no establishing of memories for the events that are later recalled" (Marsh, 2010: 78). The difficulty is that whether NDEs can occur in the absence of brain function is precisely the question. Marsh tries to back up his claim by pointing to the retention of memory. However, this will not help. If the person has an experience in the absence of any brain function, then, one has to start thinking about both the experience and the memory of it in a new light. In fact, this is the reason for establishing a



threshold in the first place. For example, if the proposed hippocampus of the limbic system and other related memory parts of the brain are not functioning and the person still has an experience during this period with an ability to remember it, it is evidence that the experience is not brain dependent. The question is still whether this is the case. Hence, the problem with Marsh is that he does not seem to help answering the question of the time of NDEs. He simply presupposes the answer to the question of veridicality in the existential sense of consciousness<sub>3</sub> based on the Dying Brain Hypothesis.

It may seem that Marsh has not succeeded in establishing a timeline for NDEs. However, he has not entirely failed either. He tried to engineer a technique for placing conscious experiences within a timeframe by relating phenomenal experiences and brain events to the outside world. This is actually what needs to be done to have an adequate timeline. This is the argument that would show whether the person was conscious after the brain could no longer support any type of consciousness. Hence, Marsh is on the right track with his method of measuring the time of NDEs.

Marsh's lack of result may be in part rooted in something that was overlooked up to this point: the understanding of time. Marsh measures the physical time it takes for the experience to occur and, then, he tries to locate the phenomenal experience within the physical framework. This may be problematic, though. Physically measured time and psychologically experienced time may not overlap. They may in fact even be irreconcilable.

A fictional portrayal of this difficulty can be found in the movie called "Contact" (Zemeckis, 1997). Ellie Arroway, the main character, is a scientist, searching for signs of alien life in the universe. Listening to the 'noise' of the universe in an observatory, she discovers with her team of scientists repeated sound patterns coming from the Vega constellation. She decodes the message. The message offers a plan to build a machine. When the machine is built, Ellie becomes the passenger, supposedly to travel to another part of the universe. The theory is that once a ball shaped metal structure is dropped through a hollow metal frame of moving parts, she would travel through space with the speed of light. From inside this enclosed metal ball structure, Ellie experiences approximately eight hours of adventure that includes traveling through space and meeting with an alien intelligence that presents itself in a human form. From

outside of this ball shaped structure, scientists observe this structure falling through the frame within four seconds. It lands in a specially built net that catches the ball structure on the bottom. Here, in the story, the psychological and the physical time clashes. There is an inconsistency in the perceived time of the person who experiences the event and the measured time of the observer. The two times seem to be irreconcilable.

The story of “Contact” is based on the fact that psychological and physical times are out of synch with each other. Human consciousness, in terms of duration, order and flow, experiences time differently, depending on the circumstance (Barušs & Mossbridge, 2017). For example, just to focus on the duration, the movie industry uses a 25 picture-frame per second to create the illusion of movement. Psychological time also speeds up and slows down with human interests and concentrations, which makes a boring lecture seem to go on forever while an interesting story to take just a short time to enjoy. The same rules apply to the case of NDEs. Near-death experiences may be perceived very differently from the scientifically measurable time.

From the observers' point of view, most dying experiences last anywhere from a few seconds to a few minutes. Perhaps, one of the longest process has been cited by Johann Hampe who describes the experience of a man recorded dead without a heartbeat for 23 minutes (Hampe, 1979). Within the physically measurable time, the perception of time drastically changes. People often claim that time has no meaning, time is negated or time does not exist at all. For example, Kenneth Ring cites a man who found time a meaningless concept during his NDE. The man says, “My sense of time was way off. Time didn’t mean anything. It seemed like time had no meaning” (Ring, 1980: 97). Another man experiences timelessness. “I found myself in a space, in a period of time, I would say, where all space and time was negated” (98). The man who was without a heartbeat for 23 minutes describes himself beyond time and space. He says:

I was moving at high speed towards a net of great luminosity...The grid was like an energy converter transporting me into formlessness, beyond time and space. Now, I was not in a place, nor even in a dimension, but rather in a condition of being (Hampe, 1979: 65).

It seems that the alteration of consciousness during near-death experiences may change the perception of time. The person may find himself outside of the regular flow of everyday time. It is not even that time slows down or speeds up as experienced in a variety of daily circumstances; but, in many cases, time changes altogether. For these people, time is meaningless, negated or altogether absent. This description of time is very close to the mystics' understanding of their sense of time during mystical experiences.

An example of such a mystic's presentation of time can be found in Plotinus' philosophy. Plotinus explains and defends the reality of psychologically perceived time. First, he locates the origin of time to one of his three hypostheses or real existences. The second of these existences is the Intelligible Realm. Eternity is found, here. Time is derived from eternity, which is time's archetype. Plotinus argues this point in the following way:

Therefore all things in it are perfect, that it may be altogether perfect...its blessedness is not something acquired, but all things are in eternity, and the true eternity, which time copies...It has therefore everything at rest in the same place, and it only is, and its "is" is for ever, and there is no place for the future for then too it is—or for the past—for nothing there has passed away—but all things remain stationary for ever, since they are the same, as if they were satisfied with themselves for being so (Plotinus, 1966: III. 7. 4, Armstrong 307).

To understand the full implication of Plotinus' time, it is best to expand on the philosophy by taking the point of view of the archetype of souls, The Soul. The Soul exists in the Intelligible Realm with eternity. The Soul is the higher self of the individual soul. It rests in eternally existing and unchanging principles. The nature of the Soul is such that it desires activity. This inspires the Soul to imprint images of itself into matter. The images are the individual souls who descend into matter. Therefore, the souls are the temporal version of the eternal Soul. This is the reason for looking to eternity in the discussion of time.

The temporal soul is an imperfect state of the Soul. It struggles to ascend back into its perfect state. It can reach up to the Intelligible Realm and even to the highest realm, The One, through contemplation. Contemplation is the direct experience needed to gain a glimpse into

eternity governed by the Intelligible Realm and into timelessness governed by The One. For Plotinus, contemplation produces the proper understanding of time. In ascent to the origin of time, eternity, the soul finds its true state and experiences the truth of eternity. Plotinus says the following:

Now if in our thought we were to make this power turn back again, and put a stop to this life which it now has without stop and never-ending, because it is the activity of an always existing soul, whose activity is not directed to itself or in itself, but lies in making and production—if, then we were to suppose that it was no longer active, but stopped this activity, and that this part of the soul turned back to the intelligible world and to eternity, and rested quietly there, what would there still be except eternity? (Plotinus, 1966: III. 7. 12, Armstrong 343).

To view time from temporal reality is inappropriate for Plotinus. This view is not necessarily wrong, but it is incomplete. All theories of time viewed from within time will fall short of presenting the complete story of time. Time needs to be viewed from the point of view of the ascended soul; time, which is either eternal in the Intelligible Realm or timeless in The One.

Following Plotinus's thoughts on time, it can be observed that the mystics' position is to elevate time, experienced during contemplation or meditation, above the time experienced in everyday life. For them, psychological time experienced during mystical episodes speaks of a greater truth than physically measurable time observed by non-mystics or mystics in a non-altered state of consciousness. The mystic's claim is that psychological and physical times are not just irreconcilable, but psychological time is more real and superior to physical time. Because psychological time is more real, it is not important what physical time indicates. Physical time is an incomplete story. It should always be evaluated from the viewpoint of the greater reality of psychological time.

The overall argument is that those who have near-death experiences move into a psychological time during NDEs that are also experienced by mystics during contemplation or meditation. This timeframe stands outside the regular and everyday timeframe. Time may become meaningless, negated or altogether absent. This means that locating the experience

physically seems to be futile. The observation made by those outside the experience seems to be incomplete. It cannot capture the experience from a more complete view of NDEs. Hence, it seems that to attempt to place conscious experiences within a timeframe by relating psychologically experienced phenomenal events and brain events to the outside world will always fail. The phenomenal experience seems to defy such an attempt for a placement because psychological time for participating individuals is experienced as having a greater reality than physical time.

Although this is a serious argument not to be easily dismissed, the counterargument is that this argument does not diminish the importance of placing consciousness within an available timeframe in the outside world from an observational viewpoint that is physically measurable by clock time because the goal is to show that consciousness<sub>3</sub> is available beyond the threshold where the brain can no longer support any type of consciousness. Even if psychological time and physical time are not in synch with each other and are seemingly not reconcilable, and psychological time is argued to be more superior, there is still a physical time from an observer's view at which point NDEs begin and at which point NDEs end. Granted, this move presupposes the correspondence theory of truth, which has already proved to be problematic. However, to help out the traditional line of argumentation, the correspondence theory of truth becomes necessary since locating consciousness at the time of dying is important. It is important to find out whether consciousness exists beyond the established threshold because it will help the argument from a traditional approach to determine the veridicality of NDEs in the existential sense of consciousness<sub>3</sub>. Although psychological time may seem superior, it has to be decided whether it is independent of the brain in order to make the threshold argument work.

It appears that the most convincing argument for all involved in the discussion of NDEs to determine the veridicality of NDEs in the existential sense of consciousness is still to place consciousness within a timeframe by relating the phenomenal experience and the brain event to the outside world. Marsh did not do a good job at this. He faced some serious difficulties. Nevertheless, others may succeed in the future where he has failed. Until then, it is at least possible to do it in theory. Since the acquisition of an experience that becomes the accurate content of memory requires that consciousness exist at the time, the best-case scenario would be to have a conscious experience accurately remembered by both the people who have near-death

experiences and the witnesses to these experiences. This remembered event should happen beyond the threshold of memory when the memory system, such as the proposed limbic system and other parts of the brain, responsible for memories no longer function. If this scenario ever happens, researchers will be convinced that NDEs are veridical in the existential sense. The person who reports or remembers having a near-death experience would be shown to be conscious at the time the experience allegedly happens beyond the possibility of brain support. All one needs is to encounter the ideal case that puts the time of consciousness in the existential sense without any doubt beyond the memory threshold.

### The Ideal Case: A Time to Give Up on Veridicality?

The trouble is that the ideal scenario is difficult to realize. Most near-death experiences rely mainly on testimonial evidence. These experiences cannot be properly located within the timeframe of dying. The Reynolds' case is a good example. Reynolds' brain was fully monitored when her NDE was in progress. While her brain function was monitored, she collected memories of events taking place around her in the surgery room. Her experience and brain event can be linked to the outside world to locate the time of her consciousness. Nonetheless, the Reynolds case has a disappointing result. Most of Reynolds' observation of events about the outside world can be placed at the time she had brain function (Sabom, 1998). This means that even in one of the strongest and most documented cases, it cannot be shown without a doubt that a near-death experience happens when the person alleges it does. Thus, near-death experiences overall cannot be placed to the time beyond the threshold for now. Hence, the ideal real-life bullet-proof case has yet to arrive.

Stephen E. Braude tries to build a functional ideal bullet-proof case for reincarnation or possession stories to demonstrate what has to be in place for accepting these stories as true and indicative of an afterlife (Braude, 2003: 285). It is worth following Braude's lead in developing a fictional scenario of an ideal bullet-proof case for NDEs; an ideal bullet-proof case, which would potentially show without a doubt that, at least in the case of NDEs, these experiences are veridical in the first sense, in the existential sense of consciousness<sup>3</sup>. The following is a fictional case set up to demonstrate the demand for a positive proof at the highest level.

In this fictional case, the main character is Nurse A. Nurse A works in a room next to a surgery room where patient X becomes clinically dead due to an induced hypothermic cardiac arrest. Nurse A never comes into the surgery room and never has any contact with the patient before he becomes clinically dead. However, she gains knowledge of the fact that the person is clinically dead at the time it happens. She meets a doctor who steps out of the surgery room for a second and mentions in passing to Nurse A that the person is now clinically dead. Having just met the doctor, nurse A goes on with her daily routine. Before she continues her work, though, she goes to the washroom. She is alone in the washroom. She washes her hands properly before leaving. While she is washing her hands, she removes her watch to do a better job. When she turns around to look for paper towel, she accidentally knocks over the watch into the corner behind the garbage can. The watch is out of view. Nurse A is in a hurry and does not notice the missing watch. In this story, it is important to note for the sake of acquiring bullet-proof evidence that Nurse A does not even know that her watch is missing! She goes back to work. A short time later, she is informed that the patient was successfully revived in the next room.

A few hours later, another nurse, Nurse B, meets the patient who was revived from clinical death. He is just awakening. Nurse B is standing there with a doctor when patient X turns to Nurse B and explains to her that while he was clinically dead, he had a near-death experience. He was out of body, following Nurse A from the room she worked at to the washroom. He describes Nurse A in detail. He talks about her age, hair, body type and clothing. He identifies the washroom location and the furniture in it. Patient X then explains that Nurse A removed her watch while washing her hands and knocked the watch into the corner behind the garbage can. He also describes the watch in great detail and tells Nurse B that Nurse A does not know that she lost her watch. The missing watch in the story makes the case bullet proof because, other than the person who had the near-death experience, nobody knows about the missing watch, not even the person who lost it!

Nurse B and the doctor find Nurse A. When she is told about the missing watch, she looks at her wrist and turns pale. She is stunned that her expensive watch is missing. She does not know what has happened to the watch. They go to the washroom together. Nurse B retrieves Nurse A's watch in the presence of the doctor. She finds it exactly where Patient X told them to find it. They all go back to the patient's room together. Nurse A meets Patient X for the first

time. She thanks him for the information that allowed them to find the missing watch. The case of the missing watch becomes bullet proof because no lucky guesses, accidents or gossiping witnesses can account for this information.

This hypothetical case demonstrates the high demand for an example that does not seem to have another successful alternative explanation. This explanation may at first sight represent a bullet-proof argument for the veridicality of NDE in the existential sense of consciousness<sub>3</sub> by locating the person's sense of presence at the time when there was no brain support for any consciousness. Here are the necessary components. First, the NDEer's observation of events around him has to be shown to take place while the person is clinically dead. For this to happen, the person's body and most desirably the brain have to be fully monitored. The monitors have to evince that the person was in fact clinically dead at the time of the observation. Second, at least one observed event should not be known to absolutely anyone to avoid any accusation that the patient has gained knowledge by any type of verbal communication; but, at the same time, this event has to be verifiable and verified afterwards. If anyone knows about this event, allegation can be made that the patient simply received the information from the person who knew about it. If the information cannot be verified, it is worthless. The information has to show that the event took place during the time the patient was clinically dead. Third, the person connected to this observed event should not have contact with the patient before the event is verified. This is important to ward off allegation of lucky guesses by the patient about the person connected to the observed event.

It is very difficult to ever find such an ideal bullet-proof case. This case relies on the accurate information gathered at the time when the brain did not support any type of consciousness. Although any type of information gathered at the time when there was no brain support is legitimate, the accuracy of the event helps to convince people because it properly ties the phenomenal event and the brain event to the outside world. The essential element is the location of the proper time of the event. Given this high demand, though, it is difficult to find this absolutely ideal case, if not impossible. Nevertheless, it is necessary to put effort into finding this ideal case because of the possible alternative explanations available and because of the amount of scepticism mounted against the interpretation that NDEs can be veridical in the existential sense of consciousness<sub>3</sub>.



Of course, this is a tall order. It requires more than randomly displayed images near the ceiling. With randomly displayed images, a lot can go wrong. As in the case of Parnia's research experiments, his experiments advertised as a dust collection study ended up attracting curious people climbing up to the ceiling to check out the equipment. This problem results in accusation of prior knowledge about the target item. Even if this can be avoided, it is possible to accuse the researcher of knowing about the target item and either consciously or unconsciously communicating it to the patient. The issue of fraud or bias can only be eliminated if the researcher who is collecting the near-death study does not even know about the equipment placed near the ceiling. If this problem is avoided somehow by careful planning, doubt can still arise about previous knowledge of an experiments, such as Parnia's. After all, these types of books are already published and publically available. It is possible to accuse the patient of having previous knowledge of this type of experiment through publication and to accuse the person of simply claiming that the target item was guessed based on the available reading materials. Hence, the randomly displayed images are not bullet proof. The bullet-proof event needs to be stronger. It has to avoid the possibilities of any knowledge from anyone, potential frauds or biases, lucky guesses and coincidences.

Yet, does the ideal case ever really become ideal? Basically, does it ever become bullet proof? Even if all potential problems mentioned so far are eliminated, there is an argument that is much tougher to dismiss. Braude's explanations of reincarnation stories suggest that, in terms of explanation, extrasensory perception is a possible contender to a survival of death (Braude, 2003). If extrasensory perception is a contender in case of NDEs as well, the person does not have to operate apart from the brain and outside of the body. For example, the person does not need to be out-of-body to identify an object or a display in a hidden place. It could be the result of telepathy--the acquisition of information from another person outside the use of the five human senses--or the result of clairvoyance--the acquisition of information about an object outside the use of the five human senses. Thus, to make the ideal case even stronger, the verifiable information should not be known even to the person, such as nurse A in this scenario, who is involved in the verifiable event to avoid any telepathy or clairvoyance used at the time of the event by the patient. The fact that nurse A did not know that her watch had been lost is an

essential component to verifiability. This is the reason that the ideal case seems impossible to find to make the case full proof.

Yet, even the avoidance of telepathy or clairvoyance at the time of the event leaves a person vulnerable to one type of psychic power that could never be eliminated: precognitive clairvoyance or post-cognitive clairvoyance. The person who had the near-death experience could potentially gain information as the result of precognition or post-cognition, the acquisition of information about an event outside of the use of human senses; information, which will take place in the future or which took place in the past. With the possibility of precognition or post-cognition, the time of NDEs remains a question. If a person is capable of receiving information using precognition or post-cognition, it can happen before the person loses consciousness or after the person regains consciousness, without affecting the accuracy of the remembered content. Thus, even the ingenious experiments with hidden objects or the spontaneously occurring nearly bullet-proof cases can never positively prove that any of near-death experiences took place when the person was supposedly conscious without brain function.

If Braude is correct about the possibility of psychic powers, the argument for the Afterlife Hypothesis loses. For example, a person may have post-cognitive abilities and psychically able to demonstrate what had happened when he was not around. This means that the person was unconscious, the brain no longer supporting any mental function, but this person may have psychically picked up the information about the event after the brain has started to function again. The information could have given the idea that he was in fact present at the time he had no brain function. All one has to do is argue that this person reconstructed the post-cognitive scenario creatively where he put himself in the middle of the scenery in an imaginary way. In short, the powers of post-cognition and imagination can still account for NDEs. If this is true, life apart from the body is not necessary.

The argument is similar to Aristotle's. Asking what the soul is, Aristotle has responded, "It is substance in the sense which corresponds to the definitive formulas of a thing's essence. That means that it is 'the essential whatness' of a body the character just assigned" (Aristotle, 1947: II. 1. 412b, 10-14). According to Aristotle, the soul is necessary to the body because the soul offers the natural realization of the body. They are unified just like the wax and its

imprinted image: "it is meaningless as to ask whether the wax and the shape given to it by the stamp are one" (II, 1. 412b, 5-10). They are one and the soul has powers in this unity. However, once the body disappears, so does the soul. Similarly, the person may have certain powers, such as psychic powers, that can be expressed in the forms of precognition or post-cognition in the case of NDEs. This form of expression helps the realization of the body. However, once the brain shuts down and the body dies, these powers may also disappear with the individual. Hence, NDEs may not require the survival of bodily death.

This ancient Aristotelian argument and the modern form of it in the hands of Braude offer the potential, final defeat of the Afterlife Hypothesis. The Dying Brain Hypothesis can demonstrate its ultimate strength with the possibility of an explanation, including a psychic explanation, that does not require any survival of death. Of course, this is a stretch of imagination in a sense that most materialist-oriented individuals do not embrace the idea of psychic abilities. However, if they do and they are capable of linking it to the brain and the body, they can successfully defend their position. This way, veridicality in the first sense has not been established where the person who has a near-death experience is conscious at the time the person alleges the experience has taken place beyond brain support. The veridicality in the first sense has been defeated and NDEs are not veridical by this traditional line of argumentation. The Afterlife Hypothesis has failed.

Is this the end of the argument on veridicality? Did the defenders of the Dying Brain Hypothesis win? Or, did the argument go wrong somewhere? If it did, where did it go wrong? Well, the traditional line of argumentation went wrong right at the beginning. First, it has assumed that a split exists between the two theories, the Afterlife Hypothesis and the Dying Brain Hypothesis, based on the traditional mind-body dualism of philosophy. Once this assumption is made, there can only be two substances existing in reality: mind and body. On its own, this assumption may not be problematic; however, it becomes problematic as soon as the unwarranted bias toward materialism is added. This bias could be seen throughout the analysis. Basically, ontological support for the material reality of the brain and its powers has automatically been granted to the proponent of the Dying Brain Hypothesis, while the presence of an independently existing consciousness or mind was left for the proponents of the Afterlife Hypothesis to prove.

This materially biased view shows that the material world is held to be ontologically significant to begin with while consciousness or mind is tentatively granted provided that bullet-proof evidence or an argument can be given for its independent existence apart from the material world. Of course, this type of evidence or argument can never be provided for two reasons. First, as it was pointed out at the beginning of this traditional line of argumentation, it has never been proved that the material world exists apart from the human mind in the first place. Therefore, the existence and the powers of the brain have never been established. This means that the starting point of this traditionally presented argument is not standing on any serious philosophical footing. Hence, it is impossible to defeat a view that has not been properly established but has been taken seriously anyway.

Second, those who favour the materialist interpretation cannot be convinced that consciousness or the mind can exist apart from the brain. The materialists demand that the evidence or argument presented in favour of an independently existing consciousness or mind be bullet proof because they do not believe in this possibility. They basically put the burden of proof exclusively on the proponents of the Afterlife Hypothesis and ask them to prove the independently existing consciousness or mind to the materialists' satisfaction, based on their terms. Naturally, nobody can do that. If a non-material consciousness or mind exists independently of the brain, nobody can demonstrate this fact using matter or material ideology to the outmost satisfaction of materialists. Yet, nothing short of this type of demonstration will ever be enough for any materialist-oriented people. Hence, the task is impossible to begin with.

Moreover, due to their belief, the materialists also seem to hold a default position in this traditional line of argumentation. They believe that as long as there is an alternative explanation to the Afterlife Hypothesis, this alternative explanation in the form of the Dying Brain Hypothesis automatically wins over the possibility of any afterlife scenario. This puts them in the driving seat of the argument. Overall, this means that the Afterlife Hypothesis cannot be demonstrated using this traditional line of argumentation because this line of argumentation is already set up for the Afterlife Hypothesis to fail.

So, why do people think along this traditional line? Why is this line of thinking so prevalent in society that some people may not even see that there is anything wrong with this line

of argumentation? Is it possible that materialism prevails because it can somehow be argued to be a more established theory than previously thought? In the next chapter, I will look at materialism more closely to see whether its philosophical power can be demonstrated or whether it is all smoke and mirrors.

## CHAPTER 2: THE DOMINANCE OF MATERIALISM

"Hear me out, please," he began with a sigh, signalling that a long speech was about to follow. "You said that people believe the evidence. But, that's not always true. For example, the OPERA physics experiment shows that even scientists don't always do that. In 2011, the experiment showed that neutrino particles travelled faster than the speed of light. Scientists looked for a mistake right away. Why? They did it because the result violates the special theory of relativity proposed by Einstein. Scientists would not want to accept the result. Eventually, they did find two mistakes...They found that the speed of neutrinos was in fact consistent with the speed of light. Hence, they concluded that Einstein was right. Now, most people would say that they followed the evidence. But, look again! They refused to accept the original result because it was inconsistent with what they believed in all along: the special theory of relativity. If they did not believe in Einstein's theory to begin with, it is unlikely they would have looked for a mistake. At the end, they were right looking for a mistake. However, now that they got the desired result, they stopped looking for a mistake. My point is that the evidence has a strong hold on the individual only if he has a tendency to believe in the theory the evidence supports in the first place."

--M. J. Mandoki (2014b, pp. 125-126)

The traditional assessment of veridicality resulted in a disappointing loss for the Afterlife Hypothesis. It was determined that the traditional line of argumentation went wrong from the beginning. This line of argumentation first made an assumption that there is a split between the Afterlife Hypothesis and the Dying Brain Hypothesis, and then it made a second assumption that it is up to the proponents of the Afterlife Hypothesis to defend the presence of an independently existing consciousness or mind to the satisfaction of the proponents of the Dying Brain Hypothesis. Having naturally been provided an ontological significance to the material world, the Dying Brain Hypothesis took a default position in this battle. Basically, the Dying Brain

Hypothesis in this scenario automatically takes precedence over the Afterlife Hypothesis, if the proponents of the Afterlife Hypothesis cannot positively prove to the satisfaction of the proponents of the Dying Brain Hypothesis that an independently existing consciousness or mind exists. This approach seems to come so naturally to people that it is rare for anybody to ask the crucial question: Why should people offer the Dying Brain Hypothesis an advantage to begin with? Why should matter be treated as ontologically significant without an argument for it? Why should the burden of proof fall on the proponents of the Afterlife Hypothesis to demonstrate that consciousness or mind can exist apart from the brain? And, at the end, why should the Dying Brain Hypothesis enjoy a privileged default position in this discussion?

The Dying Brain Hypothesis should only have an advantage if its proponents can positively demonstrate that their proposed material world is clearly ontologically significant. If matter enjoys the advantage of having this type of significance, it is fair then, and only then, to put the burden of proof on the proponents of the Afterlife Hypothesis to demonstrate their case for an independently existing consciousness or mind apart from the material brain. The question becomes whether this is the case. Is the proposed material world ontologically significant? Does matter enjoy a special status?

To answer the crucial question, I propose to examine the underlying belief in matter behind the Dying Brain Hypothesis. This underlying belief is rooted in the dominance of the theory of materialism in recent times. There are several points to consider. The first point is the development of philosophical materialism and its place in history. The second point is the distinction between science and materialism, which is often times conflated or ignored. The third point is the desire for relying on evidence with the use of the cliché, "The evidence speaks for itself". The final point is the elucidation on epistemic peer disagreement and the peers' epistemic goals, which ultimately sheds light on the manner in which peers handle the evidence. Once these points are thoroughly examined, a greater clarity can be gained about the historical bias toward materialism and its influence over the people who automatically grant their generosity to it. This means that a better understanding can be gained about this generosity that tilts the scale in favour of the Dying Brain Hypothesis, which in turn shapes the way veridicality of near-death experiences is understood and judged.

Ultimately, it can be demonstrated that matter does not enjoy a special status. The materialists are incapable of showing that their proposed world is ontologically more significant than consciousness or mind that is capable of existing apart from the material brain. This means that the traditional assessment of the veridicality of near-death experiences needs to be given up. Simply, the burden of proof should not be placed on the proponents of the Afterlife Hypothesis to demonstrate that consciousness or mind can exist apart from the brain. An entirely different approach is needed to answer the question whether near-death experiences are veridical and in what sense they are so.

### The Rise of Materialism

The theory of philosophical materialism has always been around in one form or another. For example, the doctrine of Lokāyata in the Cārvāka system of Indian Philosophy, which dates back to the Ṛg Veda, has already advocated a belief that matter is the only form of reality (Radhakrishnan & Moore, 1957). Basically, it is possible to begin the explanation of the history of materialism at any number of historical moments. However, for the purpose of understanding the rise of materialism in recent times, it is perhaps the most fruitful to begin with the disagreement between Plato and Aristotle. It can provide a more proper understanding of the place materialism takes in history.

#### **Plato**

Plato has argued for the existence of both the soul and the body, with the soul having an ability to survive death. He provides reasons for his belief, perhaps, the most impressive one being his theory of knowledge. According to the analogy of the Divided Line, there are several sources of knowledge (Plato, 1993, Republic 509a-513e). The two large divisions consist of the world of opinion, further divided into sections of conjecture and belief, and the world of knowledge, further divided into sections of understanding and thinking. This is a hierarchical arrangement where Plato's famous theory of Forms or Ideas is found on top of the hierarchy in the section of thinking. Plato argues that the Forms are supra-sensible entities that are immutable, simple, eternal, immaterial, divine and ultimately real. For example, all things that



are beautiful partake in and are examples of the Form of Beauty (Plato, 1986, Phaedo 75c-d, Symposium 211e; 1993, Republic 476c).

In this hierarchical arrangement, thinking is the highest type of mental activity because thinking uses the Forms only. Of course, this type of mental activity requires a mind or a soul that "is of the same order as the divine, immortal, and eternal realm" (Plato, 1993, Republic 611e, 368). This way, the mind, which is of the same order, can mentally engage with the Forms. Therefore, according to Plato, the soul is of a special quality that cannot be destroyed even by immortality, unlike the body that can be destroyed by disease (608c-613e). This is the soul that is capable of recollecting true knowledge of the Forms in every life in its path of reincarnation (Plato, 1986, Meno 81a-86b).

Plato's presentation of the Myth of Er explains his thoughts on the afterlife and reincarnation really well (Plato, 1993, Republic 614b-621d). The story of Er closely resembles near-death experiences. Er is thought to have been killed during a battle. Surrounded by people when lying on the pyre, he returns to life. He shares his experience with the others. According to Plato, Er goes through the following experience when he dies:

He said that his soul left his body and went on a journey, with lots of other souls as his companions. They came to an awesome place, where they found two openings next to each other in the earth, and two others directly opposite them up in the sky. There were judges sitting between the openings who made their assessment and then told the moral ones to take the right-hand route which went up and through the sky, and gave them tokens to wear on their fronts to show what behaviour they'd been assessed for, but told the immoral ones to take the left-hand, downward route. These people also had tokens, but on their backs, to show all their past deeds. When Er approached, however, the judges said that he had to report back to mankind about what goes on there, and they told him to listen and observe everything that happened in the place (614 c-d, 371-372).

Er's experience contains a number of NDE stages. He leaves his body, travels to a border he is not allowed to pass, observes the events and later reunites with his body. In addition to the

typical modern-day experience, the story of Er is also filled with Greek pagan mythology. After either a time of great torment or heavenly rest, the souls pass before Lady Necessity who directs them to travel through the Plain of Oblivion to the river of Lethe (forgetfulness) to take a drink and fall asleep (621 a-b). Mixed with the Greek mythological elements, the event ends with the revelation that the souls are born into new bodies, similarly to what happens in some Eastern traditions.

Although the story of Er is told to defend Plato's claim that it is better to choose a virtuous life, it is representative of Plato's entire philosophy of a separately existing soul. The soul is necessary for the acquisition of knowledge in the form of remembering the Ideas or Forms in every life. It is crucial for the soul to be different from the body to separate the person's true essence from an easily corruptible earthly body. Without an incorruptible soul, true knowledge is not possible and the person cannot become virtuous. Hence, Plato's entire philosophy is dependent on this incorruptible soul that can travel from life to life to gain an increasingly virtuous existence until it finds philosophical knowledge in an effort to become fully enlightened.

## **Aristotle**

Aristotle has rejected Plato's theory of Forms, which led him away from the type of soul-body dualism that Plato has argued for. Aristotle defines metaphysics as the ultimate science that investigates "being as being" in Book Gamma of his *Metaphysics* written in 350 B. C. E. (Aristotle, 1971). In this work, while contemplating the meaning of true substance, Aristotle disagrees with Plato's theory of Forms because Plato's Forms cannot account for the knowledge and existence of particular things and their ability to change. To say that particular things participate in the Forms is not enough to explain the relationship between the universal Forms and the particular things. Simply, the immutable, simple, eternal, immaterial, divine and ultimately real, supra-sensible entities do not seem to have anything in common with particular things in the world other than some abstract notion of participation that, according to Aristotle, explains nothing. Therefore, instead of thinking about the Forms as separately existing supra-sensible entities, Aristotle thinks of them as universals that exist in each particular thing. In his mind, there is no such thing as pure matter; matter already has a form in each instance.

The result of his claim about the universal Forms is that the soul becomes the form of the body. The soul is the function of the living body. Aristotle argues that "But since it [the natural body] is also a body of such and such a kind, viz. having a life, the body cannot be the soul; the body is the subject or matter, not what is attributed to it. Hence the soul must be a substance in the sense of the form of a natural body having life potentially within it" (Aristotle, 1947, 412a, 171-172). Once the soul becomes the form of the body, it is tied up with the body's destiny. Hence, for Aristotle, as it was argued previously, the soul's destiny is to perish with the body.

The distinction between Plato's dualism and Aristotle's dualism defines the future of belief in survival of death. Plato's dualism leads to an argument for substance dualism, the belief that the mind or soul and the body are two different types of substances, an argument that René Descartes later becomes famous for. Here, the soul or mind survives death. Aristotle's dualism, on the other hand, leads to two different types of an argument. It can lead to attribute dualism, a belief that there are two different kinds of attributes or properties, mental and the physical, with the understanding that both are attributes of the same underlying substance, the body. Alternatively, it can lead to materialism, the rejection of any kinds of dualism; instead, it can lead to the acceptance of the view that the mind and its mental states are eliminable or, at least, in some ways, reducible to the body and material states. The two types of argument grown out of Aristotelian philosophy end the existence of the soul or mind at the moment of bodily death and this type of materialism becomes dominant by the Twentieth Century.

## **Descartes**

Before the rise of materialism, in the Seventeenth Century, Descartes has embraced the theory of substance dualism, famously becoming the father of Modern Philosophy. His substance dualism leaves difficult, unanswered questions about the mind and the body that haunt philosophers even to this day. Interestingly, his mind-body dualism in the *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) was not meant to be a metaphysical project; rather, it was a quest for a theory of knowledge with a secure foundation for truth. In essence, Descartes turns away from the Aristotelian inspired Scholastic philosophy of his day by rejecting the reliance on sensory knowledge for discovering certain truth and by rejecting the Aristotelian idea of substance as the infusion of matter and form (Descartes, 1641/1993). He favours the use of the method of doubt

where he doubts everything uncertain, which includes his senses. This method leads him to his well-known line on the one, single indubitable truth: "I am; I exist--this is certain" (II. 27, 19).

From here, he establishes the existence of the mind as a thinking thing and the existence of the body as an extended thing (II 27 & II 31). Descartes treats the body not as a matter defined by form, as Aristotle did before him, but instead, as a mechanical device defined by its mechanical configuration and parts. The mind is present in the body the same way as "a sailor is present in a ship" (VI. 81, 53). The mind's nature is to think while the body's nature is to harmoniously work its extended, mechanically designed parts. Descartes concludes that, since the thinking thing and the extended thing are so radically different in nature, at least two different kinds of created substances have to be in existence. For this reason, historically, he is referred to as a substance dualist.

Descartes' substance dualism gives way to a belief in survival of death. If the mind and the body are different substances, they can exist without each other. Once the body disintegrates, the mind can become free of it. This is the theory that Descartes actually defends:

Again, the soul is of such nature that it has no relation to extension, nor to the dimensions or other properties of the matter composing of the body, but only to the whole assemblage of the organs...It does not become smaller on the removal of the parts of the body. When, however, the assemblage of the bodily organs disintegrates, it itself, in its entirety, withdraws from the body (Descartes, 1649/1952, Article 30).

Since the mind and the body are of different substances, the mind does not have any difficulty existing apart from the body after death. Descartes' reliance on natural reason allows him to come to this conclusion. Of course, reason cannot take one any further. Therefore, the fate of the mind after the demise of the body remains a mystery. However, since Descartes does defend the existence of God (Descartes, 1641/1993), it is safe to say that, according to this theory, God will provide the manner in which the mind can exist apart from the body.

Even though Descartes' philosophy does favour survival of death just like Plato's theory does before him, the theory itself suffers from a serious flaw. If the mind and the body are truly

made of two distinct substances, how do they interact? How does the mind influence the body and the body influence the mind? The body has a surface because it is extended, but the unextended mind does not have a surface to come into contact with the body. Initially, Descartes chooses the Pineal Gland in the brain to locate the seat of mind (Descartes, 1649/1960, Article 31). However, pointing to the location really does not explain the manner of interaction. This problem becomes a major obstacle to the acceptance of substance dualism. Historically, the obstacle is so great that most philosophers abandon the theory.

If two completely different substances cannot be made to work to explain the nature of reality, the intuition is always to reduce the number of substances to just one. Basically, the movement is from dualism to monism. Monism can be two major kinds: either the mind is reduced to body or the body is reduced to the mind. Occasionally, the substance is argued to be neutral, neither body nor mind, in which case the body and the mind most often become attributes of the substance, such as in the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza. Although some idealists, such as George Berkeley, have tried to reduce the body to the mind, historically speaking, philosophers have favoured the reduction from mind to body. Thus, historically, the reduction of the mind to the body or matter became the goal for many learned individuals. This is the way modern-day materialism has begun.

## **Materialism**

According to Jeffrey C. Leon the dichotomy between the subjective and the objective caused a major shift in worldview (Leon, 1999). In ancient and medieval periods, reasoning, observation and argument were equally employed in metaphysics and in physical sciences. However, separating mind and matter meant a shifting of worldviews. Leon explains it the following way:

Philosophy becomes the realm of epistemology, ethics, and mind. Science becomes the study of facts. Room for metaphysical speculation in philosophy becomes increasingly crowded out by the intrusion of scientific theories of reality into formerly philosophical domains, and eventually even the realm of mind is forsaken to science (56).

The problem of forsaking the realm of mind to science is that science is predominantly focused on the study of matter. Therefore, scientific facts largely consist of statements about matter. In this environment, it is easy to see the reason that the desired monism becomes materialism. As large amounts of scientific facts are piled up about matter, the desire to have accurate facts about the mind in terms of matter increases. Hence, the historical era has set the tone for the mind to be studied and understood in terms of matter.

Historically, in the Seventeenth Century, Thomas Hobbes was one of the first materialists of his era. He criticized the dualists, such as Descartes, for proposing the existence of an immaterial substance, which he thought was unnecessary. He says, "I can explain all the workings of the mind using only material resources. What need is there to postulate an immaterial mind when this perfectly good, and more minimal, explanation is available?" (Hobbes, 1651/1981, 2.9). In his time, perhaps a shocking declaration, Hobbes is a fully committed materialist. He believes in motion, energy and striving of the body that account for the entire human life. He also believes in the afterlife in terms of Christian resurrection strictly on religious ground where God would resurrect the body of the faithful upon the second coming of Christ. But, his philosophy has no place for an independently existing soul or mind, which arguably is a form of trance logic.

The early mechanical vision of the materialist view was disappointing. Heavily relying on the source of sensation, the view could not accommodate changes in nature. For example, John Locke's theory of Tabula Rasa (Locke, 1689/1975) could not explain any intuitive idea, instinctive act or an adaptation to changing circumstances. How can a blank slate of experience at birth explain the newborn baby's ability to suckle from her mother's breast? There were early suggestions to overcome this problem. For instance, Julian Offray de la Mettrie conceived of human beings as enlightened machines whose dignity, humanity, morality, happiness and their lack of fear of death is provided by nature (De la Mettrie, 1747/1912). According to de la Mettrie, "he [the materialist] will await death without either fear or desire, and will cherish life...he will be happy, in short, in feeling nature, and in being present at the enchanting spectacle of the universe..." (147-148). This early solution of connecting an enlightened machine to nature fails though, because, undoubtedly, nature can also be cruel where natural disaster, murder, rape, cannibalism and other undignified, inhumane, immoral, unhappy and fearful events take place.

Eventually, the materialists solved the issue of instinct, intuition and change with the ability of nature, as matter, being self-organized. The original notion of atomism introduced by Leucippus and Democritus, and later also embraced by Pierre Gassendi and Robert Boyle in the Seventeenth Century, suggested that the universe was made up of lifeless atoms and void (Furley, 1967). David Hume spoke about material causation using the analogy of billiard balls (Hume, 1748/1993). This inert, lifeless billiard ball like image was essentially replaced. Denis Diderot argued, for example, that, instead of thinking of nature as a collection of billiard balls, nature consisted of vibrant, living matter which was capable of self-transformation over time (Diderot, 1769/1982). Erasmus Darwin also solved the problem of instinct with his theory of evolution of the species (Darwin 1859/1993). The result was that the materialists could finally account for instinct, intuition and change in matter. Human beings became the product of evolutionary processes of vibrant, living and self-transforming matter in nature.

The solution seemed brilliant. The problem of dualism was gone; two completely different substances did not have to mysteriously interact with each other. The number of substances was reduced to one. Monism became the winning solution in the form of materialism. The vibrant, living and self-transforming nature, allowing for the evolution of the species, made all the problem of the early lifeless, billiard-ball like image disappear from view. All one had to do was observe objects in nature and make conclusions about them to see how the material world worked.

Ultimately, the mind disappeared into matter, so to speak. Analytic philosophers have developed a number of material explanations to clarify the idea behind the mind and its mental states. Today, those who believe in interaction between the body and the mind often hold either the functionalist theory or the identity theory (Bonjour & Baker, 2008). According to functionalism, mental states are functional states. Mental states are caused by the inputs from the environment, the interactions with other mental states and the behavioural outputs into the environment. It is an input-output system of causal explanation. Of course, it so happens that the human brain is the ideal input-output system for human beings. According to the identity theory, mental states are simply brain states. This is treated as an empirical discovery, similar to the discovery that water is actually a molecule that contains two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom. Without going into these theories any further, it is easy to see that modern-day

materialism is trying very hard to reduce the mind and mental states into the body and its brain states. In fact, some materialists went as far as trying to eliminate the mind and its states altogether by having adopted the theory of behaviourism at the early stages of the Twentieth Century. Logical behaviourists have claimed that mental states are simply behavioural states and dispositions to certain behaviours. At the extreme, people like Paul and Patricia Churchland have offered an argument for eliminative materialism where, for example, Patricia Churchland has taken a stand against the use of commonsense mental states altogether (Churchland, 1986). These materialists basically deny that there are conscious states at all! This effort shows the length materialists go to in order to make the mind disappear into matter.

European Continental philosophers have fared no better at distancing themselves from materialism than the analytic philosophers. Some have simply shied away from talking about metaphysics altogether not having to deal with the problem. For example, Martin Heidegger has developed an ontology in which he analyzes the conditions in which human beings find themselves, but refuses to speculate about what happens when they are no longer present in the world (Heidegger, 1962, II. 1. 53, H 265). Alternatively, some other philosophers have just given into the pressure and have assumed the position of materialism. For example, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari have developed a larger system of reality, they refer to as the rhizome, which explores the various thresholds at which their materially conceived systems self-organize (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). And, some other philosophers have tried to overcome dualism without specifically embracing materialism by developing theories that are difficult to categorize. For example, Maurice Merleau-Ponty has introduced the concept of the flesh as a result of a self-critique of his previously dualistic tendencies (Merleau-Ponty, 1968). However, it is difficult to tell whether the flesh can be categorized more along the lines of materialism, neutral monism or some other theory. Basically, it seems that materialism has grown to be too powerful to truly escape from. It lingers over the philosophers' heads whether they are trying to avoid it, embrace it or rework it.

As powerful as materialism has grown to become, the important lesson to learn from its rise to power is that it is an historical phenomenon. It is not an ahistorical description of the nature of reality; it is not an ahistorical fact or an apriori piece of knowledge people have discovered. Materialism is an historical response to a philosophical problem, a response to a



frustration with Cartesian dualism that has been unable to solve the interaction problem between mind and body. The presence of two substances created too complex of a system of reality to maintain it. The historical solution has been to simplify and reduce the number of substances to one. To have only one substance is a neat solution and, pressure from scientific discoveries and curiosity shown toward the mechanism of the physical realm, pushed the substance reduction in favour of materialism. Materialism has thrived on scientific discoveries to further develop its system. It has grown slowly and steadily over the centuries incorporating more and more of those scientific discoveries that have supported its theory. Ultimately, materialists have worked out theories of the mind, as well, that could be presented in terms of the already existing theory of materialism. Materialism has become an edifice that was historically built piece by piece to bedazzle a segment of the population who has come to admire it.

Of course, the materialists can object to this characterization by pointing out that just because materialism has arisen historically, it does not mean that the theory is untrue. It has to be granted that the materialists may have a point, here. Something can be envisioned at some point in history, be developed, and then turn out to be true. Copernicus' heliocentric universe is a good example. Copernicus envisioned the idea, Galileo developed it, and other scientists discovered and described the heliocentric universe with great sophistication and, it turned out to be the correct vision. Therefore, something can be envisioned at a certain time in history, be slowly developed and turn out to be the correct vision.

The question is still whether the material vision of reality is the correct vision. It is important to find out because, if it is the correct vision, there is no hope for an afterlife. If the mind disappears into the brain in some way, all phenomenal experiences, including near-death experiences can be reduced to brain states and brain functions. But, how does one find out if materialism is the correct vision?

### The Reality of Matter

To find out if materialism is the correct vision of reality, it is necessary to ask the basic questions: What is materialism? What do materialists believe? And, what does it mean to say that reality is made of matter? If these questions are answered, the answers can be analyzed,

scrutinized and a verdict can be delivered on the possible materiality of the world that exists around human beings, which they often refer to as nature.

Despite the power materialism enjoys in the current era, it is very difficult to find a comprehensive work on the beliefs of materialists because most philosophical works in recent times have focused on the mind-body issue. Of course, their goal is to explain the mind in terms of matter. Here, the materialists, under the theory they often call physicalism, try to commit themselves to a modest, minimalist explanation in order to come as close to their true belief about materialism as possible. For example, David Braddon-Mitchell and Frank Jackson have explained the materialist position in terms of supervenience (1997). This position utilizes possible worlds to show what has to be the minimal standard for all mental states in some way to end up being physical in nature. They suggest the following definition: "Any world that is a minimal physical duplicate of our world is a psychological duplicate of our world" (Braddon-Mitchell & Jackson, 1997: 24). The point is that the minimal physical duplicate of the world would need to utilize the physical nature of this world in order to be considered physical. If the minimally physical duplicate does not produce a psychologically duplicate world, then, materialism is false. However, if it does, materialism may be considered to be true. This is the type of minimalist commitment materialists usually make in philosophy of mind to clarify their true position.

Beyond this minimalist position, though, the materialists have declined to provide a comprehensive summary of what they actually believe in. They focus so much on solving the mind-body problem that they do not work out the details of their physical universe with all its possibilities and consequences. Perhaps, the exception to this rather neglectful behaviour is Richard C. Vitzthum's book called *Materialism: An Affirmative History and Definition* (1995). In this book, Vitzthum explains that materialism makes three basic claims. First, without developing or referring to any specific theory of time, he claims that nature is a continuum. Nature works according to a causal principle; therefore, nature has no beginning or end. Even the Big Bang did not arise out of nothing. Everything comes from something. This means that nature and the matter upon which nature is built are forever. The formation of matter perishes but matter itself remains.

The second claim is that materiality is non-anthropomorphic. This means that nature does not possess intelligence in a sense that it cannot think or feel. The result is that the presence of supernatural forces in nature is not possible. Intelligence strictly arises out of matter during evolutionary processes since matter has the ability to create, amongst other configurations, intelligence. However, matter itself has no trace of intelligence in its basic form.

The final claim is that, understood in terms of physical magnitude, all levels of physical reality are equally basic. By this statement, Vitzthum means that none of the levels of reality--be it, for example, the ordinary level of the everyday world or the quantum level--is thought to be more basic than any other. They are all equally authentic, perfect and meaningful. Although scientists do talk about more fundamental levels of reality when they are trying to explain the main building blocks of matter, they cherish or value all levels to the same extent. In terms of value, none of them enjoy greater privilege and is not thought to be more fundamental than any other level.

Vitzthum adds a couple of more notes to these three basic claims. He emphasizes that nothingness or nonbeing is a meaningless concept to materialism. Since the causal principle has no beginning or end and something always comes from something else, nothing or nonbeing is a useless terminology. No break in the continuity of material order is ever possible. There is never a nothing, but neither is there any supernatural something beyond the material order. Matter is all there is.

All of Vitzthum's claims and points have been carefully crafted in order to deny certain ideological possibilities. The first claim targets the possibility of a first cause that can lead to a religious interpretation. For example, Alan B. Wallace has pointed out that the late medieval era developed a hierarchy of disciplines according to which theology dominated and enforced its ideology on philosophy and science (Wallace, 2007). In that era, the first cause was most often identified with God who created the world and, this ideology, as Wallace points out, was forced upon both the discipline of philosophy and science. Since materialism denies the possibility of God, which would exist primary to matter, the possibility of the first cause is rejected by claiming nature to be a continuum. This way, theology cannot claim supremacy over other disciplines such as science, to which the materialists claim a close connection.

The second claim rejects the possibility of the mind existing independently of matter. If nature had an imbedded intelligence, it would be possible to argue for substance dualism where both the mind and matter are considered equally important basic building blocks of reality or, for idealism where matter is either mind-dependent or mind-created. Either of these options would mean the end of materialism. Therefore, it makes sense for materialists to reject the possibility of intelligence imbedded in nature and, instead, to make intelligence the creation of matter. This way, the primacy and exclusivity of matter can be preserved.

The third claim rejects the possibility that certain levels of reality, such as the quantum level, could be held to be more basic than the level of visible reality. This is important to materialism because this claim ensures that the materially interpreted everyday reality is extended to the quantum world. If the quantum world could be treated as more basic, and therefore more valuable, it would allow some quantum physicists to entertain the possibility of a non-material interpretation of reality. For example, Nick Herbert entertains eight different interpretations of quantum reality, one of which is the interpretation that consciousness creates reality (Herbert, 1985). If quantum physicists could claim quantum reality to be more basic, this decision might lead physicists away from the materialist view.

All these claims and points are designed to tighten the rules of materialism in favour of preserving matter as the only building block of reality. In fact, if one carries the materialist beliefs to a more sophisticated level, it can be extended to other areas of philosophy such as epistemology and ethics. Charles T. Tart has created a summary of the expanded materialist beliefs (Tart, 2009). He presents this summary similar to a religious creed in order to have his audience be able to repeat it out loud while he reads it to them, section by section, in order for them to watch for their own reactions to it. The following is the entire Western Creed as it appears in his book<sup>13</sup>, *The End of Materialism* (Tart, 2009: 28):

**I believe**--in the material universe--as the only and ultimate reality--a universe controlled by fixed physical laws--and blind chance.

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<sup>13</sup> The author gives permission to all in his book to use and reproduce this section of his book he calls the Western Creed.

**I affirm**--that the universe has no creator--no objective purpose--and no objective meaning or destiny.

**I maintain**--that all ideas about God or gods--enlightened beings--prophets and saviors--or other non-physical beings and forces--are superstitions and delusions--. Life and consciousness are totally identical to physical processes--and arose from chance interactions of blind physical forces--. Like the rest of life--my life--and my consciousness--have no objective purpose--meaning--or destiny.

**I believe**--that all judgments, values, and moralities--whether my own or others'--are subjective--arising solely from biological determinants--personal history--and chance--. Free will is an illusion--. Therefore, the most rational values I can personally live by--must be based on knowledge that for me--what pleases me is good--what pains me is bad--. Those who please me or help me avoid pain--are my friends--those who pain me or keep me from my pleasure--are my enemies--. Rationality requires that friends and enemies--be used in a way that maximize my pleasure--and minimize my pain.

**I affirm**--that churches have no real use other than social support--that there are no objective sins to commit or be forgiven for--that there is no divine retribution for sin--or reward for virtue--. Virtue for me is getting what I want--without being caught and punished by others.

**I maintain**--that the death of the body--is the death of the mind--. There is no afterlife--and all hope of such is nonsense.

This is a nearly maximally worked-out vision of materialism with all its consequences. Of course, some materialists may object to this nearly maximal view. For example, mentioning physical laws and blind chance in the same sentence may make a materialist pause because the two seem incompatible with each other. Nevertheless, this nearly maximally worked-out vision of materialism represents the consequences of the full commitment to materialism.

It must be acknowledged that the human response to this nearly maximally worked-out materialism is powerful. Tart uses the above Western Creed to help his participants study their own emotional and psychological reactions to it without an intellectual analysis. According to Tart, most people come to a realization that the materialist beliefs are greatly imbedded in their society and culture. Tart says, "Most people find this exercise temporarily depressing, for they see various ways in which they share common cultural attitudes of a materialistic dismissal of spirituality, attitudes and beliefs that interfere with their full commitment to their spiritual search they consciously value" (2009:28). This means that the nearly maximally worked-out vision of materialism silently exists in society. Many materialists may be committed to the modest, minimalist interpretation, such as the supervenience theory, but the consequences of this materialism reverberate in society on a much larger scale. This is very strange in a climate where the Washington Times has reported in 2012 that 84% of the world still belongs to a religious faith and less than 7% are atheists and agnostics (Harper, 2012). The materialist vision has power that has subconsciously sneaked into people's lives. It is a seductive theory.

Even though this theory seems to be very seductive, the question is still whether it has a chance to succeed as the correct vision. It is true that physical monism is a more simple theory than dualism. But, this is not enough. There has to be something special about materialism that makes some people become convinced that it is the correct theory. Perhaps, the answer lies in the concept of matter.

What is matter anyway? It is one thing to declare that the universe is purely physical in nature, but it is quite another thing to actually explain what matter is. What is this matter that the materialists are so committed to? The answer to this question might be shocking. Most materialists honestly admit that they do not have the answer to what matter is. For example, even though he believes that matter is all there is, Vitzthum confesses that the basic components of matter may never be known because the basic components may elude scientists forever (Vitzthum, 1995). In the same manner, Braddon-Mitchell and Jackson also profess to not knowing what matter is: "Now, of course, sciences are far from complete. To that extent, we do not yet know exactly what the physical properties, entities and relations are according to our definition" (Braddon-Mitchell & Jackson, 1997: 14). And, Herbert elegantly starts one of his chapters in explaining quantum reality by declaring that, "One of the best-kept secrets of science

is that physicists have lost their grip on reality" (Herbert, 1985, 15). Basically, there is a wide admission from experts that they do not know what matter is. This means that materialists are putting their faith in materialism without having any idea of what the basic building block of their reality is.

Yet, despite their admission that they do not know what matter is, the confidence of the materialists does not weaken. Braddon-Mitchell and Jackson confidently state that, "The incompleteness of current physical theory does not imply incompleteness of the kinds of ingredients that will be needed to complete the job" (Braddon-Mitchell & Jackson, 1997: 14). Alyssa Ney takes an "attitudinal view", according to which "physicalism is an attitude one takes form one's ontology completely and solely according to what physics says exists" (Ney, 2008: 9). And, William G. Lycan (1987) proudly declares in the epilogue of his book that "materialists remain unembarrassed by the lack of any particularly convincing argument for materialism..." (121). It seems that materialists have an unwavering confidence in their theory. They never question their own confidence. In fact, some freely admit that, "Materialism is orthodoxy nowadays" (Braddon-Mitchell & Jackson, 1997: 4).

Why are materialists so confident? If most have a minimalist or roughly worked-out thesis of materialism and an inability to know what matter is, why do they not waver in their confidence? The answer lies in the word "science". They have complete faith in science; science, which they believe is supporting their ambition for a materialist vision of reality.

### Materialism and Science

Does science support the theory of materialism? The short answer is "no". The longer answer starts with asking what science is. Bertrand Russell has offered a classical definition: "Science is an attempt to discover, by means of observation, and reasoning based upon it, first, particular facts about the world, and then laws connecting facts with one another and (in fortunate cases) making it possible to predict future occurrences" (Russell, 1935/1997: 8). This definition offers the fundamental idea behind science; which is, that science is a method of studying the world. It is driven by the desire to discover something, and it uses the methods of observation and reasoning to accumulate facts and to find out some laws about the world in order

to make current and future predictions. Science is a method, not a metaphysical statement about the world. It does not have any underlying metaphysical commitment that drives it forward.

Any basic physics textbook openly admits that science does not even have a particular method. For example, one physics book teaches secondary school students that, "There is no single 'scientific method'...Knowledge, skills, luck, imagination, trial and error, educated guesses, and great patience--all play a part" (Davids, Neff & Zitzewitz, 1992: 9). In fact, historically speaking, a specific method in one form or another has dominated at any particular time, such as Aristotle's method driven by essentialism and teleology, Bacon's inductivism or Galileo's empiricism (Matthews, 1989). The Twentieth Century also added more modern methods of verification and falsification, inspired by the logical positivist, Rudolph Carnap (Stumpf, 1993). The point is that scientific methods change with times and can even widely vary within the same timeframe without any single method dominating. Science is fluid and the only factor that unites all scientists is the desire to discover things in the world.

The great thing about science is that scientists have to conclude without a metaphysical bias whatever results their methods are producing. For example, when Galileo observed, calculated and proved that planet Earth belongs to a heliocentric system, physicists were forced to eventually rewrite the physics books to reflect the shift from a geocentric universe to a heliocentric universe. As difficult as it may have been to emotionally part from the long held belief in the geocentric system, the move eventually had to be made to the newer system that better fit their astronomical data. In fact, this type of change has occurred several times in history even on larger scales. Aristotelian physics was replaced by Galilean physics, then, by Newtownian physics, then, by Einsteinean physics and finally by a more integrated quantum physics (Davids, Neff & Zitzewitz, 1992). Each time it happens that the physics books, or science books in general, are rewritten, there may be hesitancy and resistance from some individuals. Eventually, the new system is embraced, though. This means that systems come and go, rise and fall, with new results on which scientists make newer conclusions.

Russell has argued that science came into conflict with religion exactly because science does not have a creed to rely on (Russell, 1935/1997). He says, "Science starts, not from large assumptions, but from particular facts discovered by observation or experiment" (13). From



these facts, general rules are deduced and a hypothesis is built. If the hypotheses are confirmed, a working theory is produced. As opposed to this approach, religion is relying on a creed. This creed is central to a religion, without which it falls apart. For this reason, this creed cannot be questioned. Thus, religion starts with an ironclad theory. All hypotheses, general rules and facts have to accommodate this prevailing theory. The result is a conflict between these approaches. As Russell argues, "Creeds are the intellectual source of the conflict between religion and science" (9). Basically, if one starts with a theory, there is no room to grow. The person is forced to rearrange hypotheses, rules and facts according to the dictates of the theory.

Does this sound familiar? Tart has built the Western Creed to show what a nearly full-fledged materialism looks like. It shows that materialism is a theory even if a materialist denies some of the details Tart has outlined. Even in support for the minimalist standard, such as the supervenience theory, a materialist is committed to the belief in a type of physical reality. Therefore, materialism is a theory that acts like a creed where a materialist has to rearrange all facts, general rules and hypotheses according to its theory. Of course, this stands in direct opposition to what science does. Scientists start from small observations and experiments to gain facts based on which they eventually build a theory, which can be overthrown if the theory no longer serves its purpose. This means that scientists do not necessarily support materialism. In science, if the facts, general rules or the hypotheses do not support materialism, the materialist theory is set aside. Barušs eloquently sums it up by saying that, "In other words, I think that the point of science is the acquisition of actual knowledge by a scientist. And, of course, such knowledge could be contrary to popular opinions, including materialism" (Barušs, 2007:16).

Of course, the materialists can easily argue that all scientific facts just happen to support the materialist theory. The argument is that the world just happens to be in such a way that materialism is true. Unfortunately for the materialists, this statement is actually not true. For example, as it was previously stated, Herbert has created at least eight different interpretations of quantum reality compatible with quantum results of which, arguably, only about two or three, at the most, can be shown to be in line with materialism (Herbert, 1985). Tart has also written his entire book about psychic experiences which demonstrate that, "human beings occasionally have experiences and show certain behaviors that cannot be reduced to materialistic explanations and that look like fundamental aspects of a spiritual nature" (Tart, 2009: 36). And, studies in near-

death experiences also show that the experiences are compatible with a theory of an afterlife in another realm. A good scientist is open to the possibility that in these instances materialism is not necessarily true. Simply, it is not the case that science clearly supports materialism. The scientific findings can support a number of equally great theories.

This is the reason that materialism does not take a default position in any investigation. In the area of near-death studies, it is just untrue that as long as there is a materialist explanation, the materialists are automatically right. Both the Afterlife Hypothesis and the Dying Brain Hypothesis are possible as far as science is concerned. This means that near-death researchers are not obligated to counter-argue every point of the materialist explanation in order to show that the Afterlife Hypothesis is valid. There is no extra effort required for those who support this Hypothesis. They simply do not have to put in the extra effort because both theories are possible and valuable additions from the standpoint of science. Supporters of both theories have to put in the same amount of effort to make their cases because, scientifically, they stand on equal ground based on the fact that they both represent possibilities for the truth.

The fact that science does not necessarily support materialism can cause an actual friction between the two. Science is a method of investigation that is fluid in its essence. Materialism is a theory that is rather rigid in its commitment even in its most minimal expression. So, how can materialism rely on science for its truth? This has been Carl Hempel's problem, which is often referred to as Hempel's dilemma. It seems that materialism actually cannot do so. Any formulation of physicalism which uses the scientific platform is either false or trivial (Hempel, 1969). If physicalism is defined in terms of contemporary physics, it is simply false. After all, physics, as a science, is constantly changing. Its fluidity does not offer a rigid platform necessary for materialists to build a fixed theory they can believe in. What is true today, may not be true tomorrow in the world of physics and science in general. If physicalism is defined according to tomorrow's physics, however, it is trivial. Simply, nobody knows what any future physics looks like. What happens if physicists discover that reality is consciousness created? Are materialists willing to believe then in a consciousness created reality? But, then, would they still be able to call themselves materialists? Basically, materialism is at odds with science in either scenario. The materialists are trying to find something fixed in a fluid science that is just

not there. Their effort closely resembles a person trying to catch running water with a kitchen sifter.

Yet, despite the friction between materialism and science, materialists could insist that, even though science can support more than one possible theory, the evidence available supports their theory more than any other theory. For example, Russell offers a reason to be sceptical of mystical experiences. He states the following:

From a scientific point of view, we can make no distinction between a man who eats little and sees heaven and the man who drinks much and sees snakes. Each is an abnormal physical condition, and therefore has abnormal perceptions. Normal perceptions, since they have to be useful in the struggle for life, must have correspondence with the facts; but in abnormal perceptions there is no reason to expect such correspondence, and their testimony, therefore, cannot outweigh that of normal perception (Russell, 1935/1997: 188)

Russell believes that the scientific observation of people in altered state is best explained by the material outlook on life that can be described as the struggle for life. In a material universe, all useful perceptions that support the struggle for life are normal and all others are abnormal. Therefore, abnormal perceptions must be rejected. In short, Russell believes that the scientific evidence supports the materialist view of reality more than any other view. Basically, the available evidence best supports the materialist theory.

Is this argument valid, though? Does the evidence support the materialist theory more than any other theory available? To answer this question, it is necessary to take a closer look at the idea behind evidence. How does one understand the idea of "evidence"? What does it mean to rely on evidence? And, can a person actually rely on it? If one can rely on evidence, in what sense can one do so?

### Does the Evidence Speak for Itself?

"The evidence speaks for itself," is one of the most used metaphors in relation to science. It is a metaphor because it is simply a figure of speech. This figure of speech is based on a

personification of something inanimate. Basically, the evidence is not a person who can speak. The importance of this metaphor is that it often confuses people about what role the evidence actually plays. In essence, evidence is defined as "information bearing on the truth or falsity of a proposition" (Feldman, 1995: 252). In philosophical discussions, "a person's evidence is generally taken to be all the information a person has, positive or negative, relevant to the proposition" (252). The difference between the metaphor used and the definition for evidence provided is the presence or absence of a human being. The metaphor has no human evaluator present. The evidence is treated as a personified subject that is responsible for the evaluation on its own. On the other hand, the definition of evidence includes an actual human being who is responsible for evaluating the evidence. The absence or presence of a human being makes a huge difference with regard to the evaluation process. The question is how far the human subject becomes part of the evaluation process and whether the presence of the human subject in the process is desirable.

To understand the possible role any evidence plays, I will first turn to the evidentialist theory of philosophy to show what happens when one puts a strong emphasis on the power of the evidence. For example, W. K. Clifford has presented a classical view of an evidentialist's response, often cited by many from his work "The Ethics of Belief" (1879)<sup>14</sup>. Clifford argues for a strong relationship between belief and evidence. He summarizes his argument by claiming the following: "It is wrong, always, everywhere and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence" (Clifford, 1993: 505). Clifford claims that this is the responsible position to take for two reasons. First, a belief has influence on the person who holds that belief. All beliefs are significant because they build up a person's mental life and they will affect this person's actions. Second, a person's belief is not a private matter and, an irresponsible belief can do harm to the public. Since language is a public and social phenomenon and, meanings are held in common, no life can ever be truly private. This puts responsibility on the person to do what is right. Hence, the responsibility is on the person to make certain that the person is led by sufficient evidence only and avoids mistakes.

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example: Clifford, W. K. (1993) *The Ethics of Belief*. In *The Theory of Knowledge: Classic and Contemporary Readings*. L. P. Pojman (Ed.). Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing.

In essence, Clifford's statement shows that the evidentialists hold evidence in high regard. Any justification for a belief is entirely dependent on the evidence. They believe that the evidence speaks for itself in this sense. Richard Feldman and Earl Conee' theory is a good example for a theory on evidentialism (Feldman & Conee, 2004). They define evidentialism in the following manner: "What we call evidentialism is the view that the epistemic justification of a belief is determined by the quality of the believer's evidence for the belief" (83). According to Feldman and Conee, it makes no difference whether the person even has control over the attitude she takes toward a proposition that fits her evidence. If a person involuntarily believes that the lights are on in a room, the belief is still justified. On the other hand, if a person involuntarily believes that she is spied on, out of paranoia, the belief is not justified. It all depends on the quality of the evidence and not the person in question.

Following Feldman and Conee's theory, it is epistemically obligatory for a person to do what is epistemically justified. There is no intellectual requirement for a person to try the person's best to believe the truth. It is unimportant because believing, or not believing, solely depends on the person's evidence. If the evidence fits, it is justified and one is obligated to believe it. Hence, the person's ability or character does not weigh in the decision. A person's attitude is evaluated based on the evidence and not on the way the evidence arrives to the person.

Fulfilling an epistemic obligation is oriented toward the epistemic goal of knowledge acquisition in this case. Feldman and Conee do not deny that this obligation can be set aside to fulfill other moral and prudential obligations. Neither do they deny that manipulating the evidence can sometimes lead to better results. They cite two examples for this argument. First, they agree with Roderick Firth's point that a scientist will recover faster from an illness, if he believes in the recovery against the evidence to the contrary. This scientist will also enjoy the benefit of returning to work and will contribute to society upon recovery. Second, they agree that William James's exercise of the will to believe may lead to valuable epistemic ends. If one believes in God without justifying evidence in order to gain evidence for the existence of God, it is perfectly acceptable to adopt such a belief. Feldman and Conee argue, though, that even if these beliefs serve some epistemic good, the beliefs are not justified. They honestly admit that following one's epistemic obligations may not necessarily result in the "overall best epistemic consequences" (92).

Nevertheless, Feldman and Conee believe that evidentialism is the best theory as long as one's attitude toward a proposition is well founded. This means that one should adopt a belief because it is supported by the evidence and not for other reasons. If the belief is adopted for other reasons, the belief is epistemically defective. Hence, a doxastic attitude has to be "epistemically both well supported and properly arrived at" (93). Given all these factors, they believe that evidentialism is successful and one can rely on the evidence.

If one logically follows this theory, the person turns out to have very little power. The theory states that the quality of the believer's evidence for the belief determines epistemic justification. If epistemic justification is dependent on the evidence, it is hard to know exactly what kind of and how much power the person has in the first place. It was already decided that the person does not necessarily have any power over the acquisition of belief. The belief may arrive voluntarily or involuntarily to the person. Yet, once the person obtains the belief, this person is obligated to do what is epistemically justified. Here, one seems to have the power to choose the highest or best quality of evidence to be able to become epistemically justified. In fact, as it was just stated, one is obligated to do so. Of course, anybody may choose to ignore the advice and go with a lower quality of evidence, or no evidence at all. The drawback is simply that the person would not be epistemically justified. The person really seems to have a power to choose in this sense.

Yet, this power seems to be very limited. One has the choice to be either epistemically justified or epistemically not justified. However, as soon as the person decides to be epistemically justified, this individual has no choice but to accept the highest quality, or best, evidence available. In a sense, as soon as one chooses to be epistemically justified, one has to hand over the power to the evidence. At this point, the evidence is in charge because it is the quality of the believer's evidence for the belief, and not the believer, that determines epistemic justification. In short, the believer is powerless after the choice to be epistemically justified has been reached. This is an example of a theory where the involvement of a human subject is minimized in the evaluation of the evidence.

It is possible that this way of portraying the evidence is acceptable for the materialists. After all, their potential argument is that, although science can support more than one possible

theory, the evidence available supports their theory more than any other theory. In fact, this claim can be correct in cases where the quality of the evidence allows for it. If the quality of evidence is straightforward and tangible, it is easy to hand over the power to the evidence. For example, if the mathematical calculations fit the theory of the existence of a heliocentric universe, it is easy to conclude that the universe is in fact heliocentric. The best quality of evidence will deny that the universe is geocentric where the Greek gods live on Mount Olympus on one of its highest realms or that God lives in heaven beyond the stars. This means that all one has to do is to be epistemically responsible to choose the highest or best quality of evidence and the evidence will show the solid result that can potentially support the theory of materialism more than any other theory.

However, evidentialism is harder to use to support materialism where the quality of evidence is not straightforward and not tangible. Here, it is not easy to hand over the power to the evidence because the evidence holder is not passive. The person evaluating the evidence has to actively determine the sufficiency of the evidence. To demonstrate the extent of the problem evidentialists find themselves in when dealing with the determination of the quality of the evidence, an interesting and intriguing hypothetical example can be created in the form of a cheating wife. In this hypothetical example, the relationship between the sufficiency of evidence and the evidence holder is fully explored because in the everyday example where a woman is suspected of being unfaithful to her husband, it is difficult to decide at what stage the evidence is sufficient to conclude that she is in fact not faithful to her husband. There could be several clues where each clue represents an increasing amount of evidence. Let's assume that there are ten pieces of potential evidence ranked from 1 to 10. Number 1 represents the weakest evidence and number 10 represents the strongest evidence. Here are the ten pieces of evidence in order:

1. Male perfume can be smelled on the woman's clothes.
2. A man's phone number is found in her purse.
3. She is seen having lunch with the man.
4. She is seen kissing the man on the cheeks.

5. She is seen walking with the man arm-in-arm.
6. She is seen kissing the man on the lips.
7. She is seen walking into a hotel room with the man.
8. She is found sitting on a couch in the hotel room with the man both partially undressed.
9. She is found with the man naked on the hotel room bed.
10. She is found naked in the hotel room bed in the act of having sex with the man.

Gaining an increasing amount of evidence on the wife's infidelity, the question becomes, at what point is the evidence sufficient enough to believe that the wife is cheating on her husband? Number 10 may be considered conclusive evidence in this case unless the woman is not consenting but, instead, she has fallen victim to a devastating experience of being forced. In this case, the evidence is not conclusive. However, short of number 10 where one assumes that the woman has consented to the act, at what stage should the husband believe that his wife is unfaithful? At each stage, there could be an innocent explanation. For example, in evidence number 5 where she is seen walking with the man arm-in-arm, the man can be a childhood friend she is very close to. Even the nudity act in number 9 can be explained. She can claim that she is practicing a new sport called naked wrestling. It appears that the evidence, on its own, simply does not indicate at what stage the husband should be convinced about his wife's unfaithfulness.

It seems that such conviction is largely dependent on the husband in question; it is not simply dependent on the evidence. Whether there is an alternate plausible explanation is already affected by the type of husband he is. A jealous husband will be convinced of the wife's infidelity at a very early stage. Smelling a strange man's perfume or finding a phone number might be enough. For the jealous husband the quality of the evidence is sufficient to determine guilt at an early stage. A naïve husband, on the other hand, might even believe the story about naked wrestling. In his case, the quality of the evidence is not sufficient. Hence, the evidence by itself will not determine the quantity or type of evidence needed for a belief to be accepted. It is up to the husband in question to determine what should count as good, sufficient evidence and to



what degree a certain type of evidence should be trusted. Here, evidentialism is unable to help. It cannot help because the determination of the quality is believer-dependent. It is simply the case that the person's participation adds something extra to the epistemic justification of a belief. This means that one cannot simply rely on the evidence in this sense. The evidence cannot speak for itself as the metaphor's originally intended meaning would suggest.

This means that, if the quality of the evidence is not straightforward and tangible, it may not have the power to provide an adequate result on its own. The evidence holder who is a human subject has to step in to determine at what point the evidence is sufficient enough to accept a particular conclusion. This is the point where it gets tricky. For materialists, the evidence is sufficient enough at a lower threshold if it supports materialism, in which case, of course, they suffer from confirmation bias. On the other hand, if the evidence does not support materialism, they put the threshold so high that the evidence becomes unacceptable at even the highest level. For example, Neil Grossman has pointed out that an unreasonable level of threshold exists in the case of near-death experiences:

When it is pointed out to them [materialists] that there exist many well-documented cases that satisfy their proposed criterion, they will simply make their criterion more stringent, and at some point cross the line between the reasonable demand for scientific evidence and the unreasonable (and unscientific) demand for logical proof (Grossman, 2002: 9-10).

It is safe to say that in cases where the evidence is not straightforward and tangible and, for this reason, the evidence holder needs to step in to determine the sufficiency of the evidence, the materialist bias easily sneaks into the picture. Of course, the materialists are not alone. Any theory holder may have a strong bias toward the person's own interpretation. Nevertheless, the existence of a materialist bias can show that it is not true that the evidence supports the materialist theory more than it supports any other scientific theory. How could it do so, if the evidence holder gets to determine at what point the evidence is acceptable to adopt a particular theory?

It seems that evidentialism offers disappointing results. Still, as tempting as it may be to some, setting aside the evidence is not an option either. Pojman shows in one of his arguments that direct descriptive volitionalism, which he defines as acquiring beliefs “directly simply by willing to believe certain propositions,” is unacceptable (Pojman, 1993: 526). He states that “there is something psychologically aberrant about the notion of voliting” and there is something “incoherent about holding that a particular belief is held decisively on the basis of wanting to have that belief”(527). Pojman argues that the psychological aberrance comes from the fact that the acquisition of the act of will to believe is a basic act that is supposed to happen in full consciousness<sup>15</sup>. According to him, this full consciousness is not possible because the world normally forces itself on a person. The world forcing itself upon the person is a passive act that a person does not choose. This means that the person does not choose a belief in full consciousness. The incoherence in the theory of volitionalism arises from its claim that a belief can be gained independent of the evidence. According to Pojman, it seems incoherent to suggest that a person can will to believe by knowingly setting aside the evidence. A person’s belief has to have a connection to the truth. In the absence of truth, it makes no sense to believe, in full consciousness, in a proposition as a result of a person having just willed it to believe<sup>16</sup>.

Although it is potentially possible to object to his metaphysical portrayal of the world as a world capable of forcing itself on a person, Pojman's concern is still legitimate in this instance. Given the human condition where the world at least seemingly forces itself on a person at times, it is ill advised to adopt a belief without consideration of the evidence such a world provides. For example, to believe in the veridicality of NDEs just because one wants to believe in it for no apparent reason and apart from all evidence is psychologically disagreeable and logically questionable. Hence, setting aside the evidence is undoubtedly not a good solution either if one wants to tackle the problem of evidence. One needs to rely on the available evidence in some sense.

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<sup>15</sup> Pojman describes full consciousness as full awareness of the decisions made by the act of will when it produces beliefs.

<sup>16</sup> Pojman argues at the end of this article that it is morally permissible to indirectly volit. See: L. P. Pojman, *Believing, Willing and the Ethics of Belief*. In *The Theory of Knowledge: Classical and Contemporary Readings* Pojman, L. P. (ed). (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing, 1993) p.p. 546-556.

Often times, the attempted solution to get to the evidence is to minimize or altogether eliminate the influence of the human subject, the believer, by simply turning for help from objectivity. The idea is that if one actively pursues and embraces objectivity, then, both volitionalism and the bias of the belief holder disappears. This means that the problem of will to believe in the veridicality of NDEs for no apparent reason or the personality of a jealous or naive husband in the cheating scenario can be easily overcome by being objective. Basically, if one is objective it is possible to rely on the available evidence without compromising it.

There are strategies that work toward achieving objectivity. For example, Evan Fales argues that, "When doubt arises about scientific hypothesis or sense perceptual claims recourse can be had to (at least) the following sorts of strategies: observations can be checked by other observers and can be repeated; a claim can be often tested by other means; competing claims can be tested and disconfirmed" (Fales, 1996: 26-27). According to this argument, the ability to replace observers, repeated observations and alternative means can purify the evidence by freeing it from the curse of subjective biases. This way, the objective standpoint can show the true value of the evidence. Of course, it is possible to argue that the reliability of such a strategy does not necessarily provide validity. For example, all human beings can stare at the sky and conclude that the sky is moving and the earth is standing still. In this case, repeated observations done by multiple number of people will only offer a reliable result of the apparent movement of the sky. It will not offer a valid description of the sky-earth movement. But, setting aside any possible shortcomings of these strategies for the moment, naturally, a materialist argument would conclude that evidence gained through such a strategy supports materialism more than any other theory.

It is true that objectivity that yields scientific results gained in the above manner may be at times more compatible with materialism than with other theories. However, embracing objectivity has a serious weakness. Adopting an objective standpoint does not mean embracing reality as it is. To understand this point, first, it has to be clarified what the words "subjective" and "objective" can possibly mean. The word "subjective" can be interpreted in a solipsistic way to indicate one's own mental states only. Other people's mental states and objects in the world are known objectively in a sense that they are not part of one's own mental states. Alternatively, the word "subjective" can also be interpreted as anybody's mental states. Here, mental states are

opposed to objects in the world that are not part of any mental operations or states. Therefore, depending on the meaning of the word "subjective", objectivity can be more or less restrictive.

What does it mean to be objective then? Historically, the idea of objectivity arises on the basis of primary and secondary qualities. For example, John Locke listed "Solidity, Extension, Figure, Motion, or Rest, and Number" (Locke, 1689/1979: VIII, ¶ 9, 135) as primary qualities, which he thought of as qualities existing apart from the mind. Primary qualities are different because they are independent of the perceiving mind. As opposed to these qualities, secondary qualities such as colours, sounds, tastes, smells and touch are mind dependent. They do not exist apart from the mind. Since primary qualities are independent of the mind, they are thought to be the objective qualities. They are simply out there in the world even if there are no minds existing in the world. This means that to be objective is to focus on the primary qualities in this less solipsistic and more restrictive sense of objectivity.

If one is objective in this sense, objectivity does lead to a support for materialism. It is natural for it to do so since the focus on primary qualities always leads back to the world of objects. Solid objects in extended space where figures are discernable as they move around predominantly describe the world of objects. If one remains in this restricted world, the world seems to appear in its material form. Hence, this type of objectivity always leads back to the material realm and objectivity in this sense may support the materialist interpretation more than any of the alternatives.

The problem is that objectivity in this sense does not describe the full extent of reality. How could it describe the full extent of reality when it leaves out the subjective mental states and operations that are doing the description in the first place? Thomas Nagel puts it the following way:

One of the strongest philosophical motives is the desire for a comprehensive picture of objective reality, since it is easy to assume that that is all there really is. But the very idea of objective reality guarantees that such a picture will not comprehend everything; we ourselves are the first obstacles to such an ambition (Nagel, 1986: 14).

If one tries to leave out the subjective element that is responsible for the objective description of the world, the description is incomplete. In fact, as Nagel suggests it, it is impossible. Without the subject who is offering the description, there is no description. The subject is the obstacle to achieving pure objectivity. Essentially, Nagel finds that this sense of objectivity is unacceptable. He argues, "The reductionist program that dominates current work in the philosophy of mind is completely misguided, because it is based on the groundless assumption that a particular conception of objective reality is exhaustive of what there is" (16). Simply, the objectively conceived reality is one version of reality; the version, which conceives it objectively rather than in any other way. It is a version of reality and not the full extent of reality.

The objectively conceived reality offers a reductionist view of reality. This reductionist view offers the material reality as seen through the presence of objects. Here, the importance of objects is magnified and presented as the true reality. The objective examination of the evidence within this reductively presented and confined version of reality always lends a support to materialism. It is a world of a closed circle. One focuses on the evidence in an objective sense that confines the person to this reduced version of reality, which in turn will offer back results according to this version of reality. This means that relying on the evidence according to this sense of objectivity is unfairly biased in favour of materialism, and is simply supported by a misconceived idea that reality is fully known this way.

In short, being objective does not solve the problem of dealing with the problematic notion of evidence. One cannot just describe what goes on in the brain in terms of the primary qualities when the brain is dying and pronounce a verdict on the nature of reality based on the description of these primary qualities. This description will offer a description of objective reality and not the full extent of reality. To learn a fuller extent of reality, one has to return the subjective description of events into the picture, which includes both the experience of the witnesses of a near-death episode and the experience of the dying having a near-death experience. This subjective version of evidence is also part of the evidence. As Nagel suggests, it is impossible to skip the subjective element since the activity of description itself is subject dependent in every case. The ultimate lesson is that it is not just impossible to have a purely objective description, but that it is undesirable to do so.

To sum up, the evidence does not speak for itself. The evidence cannot be separated from the evidence holder, the believer. The believer has a power to believe and adds something extra to the evidence when entertaining that evidence, and this process creates a bias. This situation cannot be remedied by adopting an objective description of the evidence because the description itself is tied to the subject who is offering the description. Given this impossibility, one should give up the misguided attempt to have pure objectivity. In fact, it is undesirable to have an objective description of reality that represents a reduced version of reality and not the fuller version of reality. However, once the attempt to hold on to an objective reality that is treated as if it were the full extension of reality is given up, the evidence does not have clear support for materialism. Materialism becomes just one of the many theories of reality a person can entertain.

The point is that if the definition is taken seriously that "a person's evidence is generally taken to be all the information a person has, positive or negative, relevant to the proposition" (Feldman, 1995: 252), both the presence of the person and the presence of the evidence need to be recognized in the evaluation process. Neither element can be removed. Once the power of the human being is recognized through which the evidence is filtered, human participation becomes important. The human experience becomes an important part of the evaluation of evidence to learn more about the fuller extension of reality.

Focusing on the human evaluator for now and returning to the problem of evidence in the next chapter, a number of questions arises. If evidence cannot clearly support materialism and if it can possibly support more than one theory at a time, why do so many people misguidedly believe that it does? Why do even experts give credence to materialism? Why do near-death researchers feel the need to discredit all materialist explanations in order to feel vindicated and in order to believe that they have the right to make a different conclusion about the veridicality of near-death experiences than their materialist peers do? Basically, why is the veridicality of near-death experiences tied to the discrediting of materialism in the present era?

## Epistemic Peer Disagreement

People in general are biased. However, if one assumes that all experts in a particular situation are similarly well informed and are in possession of the same quality and quantity of evidence, it is logical to also assume that these experts should come to the same conclusion definitely about scientific but also about any other types of investigation. After all, these experts are what Richard Feldman calls "epistemic peers" (Feldman, 2006: 218). According to Feldman, epistemic peers possess similar traits of being "intelligent, informed and thoughtful" (218). They are equally careful at assessing the evidence and equally trustworthy for often arriving at the right conclusions. The same way, Thomas Kelly also argues that epistemic peers are "equal with respect to their familiarity with the evidence and arguments which bear on that question" and, also, "with respect to general epistemic virtues such as intelligence, thoughtfulness and freedom from bias" (Kelly, 2005: 174-175). If one creates an equal platform for all who are also equally qualified, an agreement should be easy to reach at least amongst the experts. Yet, it clearly does not happen. Experts disagree with each other. Some support materialism and others support other theories. However, not only do the materialists and supporters of other theories disagree with each other, but the supporters of any particular theory do not see eye-to-eye with each other in their own camp. If they are epistemic peers, why does this happen even today? Where do the biases of epistemic peers come from?

It was previously pointed out that it is not only impossible to separate the evidence from the evaluator but that it is undesirable to do so. The evidence and the evaluator of the evidence are inextricably linked together. In this inextricable link, if the evidence is the same for all evaluators, then, it stands to reason that the disagreement between peers arises out of their own evaluator status. Obviously, there is something different even about these evaluators who are epistemic peers that makes them come to different conclusions in light of the same evidence. What is this difference that drives them to different conclusions?

Epistemic peer disagreement happens because not all epistemic peers analyze the evidence the same way; they do not analyze the evidence from the same epistemic standpoint. In their analysis, they look to distinct epistemic authority to settle a dispute with a peer. Some turn to a superior for advice, some privilege their own views and some offer equal weight to all

views. For example, Bryan Frances has worked out the position that under normal circumstances one has to defer to one's superior (Frances, 2010). First, he outlines the characteristics for someone to be a superior. The superior is generally more informed about the material; he has more raw intelligence; examined the material and the related material for longer and in greater depth; he is more careful and less biased; and, he more fairly examined and evaluated the evidence. Given this situation, a person has to defer to a superior. If a person disagrees with a superior, the person is considered what Frances calls an "epistemic renegade" with regard to that topic (Frances, 2010: 420). The reflective epistemic renegade fully understands that he disagrees with a superior. He knows what a superior is. He knows that the superior knows more about the topic. At the end, he simultaneously recognizes the fact that the person is his superior and the fact that he believes the opposite of what the superior believes. Frances argues that the epistemic renegade in general is blameworthy to disagree with a superior.

Frances finds that there are only four conditions in which the epistemic renegade is blameless in disagreeing with a superior. First, he is blameless if the superior's argument depends on an undefended assumption. Second, he is blameless if other superiors by a large percentage are on his side even though his immediate superior is not. Third, he is blameless if he discovers that in that particular case the superior made a mistake about or mislead by some evidence that the renegade avoided during the process of evaluation. Finally, he is blameless if the renegade knows that his judgement is extremely reliable in a particular instance of a disagreement with the superior about a straightforward topic and concludes that, therefore, the superior's judgement must be impaired. Frances thinks that these four situations are rare and, therefore, an epistemic renegade is usually blameworthy if he does not defer to the superior.

The problem is that deferring to a superior in a hierarchically created structure may not work out as intended. The following hypothetical scenario may illustrate the issue. Let's assume that there are several people who are all experts placed into a hierarchical structure. Amy has a superior called Beatrice. Beatrice's superior is Cecilia. Cecilia's superior is Danika. Amy believes X. She finds out that Beatrice believes not X. Wanting to be epistemically blameless, she defers to Beatrice's conclusion of not X. At the same time, Beatrice finds out that her superior Cecilia believes in X. Therefore, she defers to the superior's conclusion of X. Now, Amy has to defer to Beatrice's new position of X, which was her original conclusion in the first



place. Sometime later, Cecilia learns that Danika believes that not X. Once again, the chain reaction starts for everyone to adjust her view to not X.

A year later, Danika dies in a race car accident. Cecilia is the top superior. Upon reflection, she decides that the right view is X, after all. Once again the chain reaction starts in order to adjust everyone's view to the right view of X. Another year later, during an excavation under the house of an early Twentieth Century scientist and philosopher, named Ellen, an unpublished book surfaces. Ellen is world famous and happens to be Cecilia's superior on the topic in dispute. However, Ellen concludes before she dies that the answer is not X. Hence, Cecilia and everyone else's conclusion has to be changed once again to not X to be epistemically blameless.

It is obvious that this continuous switching of views creates inconsistency in the system of knowledge and a continuously anticipated change that shake people's confidence. For example, if some superiors are materialists and some are not, reliable knowledge may be hard to come by and the experts' confidence may be diminished. If all experts are materialists, materialism can rule a certain area of study, such as near-death experiences, but, since not all materialists are committed to materialism to the same degree, a different version of materialism can rule at one or another time. Also, deferring to a superior is never a guarantee that she is right. In addition to the weakness of a hierarchically created system of superiority, the system itself already allows for epistemic renegades who can disagree in certain circumstances with a superior. For example, in a system ruled by materialism, some experts may deviate from the undefended assumptions of materialism, may decide to side with other superiors, may point out a large mistake a materialist made in the study or may insist that the superior's judgment is impaired due to his bias. Hence, turning to a superior to handle an epistemic disagreement may not be a sure way to come to a reliable conclusion about a subject matter.

Another way to try to resolve an epistemic disagreement for peers is to help each other to arrive at a conclusion. For example, Kelly develops and defends an asymmetrical view, which means that at least in some cases one is allowed to privilege one's own point of view in a peer disagreement (Kelly, 2005). He argues that the sheer presence of a disagreeing peer does not undermine the rationality of one's own belief because the person has available evidence and

arguments open to careful analysis, which allows him to develop an opinion. Basically, it is not a failure of rationality to hold on to this opinion once a disagreeing peer appears on the horizon. In fact, retaining the original view in case of a disagreement may be what he calls "the uniquely reasonable response" (Kelly, 2005: 170).

Kelly develops this thesis by focusing on the available evidence and arguments. He agrees that in cases where the peer has more access to evidence and arguments, it is necessary to defer to him. However, once the peers are in an equal position with the same access to evidence and arguments, it is not clear whether one has to defer to one's peer. It is possible to give more weight, less weight or equal weight to a peer's opinion. Kelly believes that the symmetry can be broken in certain cases. He says, "the only thing that would justify one in maintaining views that are rejected by one's epistemic peers would be if one had some positive reason to privilege one's own views over the views of those with whom one disagrees" (Kelly, 2006: 178). The positive reason to break the symmetry would be a situation where the person believes that he is a better evaluator. On occasions, it is possible that one has done a better job at evaluating the evidence and the arguments than one's peer and, therefore, the person concludes that the peer has misjudged the probative force of the evidence and arguments. On these occasions, one has the right to privilege one's own opinion.

According to Kelly, the conviction that one's peer has done a worse job at evaluating the evidence and the arguments depends on whether the peer had actually done a worse job doing so. He says the following:

On the present view, the rationality of the parties engaged in such a dispute will typically depend on who has in fact correctly evaluated the available evidence and who has not. If you have access to the same body of evidence but draw different conclusions, which one of us is being more reasonable (if either) will typically depend on which of the different conclusions (if either) is in fact better supported by that body of evidence" (Kelly, 2005, 180).

Here, Kelly is looking for a universal, objective principle by which he can decide who has done a better job at evaluating the evidence. This universal, objective principle has to allow the person

to come to the right conclusion. If the person's conclusion is such that he finds that the peer is mistaken, he has the right to stick to his own opinion by giving greater weight to his own view. He does not have to give equal weight to both views.

Adam Elga responds to Kelly's proposal pointing out that there is not any universal, objective principle to decide who has done a better job at evaluating the evidence and the arguments (Elga, 2007). If one gives equal weight to peers in disagreement, the person acknowledges the possibility that both parties may be incorrect in judging the issue at hand. However, when one favours one's own view, the person automatically assumes that the peer has made all the mistakes. Elga points out that it is impossible to know who in fact has made the mistakes: "Without some antecedent reason to think that you are a better judge, the disagreement between you and your friend is no evidence that she has made most of the mistakes" (Elga, 2007: 487). Simply, there is nothing universal, nothing objective, to appeal to in order to decide who is the better evaluator. To just assume that one's peer has made all the mistakes in order to be confident in one's judgment is what Elga calls a "bootstrapping technique" (488). And, bootstrapping is not enough to give extra weight to one's own view when evaluating the evidence and arguments in question.

The discussion on peer disagreement shows that transferring the power from the evidence to the evaluator and acknowledging the power of the evaluator are not without challenges. It is difficult to decide how to evaluate the evidence and arguments, given a disagreement between epistemic peers. For example, if one of the epistemic peers is a materialist, he may be searching for a universal, objective principle to judge the issue at hand, such as in the case of the veridicality of near-death experiences, usually looking for an objective, scientific principle whatever this alleged scientific principle may be. However, it was already shown that science does not clearly support materialism. This means that a materialist cannot find an antecedent reason to favour his own opinion about materialism. The result is that he cannot actually give more weight to his own view than to his non-materialist counterpart.

The problem is that some materialist peers try to give more weight to their own views without justification. They may convince the rest of the experts that science is on their side, even if it is not, and they let their peers fight the battle on the materialists' terms of reality by

making their peers try to disprove those scientific observations and speculations that the materialists rely on. In essence, they are favouring their own materialist view. However, this is an unjustified move because the materialists do not have an antecedent reason to choose the materialist interpretation above other interpretations in the first place. For example, it does not matter how many physiological activities in the brain correspond to the stages of near-death experiences; these physiological activities alone do not prove the materialists' theory of reality correct. These activities only prove that, if the materialists' theory turns out to be correct, then, these activities can explain their theory. But, brain correspondence itself does not rise to the level of causation unless there is an antecedent reason to believe that the materialists are correct in their theory of reality and the brain correspondence does indeed rise to the level of causation. Since science does not necessarily support materialism, given the fact that dualism and idealism can also be deduced from brain correspondence, there is no antecedent reason to believe that materialism is the right theory and, therefore, there is no antecedent reason to believe that brain correspondence is indicative of any causation. This means that since the battleground is not in the court of science, but in the court of the philosophical interpretation of scientific findings, there is no reason for all experts in general to spend time on disproving the scientific findings about brain activities in terms of causation. The experts should not let their materialist peers hijack the conversation and allow the materialists to assume their theory to be correct in the first place without any clear antecedent reason to do so.

To be clear, this problem is not about the available evidence or arguments. If the evidence and arguments relate to something straightforward and tangible, as it was pointed out before, the peers may agree on the conclusion. This is about the interpretation of evidence and arguments where the evidence and arguments are not straightforward and tangible and the experts can easily disagree on their evaluation. In cases, where the evaluator and the evidence are intricately bound up with each other, such as in any questions related to the nature of reality, the problem becomes the interpretation of evidence and arguments. In this instance, neither the materialists nor the defenders of any other theories can appeal to any antecedent reason to choose their own interpretation. This means that there is nothing that can tilt the balance in their favour. All theories have the same chance of succeeding. The materialist peers cannot point to any

antecedent reason for which their interpretation of the evidence and arguments should take the default position.

In summary, epistemic peers do not analyze the evidence the same way. Some defer to their superiors, which clearly creates issues if there are several superiors involved. Some turn to their peers, either privileging their own views or offering equal weight to all views. In this case, the problem becomes the ground based on which one can decide what view a person can privilege. Ultimately, the fight becomes about the justification of a particular view, such as, for example, the materialist view, based on which one can declare an advantage. In the absence of this justification, though, it seems that the materialists lose the battle for privilege. It is not the case that they can get ahead in a peer disagreement. It is unfortunate that their peers cannot see that the materialists do not hold any special advantage in a disagreement.

#### Epistemic Goals and Distant Peers

It is now clear that epistemic peers do not analyze the evidence the same way. Still, this fact does not really answer the question why certain experts are under the illusion that some of their peers deserve more credence than they actually do. It does not answer the question why some near-death researchers feel the need to discredit all materialist explanations in order to feel vindicated and to believe that they have the right to make a different conclusion about the veridicality of near-death experiences than their materialist peers do. The key to the answer for this question lies in the peers' epistemic goals, which create distant peers.

The original problem seems to be that the evaluators often do not have a clear idea about the epistemic goal they want to achieve. For example, Kelly and Elga are clearly not working on the same epistemic project. This can be seen in their adaptations to two dissimilar narrative perspectives. A narrative perspective is a literary technique creative writers use to have a vantage point from which they tell a story. The narrator chooses a specific perspective in space and in time<sup>17</sup> (Baker et. al, 1985). The narrative perspective in space locates the narrator either

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<sup>17</sup> For the purpose of this discussion, the narrative perspective in time is unimportant. The narrative perspective in time pinpoints the time lapse between events happening in the story and the narration of the story.

within the story or outside the story. If the narration takes place within the story, the narrator uses the first-person narration, identifying herself as an "I". The first person narrator invents a persona by identifying with a particular person inside the story, which may or may not represent the author's ideas. If the narration takes place outside the story, the narrator uses the third-person narration, using the grammatical third person singular "he" or "she" or plural "they". This narrative perspective assumes that the narrator possesses a certain amount of knowledge while narrating.

The third-person narrator can have three types of narrative perspectives: 1) Third Person Omniscience, 2) Third Person Limited Omniscience and, 3) Dramatic Method. If the narrator has unlimited amount of knowledge, the narrative perspective is called Third Person Omniscience. This narrator has unlimited movement in space and time and, she is aware of all thoughts and motives of the characters in the story, even if the narrator does not reveal all these thoughts and motives. Philosophically speaking, this represents God's perspective with unlimited epistemic power. If the narrator has limited knowledge the view is called Third Person Limited Omniscience. Here, the narrator has unlimited access to usually one character's thoughts and motives in the story, talking about the other characters from an external viewpoint. This view represents an abstract bird's eye view with limited epistemic power to see inside the characters. The extreme form of this perspective is the Dramatic Method. In a Dramatic Method, omniscience is almost absent; the characters and scenes are reported objectively. Instead of examining the thoughts and motives of the characters, the narrator simply reports their monologues, dialogues and movements. This view represents the absence of any epistemic power to see inside the characters.

Kelly and Elga do not use the same narrative perspectives. Kelly adopts a first-person perspective right from the beginning. For example, he talks about his beliefs in the following way:

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For more details, see: Sheridan Baker et. al. *The Harper Handbook of Literature*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1985) pp. 302-306.

I have a belief about each of these issues, a belief that I hold with some degree of conviction. Moreover, I ordinarily take my beliefs about each of these matters to be rational--I think of myself as having good reasons for holding them, if pressed to defend my position I would cite those reasons, and so on. On the other hand, I am very much aware of the fact that, with respect to each issue, there are many others who not only do not share my beliefs, but in fact, take a diametrically opposed position (Kelly, 2005: 168).

Kelly takes the first-person view designating himself as a protagonist in his work whose first person view is opposed to a second or a third-person view. In his analysis, he is always limiting himself to this first-person perspective, never assuming a direct and unlimited access to another person's thoughts or reasoning. He weighs the value of his peers' beliefs against his own limited first-person perspective. He assumes a phenomenological knowledge of the world. For example, this perspective represents the view of a person having had a near-death experience.

As opposed to Kelly, Elga takes a specific third-person narrative point of view, the Third Person Limited Omniscience. He hovers over the disagreeing peers like a ghost and assumes limited knowledge of these peers' thoughts and motives. The following example demonstrates this fact:

Suppose that you and your friend independently evaluate the same factual claim--for example, the claim that the death penalty significantly deterred crime in Texas in the 1980s. Each of you has access to the same crime, statistics, sociological reports, and so on, and has no other relevant evidence. Furthermore, you count your friend as an epistemic peer--as being as good as you at evaluating such claims (Elga, 2007: 484).

Elga uses the grammatical second-person and third-person perspectives throughout his essay from which he evaluates how much weight each peer's view should receive. From this predominantly detached third-person view, looking at them side by side, neither of the peers deserves more credit for an opinion. Hovering above them like a ghost from a bird's eye view, they seem equal in every aspect. Elga does not adopt a phenomenological view of the world.

Instead, he takes an abstract, objective view that is technically unavailable to human beings, other than in their imaginations. He judges the peers from this imaginary, objective view that Nagel calls the view from nowhere (1986).

The narrative points of view are important because, given their divergent perspectives, Kelly and Elga seem to be engaged in entirely different epistemic projects. Since Kelly is committed to a first-person perspective where a belief is always *my belief* or, in short, a personal belief, he seems to be working on acquiring a personal understanding of the world. If one imagines this belief system as a large puzzle where all the pieces needed to be fitted together, in Kelly's case, this is Kelly's own puzzle. It represents his understanding of the world. He is trying to fit the pieces together in such a way that they properly fit into his own personal belief-puzzle. Kelly is turning peer disagreement into a commitment to developing a personal understanding of the world and developing a personal belief system where all beliefs are fit together for the subject engaged in a disagreement with others.

As opposed to Kelly, Elga is committed to a third-person perspective where a belief is examined from an objective, imaginary view from nowhere. This imaginary view values all beliefs to an equal degree and it is not limited to any specific person's viewpoint. It is not an effort to gain a personal understanding of the world. Instead, it is aimed at a more universal, objective understanding that can be potentially accepted by all peers involved. It is a puzzle for the whole community of peers, trying to fit together the pieces for all to accept the outcome. It relies on the testimonies of peers based on their intellectually assessed ideas about the topic of disagreement that can be dispassionately judged from an imaginary view apart from their subjective perceptions.

Ultimately, the question becomes what kind of a world one wants to live in. Does a person want to pursue a personal understanding of the world? Or, does a person want to pursue a more objective understanding that can be potentially accepted by all those who are involved in the issue? What kind of a puzzle does one want to work on? What is the goal? This means that peers often cannot agree because they do not work on the same project and have the same goal in mind.



This problem shows up in near-death studies, as well. People who have had near-death experiences are on a personal quest to gain knowledge. For example, Anita Moorjani is on a personal quest to gain knowledge from her own experience when she reveals, "The understanding was so clear: I was looking into a new paradigm of self, becoming crystalline light of my own awareness" (Moorjani, 2012: 70). Immediately after the event, she disagrees with her doctors about her medical condition based on her own near-death experience. She is convinced that she is completely cured of cancer, while the doctors are insisting that she still has cancer despite their inability to find any in her test results. As opposed to this personal quest, most researchers are not on a personal quest to understand NDEs because most of them never had the experience. Rather, the research is focused on the debate between those who believe in an afterlife and those who do not believe in it based on the same statistical, biological, testimonial and other evidence available to all. They look at those in dispute from an abstract, objective view in order to gain an understanding that most peers could potentially agree on at some point in time. In short, not all people involved in the discussion on NDEs are engaged in the same epistemic project, having the same epistemic goal when it comes to gaining understanding.

Given the analysis and evaluation of evidence, it has to be pointed out that the current philosophical climate allows opinions to be developed and to be tilted in favour of materialism in disagreements. This favouritism has to do with knowledge acquisition while resolving epistemic disagreements. Knowledge is symbolized as a tree in philosophy where the roots of knowledge in previous ages have always been identified as metaphysics. For example, Descartes portrayed the roots of the tree as metaphysics, the trunk as physics and the branches as all other knowledge (Descartes, 1647/1983). However, in the current era, the ideology has shifted in such a way that everything is rooted in physics, followed by chemistry, biology, psychology, religion and contemplation (Wallace, 2007). Since this hierarchy is often not challenged by the experts, the ideal methods of investigation in knowledge acquisition are the ones that cater to physics. These methods favour a symmetrical view of the Third Person Limited Omniscience, where the peers are viewed from an imaginary, detached and objective point of view. The epistemic goal is to find a solution that could be potentially acceptable in the future for peers presently in disagreement within the framework of the material world built on physics. This is the reason that certain experts are under the illusion that some of their peers deserve more credence than

they actually do and that some near-death researchers feel the need to discredit all materialist explanations in order to feel vindicated and to believe that they have the right to make a different conclusion about the veridicality of near-death experiences than their materialist peers do.

Naturally, if the experts involved in a project do not have the same epistemic goal, it further complicates the evaluation of their evidence. There may be epistemically relevant differences. Mark Vorobej calls the peers with epistemically relevant differences "remote or distant peers" (Vorobej, 2011: 713). In addition to Kelly's definition of peerhood, Vorobej asks for two conditions to be recognized for two people to become remote peers. The following are the two conditions (713):

- (i) we each assess (or reason about) the probative value of [evidence] E in a manner that is largely opaque to the other; and
- (ii) neither of us is justified believing that we have comparably good track records of forming true beliefs from bodies of evidence pertaining to [topic] T, because neither of us is in a position to form any reasonable beliefs about our respective track records.

Vorobej uses the example of a beautiful sunset that can be interpreted in a theistic or atheistic way to explain the above points. The atheist finds the theist's reasoning about the evidence that concludes the sunset being interpreted theistically largely unintelligible to him. The theist has a cognitive style that is alien to the atheist. In addition, the atheist also admits that he is unsure about the status of their track record with regard to theological matters. Presumably, the theist uses similar reasoning about the atheist at the same time.

Vorobej claims that each individual develops her own epistemic identity over time (Vorobej, 2011). A person is dominated by her habits and dispositions to shape her belief system. These belief systems are informed and developed by certain principles, guidelines and conceptions. Vorobej argues that a peer "may follow fundamentally different principles or heuristic guidelines, and she may even operate with a fundamentally different conception as to what constitutes evidence with respect to the topic at hand" (711). Unlike identical or close peers whose epistemic identity allows them to evaluate the evidence and track records similarly,

remote peers, do not possess the same advantage. Their epistemic identities are too far apart to fully appreciate each other's views.

The disagreement between Michael Sabom and Kenneth Ring speaks to this issue in the field of NDE studies. Sabom's book, *Light and Death* (1998), has highlighted the author's deepening of Christian religious conviction. He has an undeniably strong Christian faith he does not conceal in this book. In fact, right at the beginning of his book, he makes the claim that "NDEs seem to produce a strong faith and a higher level of commitment to traditional religious practice" (16). Although Sabom claims that NDEs represent the experience of the dying and not the experience of an afterlife, he still ensures his audience that a strong Christian faith can seal a person's fate after death. Basically, his Christian interpretation allows him to interpret the evidence in a more theological manner.

As opposed to Sabom, Ring prefers that the NDE movement not end up in a religiously biased atmosphere. After the publication of Sabom's book, *Light and Death*, in an open letter to Sabom, Ring has lamented the loss of a religiously neutral tone in NDE studies (Ring, 2000). Criticizing the final chapter of Sabom's book, Ring makes the following observation: "Suffice it to say that, as an avowed evangelical Christian, Sabom's interpretations are all doctrinally driven and in line with his theological beliefs" (241). Ring believes that this religious overtone is a mistake. He wishes to return to a religiously neutral study of NDEs. He says, "despite everything, perhaps I am still enough of a congenital optimist to cherish a faint if possibly unrealistic hope that the NDE movement is just in the midst of a sorry phase that will pass, even as an eclipse of the sun will eventually vanish leaving its light to shine again on all the world" (242).

The argument between the two men demonstrates the problem with distant peers. Evaluating the evidence, while Sabom observes NDEs through a religious lens, Ring looks at them with a religiously neutral lens. This difference creates a distance where they are no longer close peers. Yet, the two men stand even further from those researchers, such as, for example, Susan Blackmore, who attempts to explain NDEs in a strictly physiological way with an attempt to lend support to a more materialistic interpretation. These researchers are as distant as they can be from either a religious or religiously neutral interpretation. While a religious or religiously

neutral interpretation can still support the Afterlife Hypothesis, the more physiological interpretation is intended to lend support to the Dying Brain Hypothesis. Overall, distance in peerhood matters because the probative value of the evidence is determined differently in the cases of those peers who are not deemed to be close peers in a subject area.

Basically, many peers become distant peers because they simply do not judge the probative value of the evidence the same way. They vary in the applications of their basic principles and heuristic guidelines. This is true not just in cases where some of the peers question the epistemic hierarchy and disagree with the rest of their peers, but even in cases where the roots of knowledge are assumed to be physics. Of course, those who identify with physics more closely are favoured in the materialist camp over those who do not. So, in addition to not having the same epistemic goals, the peers become as distant as they can be.

Overall, it seems that an epistemic disagreement happens because the decision-making process about the evidence may involve more than the intellect. An evaluation does not happen in an epistemically sealed intellectual vacuum. A person consists of more than an intellectual mind. A human being is the result of an accumulation of education, religiosity, moral standards, psychological attitude and cultural upbringing and, also, the result of a unique experience of ethnicity, age, race and gender; all of which, may influence the person's belief system and, possibly, all decision-making. For example, a person's philosophical education may steer one in a certain direction. Roger White provides a good example of this background influence as he contemplates on the acquisition of epistemic standards (White, 2005). His make-believe story unfolds the following way:

Suppose it is just a matter of education. I follow standards S because I was inculcated with them at MIT. But had I attended Berkeley, I would have been inculcated with standards S' instead. Given my total evidence as input, S and S' deliver conclusions P, and not-P respectively. (White, 2005: 452).

Essentially, White tells this make-believe story intending to prove that epistemic standards are actually not acquired in this way. He argues that this permissive attitude would make higher learning irrelevant because one might as well skip school and just arbitrarily believe in either P

or not-P. Yet, this make-believe example has a ring of truth to it for a good reason. Students search out like-minded professors when deciding to go to graduate school. Once they are in graduate school, these like-minded professors allow them to develop more sophisticated knowledge about the ideas they share. Once graduated, these students are more likely hired by professors who can relate to their work. Hence, students' education is steered in a certain direction through this process. The choice of P or not-P allows them to employ very particular epistemic standards that reflect their educational backgrounds. These standards then become integrated into their overall belief systems and, subconsciously, they may be present to shape a disagreement with a peer. Naturally, the same can be argued for other background sources, such as for the accumulation of religiosity, moral standards, psychological attitude and cultural upbringing and, also, for the unique experience of ethnicity, age, race and gender. This means that decision-making does not happen in an epistemically sealed intellectual vacuum. The background influence is always present. Nobody ever makes any decision in a bubble. Decision-making is messy in a world where no two people are alike.

Since evaluation does not happen in an epistemically sealed intellectual vacuum, each individual is shaped by the person's background influence. Of course, the background influence in academia is heavily dominated by philosophical materialism in the current era. Wallace argues this point in the following way:

Even in philosophy departments, faculty positions are often filled by scholars whose views are compatible with those of the chair and other senior members of the department. Thus, in many such departments ideological conformity seems to be higher in priority than intellectual diversity. Especially in the fields of philosophy of mind and the philosophy of science, scientific materialism is the prevailing ideology; and anyone who seriously challenges this dogma may find it extremely difficult to be admitted as a graduate student; or if one makes it through graduate school, the prospect for academic employment is very dim (Wallace, 2000: 171).

In this environment, the political power belongs to materialism. Since the materialists hold the political power, they hold the financial strings attached to this power. They get a voice much

more easily in peer reviewed publications and receive grants to do their research, which lead to the possibility of more publications and more research grants. The system feeds itself, giving the impression that philosophical materialism is a well established theory.

However, looking at it with a dose of honesty, it is actually far from the case. Firstly, the Third Person Limited Omniscience view is imaginary. It is impossible to have a symmetrical view because one cannot detach oneself from the self to hover over the situation to look at oneself arguing with a peer. This point of view is available to fiction writers only. Outside of fiction, the only point of view is the First Person Limited view. Hence, objective knowledge in this sense can never be had. Knowledge is always limited to *my knowledge*, based on *my* personal experience and *my* mental function, also informed by *my* perception of other people's testimony. In a sense, Kelly is right to privilege his own opinion, since this is the only true angle anybody ever possesses in this life. Yet, this personal view does not offer a materialist an edge because this view is not supported by science or by any other principle more than any other philosophical views. Simply, there is no antecedent reason to believe that the materialist view is correct.

Secondly, in a close peer situation, favouring the peer's assessment who aligns himself more closely with knowledge that is ultimately based on physics is an artificial decision. It is possible to return to previous eras and base knowledge on metaphysics. Or, it is possible to adopt the mystics' approach and base knowledge on contemplative practices. There is no antecedent reason to side with the close peer who interprets evidence according to a knowledge based on physics.

Finally, knowledge acquisition is never a matter of pure intellectual endeavour, divorced from the philosophical and political atmosphere. It is a myth that pure knowledge is possible that is free from bias. Human beings are a product of society. Whatever they learn at home, in the street and in school makes them who they are. If an era is dominated by materialism, they will be informed by the materialist mindset, handling the evidence according to the expectations placed upon them. It is very difficult to break away from the prevailing influence and become a voice for the minority, an epistemic renegade, especially in a society where the punishment may be harsh, such as not being able to finish graduate school and get a PhD in philosophy, for

example. All in all, the impression that philosophical materialism is a well-established theory is just that--an impression. Of course, there is no antecedent reason to conform to an impression. Philosophical materialism is a well-established myth rather than a well-established theory.

### The Myth of Materialism

The idea that materialism is a myth is not new. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer link human enlightenment, based on the material order, with myth in their theory (Adorno, T.W. & Horkheimer, M., 1979). They challenge the traditional understanding of enlightenment as a movement from myth, through religion, to secular and scientific reasoning. They believe that enlightenment is a continuum where both myth and enlightenment are modes of representation of reality because both myth and enlightenment try to explain and account for reality. Hence, myth in a sense is already enlightenment. However, taking this idea a step further, Adorno and Horkheimer argue that "enlightenment reverts to mythology" (1979: XVI). Basically, the aim of enlightenment is to establish sovereignty over nature, sovereignty over material reality. The realization of this sovereignty requires that the human will be able to manipulate nature. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to remove the prevailing beliefs in gods or god by arguing that the myths of gods or god were the result of mistaken beliefs. Simply, people did not understand that these forces represented the projection of people's power on nature.

The elimination of the old system is followed by handing over the control over nature to instrumentally conceived knowledge of the accumulation of objective, verifiable facts gathered in the material realm. In this objectified model, human beings represent nature objectively to themselves, which, increasingly, includes the subjects themselves. Once this objectified system of knowledge is established, people are required to conform to the dictates of instrumental reason. Reality is discernible in the form of objectively verifiable facts and any alternative modes of representing reality are rejected and undermined. Reality is conceived of in terms of an immutable and fixed realm, which predetermines human consciousness of it.

At this point, the system of enlightenment becomes another myth. Human beings are limited and determined by an outside force to which they owe their existence. The only difference is that material forces in the form of facts are not personified and, therefore, they do

not become anthropocentric, as they were in previous myths. Ultimately, philosophy ends up aiding this order of material reality by moving only within its confinement. Enlightenment of this material order is now just a myth. As Adorno and Horkheimer conclude, "Hence enlightenment reverts to mythology, which it never really knew how to elude. For in its figures mythology had the essence of the status quo: cycle, fate, and domination of the world reflected as the truth and deprived of hope" (1979: 27).

The final word on this issue is that if materialism is simply a well-established myth of enlightenment that happens to dominate today, it is not obligatory to either follow it or to try to defeat it. Materialism is just one of the many theories available to explain the nature of reality. It does not have any true power because it has never been proven to be true. This means that materialism does not take a default position against which everybody has to argue and that everybody has to defeat first in order to create a legitimate, alternative theory of reality. Thus, near-death researchers do not have to counterargue and defeat any physiological explanations to build an argument for an alternative theory of near-death experiences. The Dying Brain Hypothesis does not automatically take precedence over the Afterlife Hypothesis. It is not the case that if the Dying Brain Hypothesis is decisively proven to be incorrect, then, and only then, the Afterlife Hypothesis has a chance to succeed. Researchers have to stop giving power to the materialists by constantly trying to defeat their theory of reality. Nobody is obligated to defeat a theory that has not been proven to be correct. Nobody has to defeat an imaginary Goliath to save the day.

At the end, it has been determined that materialism is not really a dominant theory--or at least, it should not be treated as such--but, neither is any other theory at this point. If there is not any dominant theory one can rely on, it is difficult to deal with the evidence. It appears that one is stumbling around in the dark, so to speak, trying to grab onto objects and trying to decide what these objects are. Is it possible to make progress this way? Is it possible to work without a theory? In the next chapter, I will look into the feasibility of the evaluation of evidence without the presupposition of the dominance of any philosophical system.



### CHAPTER 3: WORKING WITHOUT A THEORY

He comes around the corner, as usual, and walks to take a seat in front of me at my desk.

I ignore him. I stare into thin air as if he weren't there at all.

"How are you today?" he asks.

"I think you are not real," I say after some hesitation. I still refuse to look at him.

"Oh, really? What makes you think that?" he inquires.

"You appear around the corner and then disappear around the corner with unpredictable frequency. You can't be real. I refuse to talk to you anymore," I declare with absolute conviction. I turn to face the wall and ignore him. I hear him leave after a few minutes.

--M. J. Mandoki (2019, p. 63)

It has been determined that materialism does not enjoy a privileged position. Proponents of materialism cannot positively prove that the material world is metaphysically or ontologically significant, to which some of them such as Braddon-Mitchell and Jackson (1997), Ney (2008), and Lycon (1987) openly admit. This means that the burden of proof is not on the proponents of the Afterlife Hypothesis to demonstrate to the satisfaction of the proponents of the Dying Brain Hypothesis that an independently existing consciousness or mind exists apart from the material brain. However, it has also become clear from previous discussions that simply none of the theories enjoys any special status to begin with.

Once materialism or any other theory is not assumed to have an advantage at the outset and, for this reason, is not assumed to take a default metaphysical position, the evaluation of the veridicality of near-death experiences becomes a challenge. However, taking metaphysics out of the picture is not a position that experts usually take in relation to veridicality either because most people have well established metaphysical beliefs or because it is difficult to navigate around without such theories. A metaphysical assumption and a discussion on veridicality usually go hand in hand in academic circles.

So, what happens when one lets go of all metaphysical assumptions and tries to argue without the use of any particular metaphysical theory? Where does one start the discussion on veridicality then? In what follows, I will propose to argue on the topic of veridicality in relation to near-death experiences without relying on any developed metaphysical theory. Instead, I will rely on the metaphorically understood "gut feeling" of a lay person as this person is trying to decide whether an experience is veridical. Of course, a lay person does not provide a well-developed definition of veridicality at the beginning of the process or any time after. Instead, the lay person simply provides a natural sense of what appears to be metaphysically or ontologically significant at the everyday level while moving around in the person's world based on personal experiences and, of course, without any sophisticated academic assessments. I will call this type of veridicality "veridicality in the natural sense" or "natural sense of veridicality". The reason for using the lay person's assessment is that it comes closest to working without a highly developed sophisticated metaphysical theory normally done at the academic level. It also comes closest to the way most people who are not academics, or people who are academics but operate away from the academic world, usually assess the veridicality of everyday experiences and near-death experiences.

Before presenting the lay person's assessment of veridicality in the natural sense, I find it necessary to justify the use of this approach. The best way to understand the reason for the use of this approach is to see the serious problems with the definitions of veridicality the experts have provided. Therefore, I will deal with their definitions first. Then, I will show that in light of these problems the temptation is strong to provide a purely descriptive version of reality instead, but this is actually not fruitful because it does not allow for judgments. After all, people do judge their experiences. This preliminary discussion will reveal the usefulness with which lay people approach the issue of veridicality and apply their natural sense of veridicality both to their everyday experiences and to near-death experiences. Following lay people's evaluations, it is possible to shed light on their epistemic rationality. This epistemic rationality will show that the evaluation of veridicality is actually a lot more complex than most people would admit to. To see this complexity will eventually help to understand the dispute about the veridicality of near-death experiences.

An attempt to work without a theory is important to show the eventual downfall of such an approach. Without a theory, the discussion eventually collapses into relativism. Of course, if everything is relative, it is not possible to offer a definitive answer to the question of veridicality of near-death experiences. Therefore, it is obvious that this approach will not be the final answer to the veridicality of NDEs. The answer will be elsewhere. Despite this downfall, though, this work is still essential to learn some lessons on the way lay people, which includes academics outside academic circles, actually operate. It will show that surprisingly, or maybe not so surprisingly, academics, and many times even lay people, carry a lot of unacknowledged and unjustified assumptions and biases. This approach will reveal many of these assumptions and biases while one attempts to work without a theory.

### The Experts' Take on Veridicality

Experts on veridicality fall far from a lay person's approach. Most definitions and tests of veridicality in the study of near-death experiences carry specific expert ideas of reality. It is worth looking at two of these to see the larger issues that emerge from them. The first expert to consider is Holden and her definition of veridicality. As it was previously stated, veridicality of near-death experiences is strongly tied to material consensus of reality in near-death research. Holden is no exception to this tradition. She defines veridical NDE perception as "any perception--visual auditory, kinesthetic, olfactory, and so on-- that a person reports having experienced during one's NDE and that is later corroborated as having correspondence to material consensus reality" (Holden, 2005: 186). There are some problems with this conception of veridicality. The first problem is that it limits veridicality to shared experiences within the realm of materially experienced reality. It does not speak to the entirety of the experience from start to finish. However, the question of veridicality of near-death experiences is not a just a question about a segment of the experience, but it is a question about the entire experience. "Are near-death experiences veridical?" is a question where one wants to know about these experiences in general from their start to finish and not just parts of them.

The second problem is the assumption of the correspondence theory of truth. As Thomas Aquinas has formulated it, the theory assumes that "*Veritas est adaequatio rei et intellectus*" (Truth is the equation of thing and intellect), which he explains as the following: "A judgment is

said to be true when it conforms to the external reality" (Aquinas, 1485/1989: 1. Q16, A2, arg. 2). The difficulty with the correspondence theory of truth in its metaphysical form is that it presupposes direct realism; the theory implies that a person has direct awareness of objects. Of course, if one lets go of all metaphysical assumptions about the nature of reality, the correspondence theory of truth becomes dubious. If a person does not know the nature of the subject and the object in question, it is impossible to say whether the object of perception is directly available. Actually, even with a metaphysical theory present, the relationship between the subject and the object is still open to question. This means that adopting the correspondence theory of reality in a more traditional sense where a judgement is true when it conform to a traditionally defined external reality in order to define veridicality creates a built-in, hidden assumption about the very reality that is not available to a person when the person lets go of all metaphysical assumptions and tries to find veridicality that way.

There are two additional issues that can be briefly noted now, but will become clearer later on. The first issue is the meaning of the word "material" in material consensus reality. If the material theory of reality is not dominating and one does not assume any theory of reality at the beginning of the investigation into veridicality, it is difficult to say what exactly the word "material" refers to. Does it refer to the objects available to be experienced during the waking state of consciousness? Does it refer to the objects available to be viewed publicly? What makes the "material" material in this scenario? The second issue has to do with the word "consensus". What does it mean to have consensus? Who needs to consent in order for there to be consensus? How many people have to be in agreement in order to have consensus? Basically, Holden's definition is too narrow in scope; it has too many assumptions and raises too many questions. Her definition simply does not go far enough. It does not deal with parts of the experience that reach beyond correspondence with third-person observations. Therefore, because of this major shortcoming and the other challenges that her definition indicates, Holden's definition cannot be accepted as an appropriate definition for the veridicality of near-death experiences.

So, what counts as a veridical experience or perception?<sup>18</sup> Blackmore has presented a test for veridicality<sup>19</sup> in her work (Blackmore, 1993). She is the second expert to be considered here. She distinguishes three senses in which one can claim a near-death experience to be veridical:

Firstly, there is the question whether an individual person really did have such and such an experience...Secondly, there is the question whether the experiences felt real, or were experienced as though they were real...Finally, there is the question of whether the things seen and events experienced during the NDE were part of an objective measurable world or whether they were products of the individual and private to them. This means contrasting real with imaginary (Blackmore, 1993: 138).

Although she needs to be commended for the fact that she acknowledges that veridicality can be understood more than one way, Blackmore's senses of veridicality raise more questions than solve problems. The meanings of her senses are unclear and seem to carry a definite bias toward a well-defined, tangible and material world.

To break down her points, in the first sense of veridicality, she may be understood as raising the possibility that people can lie about their experiences or that people may distort their experiences by using techniques such as exaggerating, misremembering or misrepresenting. According to Blackmore above, a person has to have "such and such an experience" to qualify as veridical. In the case of lying, her interpretation is unambiguous. If a person makes up an experience that never happened, it cannot be veridical. In the case of other techniques though, it is less clear how to interpret her possible point. If an experience takes place, whether, for example, it is exaggerated or not exaggerated, it did happen. Following Blackmore's logic, an exaggerated experience is veridical in the sense that "the person really did have such and such experience". It is simply the case that the person had the experience that the person later

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<sup>18</sup> Depending on the nature of reality, experience and perception may not be neatly separable; they may be conflated.

<sup>19</sup> Blackmore uses the word "real" to talk about veridicality in her book, *Dying to Live* (1993).

exaggerates. Nevertheless, given human nature, it is possible to interpret Blackmore's first sense in this narrow sense of lying or using techniques to distort the event.

Another way of understanding her first sense is to assume that she wants to know if there is any experience taking place during the state that the person is clinically pronounced dead. As it was previously argued, this is difficult to determine because of the possibility of a time lag. A person may be having the experience near death but before or after the time that she is pronounced dead and not during, and she may misperceive or misinterpret the situation thinking that it happens when she is clinically dead. If this is the way Blackmore understands her first sense, it can be safely said that the problem this situation causes has never been clearly resolved.

In the second sense Blackmore understands NDEs to be veridical, her question has two parts. She asks if 1) the experience felt real and, 2) if it were experienced as though it were real. The first part targets the person's feeling. Normally, a feeling suggests the presence of an emotion, such as happiness, sadness, anger and so on. However, "feeling real" does not fit this category. Perhaps, the word "feeling" is the wrong word to use here if feeling is associated with emotions. It may be better to use the words "perception" or "awareness". One perceives or is aware of something as real. However, the word "real" still remains a question mark. What does it mean for something to be real when one is feeling it? Also, in comparison to what would this feeling be real? If one is comparing it to the waking state of reality, the stereotypical assumption may already be there that all other states of consciousness are automatically qualified as less real. But, that assumption already carries a bias about the nature of reality. It is not that Blackmore is not onto something significant. She just simply does not adequately explain what she means by the experience of feeling real.

The second part of her question is slightly more sinister. Asking if something felt as if it were real already presupposes that it was not real. Grammatically, the framing of the question suggests that the verb is copulative complemented by an adjective<sup>20</sup>. The verb "feel" is complemented by the adjective "real". However, this is misleading in this case. In actuality,

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<sup>20</sup> A verb describes an action or a state of being. Transitive or intransitive verbs describe an action. Copulative verbs describe a state of being.

there is a hidden "unreal" conditional in the sentence that turns it into an impossible or improbable situation<sup>21</sup>. "As if it were real" is a structure that indicates that the event pretends or appears to be something it is actually not; it pretends or appears to be real but it is not real. The underlying assumption is that one knows what "real" is and one also knows that an NDE simply pretends or appears to be real, but it is actually not real. The larger assumption is that people are already in possession of the knowledge of reality. Of course, if one eliminates any metaphysical theory of reality, Blackmore's question becomes, if not meaningless, at least wanting of further explanation.

The second part of her question is also sinister in another way. Since it confidently assumes that NDEs appear to be real when in fact they are not, this question shifts the burden of proof to those who disagree with this assumption. It demands that people who disagree with this assumption show compelling reason to make others believe that NDEs do not just appear real. This move shifts attention away from a genuine desire to discover veridicality of NDEs and shifts attention in the direction of having to defend any possible alternative model of reality. It turns the project to what the ancient Greek called *agon*, a contest or a struggle that usually combative warriors, athletes or artists engage in. Yet, the project of veridicality is not a contest amongst combative participants. Rather, it is a genuine desire to discover or, better yet, uncover an understanding of the veridicality of near-death experiences.

In the third sense Blackmore understands NDEs to be veridical, she emphasizes the distinction between an objective measurable world and the person's private world. She equates the measurable world with something real and the private world with something imaginary. This is perhaps the most problematic sense of veridicality she provides. Firstly, she creates a subject-object distinction, which may be intuitively natural to most people; but, then, she arbitrarily decides that in this dichotomy the objective measurable world is real and the subjective private world is imaginary. This move is objectionable for a number of reasons.

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<sup>21</sup> In the present tense, there are two types of conditional: real and unreal. A real conditional covers real, possible or probable situations. An unreal conditional covers unreal, impossible or improbable situations.

To begin with the objective measurable world, it is difficult to say why Blackmore is using the qualifier "measurable" when talking about the objective world<sup>22</sup>. In her statement, the relationship between measurability and objectivity does not become clear. In philosophy, measurement is an "assignment of numbers to objects in such a way that these numbers correspond to the degree or amount of some quantity possessed by their objects" (Causey, 1995: 456). Most likely the importance of measurement arises from the identification of primary qualities in early modern philosophy. For example, Locke's previously mentioned list of primary qualities has included extension, figure, solidity and number, indicating that the intrinsic properties of objects lend themselves to simple mathematical calculations done in everyday life. In this sense, the objective world is measurable. However, measurability stops at a certain scale even in physics. Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle shows that the exact position of an electron and its speed and direction cannot be measured at the same time (Herbert, 1985). Physicists who are now forced to do two different kinds of measurement run into the problem that the measurement of one property with certainty excludes the concurrent measurement of the other property with certainty. Hence, the measurability of the objective world at a certain level disappears. This fact about physics makes it puzzling as to the reason Blackmore ties measurability to objectivity.

Moreover, the representational theory of reality advocates a world that is made up of sense data. For representational realists, a person can never get behind the sense data to the outside world. If they are right, a person's measurement is always a measurement of available data. In this case, measurability has not much to do with whatever exists behind the sense data. Since objects are expressions of these data, measuring them makes the sense data real in Blackmore's definition of veridicality. However, it leaves the world behind the sense data a mystery of reality, as it usually is for all representational realists. The representational theory of reality may not be the correct theory, but its possibility raises the question of the relationship between measurements and objects.

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<sup>22</sup> As it was already seen in the previous chapter, the word "objective" is not always clear either when people use it.



By far the greatest difficulty with the idea of a measurable objective world is that this type of world is completely undefined in Blackmore's third sense. It is not just sense data of representational realism that can be included in such a world, but also measurable objects in any state of consciousness. For example, a skilled cabinetmaker can pull out a measuring tape in his dream and provide proper measurements of wood pieces he is about to cut. The famous saying, "measure twice and cut once" applies in the dream world, too. Basically, the objective world is present to the cabinetmaker's mind who can properly measure and cut accordingly. This means that Blackmore's measurable objective world stays undefined to be properly useable. In this undefined form, it is difficult to relate it to the word "real" or to veridicality in general. What does it mean for a measurable objective world to be real? What does it have to do with the veridicality of near-death experiences?

Often times, the measurable objective world Blackmore is hinting at is meant to refer to a publicly accessible world human beings share. A shared world is a sign that people experience something veridical. This is the inspiration behind Holden's definition of veridicality of NDEs. There are at least two serious issues with this publicly accessible, shared world, though. The first issue is that even though all spaces are, technically speaking, publicly accessible, most experiences are not shared with others. All human beings spend a certain amount of time by themselves when nobody else is present. Hermits, for example, spend almost all of their times alone. If the veridicality of an experience is dependent on its ability to be shared with others, then, people's solitary times are not veridical because others are not present. This means that most of the hermit's life is not veridical.

Of course, it is possible to make slight changes in this discussion and talk about potentially shared experiences. If someone were present with the hermit, they would share the same world and this makes the hermit's world veridical. Here, the problem with this argument is the assumption that they would share the same world. How can one tell that they would indeed share the same world? Maybe the hermit in the woods would feel being in the presence of the Spirit of the Forest and speak to this spirit, while the visitor would see Big Foot at the same time. There is no reason to assume that in any hypothetical scenario people would share the same world. In fact, the reason people usually have the urge to share the world is to use it as a test to see if they are indeed experiencing the same thing. Consequently, one cannot assume the result

of the test in advance for a hypothetical situation. This means that this public accessibility test puts solitary time in jeopardy. It makes most of people's lives non-veridical.

The second issue with the publicly accessible, shared world is that even in a publicly accessible world, most people do not share exactly the same experience. Two people can attend the same wedding party and describe the events very differently. One person may pay attention to the bride, the flowers and the cake and be very critical of the wedding, having a really bad time. Another person may focus on the groom, the food, the drinks and be very happy about the wedding, having a really great time. Two people who share the same space may not have the same experience. The focus, attention, mood and a variety of other factors influence the experience in such a way that these two people's descriptions of events may make their audience think that they might as well have attended two different weddings. In most cases, where two people's experiences in the same space are not in complete agreement, are their experiences not veridical? The point is that public accessibility is not necessarily a guaranteed test for veridicality.

This point of the discussion takes one to Blackmore's linking of the subjective private world to the imaginary in her third sense of veridicality. She asks if the experiences of NDEs are the products of individuals and are private to them. Starting with the privacy part of the claim, since solitary experiences are private experiences that take up a large part of any person's life, the privacy concern is not really significant. Most experiences are private. Also, as the wedding example demonstrates, most experiences have a smaller or larger degree of subjectivity. Therefore, to claim that subjective private experiences are imaginary is an overstatement. It is doubtful that almost all of the hermits experiences and most of the wedding guests' experiences are imaginary. Subjective and private do not necessarily equal to imaginary.

Blackmore's question about the experiences being the products of individuals may be more interesting. However, the production of experiences is significant only in the case where the ontological status of the individual has been determined. For example, if it turns out that the world is mind dependent or mind created, then, all experiences are mind dependent or mind created. In this case, the question itself is insignificant because it stands to reason that they are the products of either the individual, or some other mind or minds. The production of

experiences is significant only in the case where there is a reality that exists independently from the individual's influence and this reality has the greatest metaphysical significance. For example, if individuals are directly aware of the outside world and this outside world has fixed primary qualities, then, any production of experiences apart from primary qualities, the so-called secondary qualities, becomes significant. Naturally, if all philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality are suspended, the question about the production of experiences cannot be answered and is simply irrelevant to the question of veridicality. If one does not claim to know the nature of reality at the outset, it is impossible to say which experiences are a product of the individual or even if this production is significant.

Consequently, equating the measurable objective world with reality and the subjective private world with imagination is a serious mistake. The objective measurable world may just be sense data or the result of the workings of the mind, while the subjective private world of an individual may be metaphysically or ontologically significant. The entire discussion is a philosophical conundrum where the lines between such worlds are either blurred, one overlapping the other, or the lines are simply non-existent in the first place. To base veridicality on such a conundrum does not solve the issue. It simply creates assumptions and biases that take one further from being able to gain a genuine answer to the question of veridicality. Hence, Blackmore's third sense for veridicality of NDEs needs to be dismissed.

Overall, Blackmore's three senses of veridicality work only in the case where a very specific theory of reality is assumed. Reality has to be physical in nature, at least in a sense of assuming the existence of primary qualities independently existing of the mind. These primary qualities need to be directly available to be examined and compared to secondary qualities of the mind. A sharp division has to exist between the primary and secondary qualities to distinguish between objective reality and subjective contributions of the mind. People need to be able to accurately determine whether an experience is the product of an objective reality or the product of a mind, which includes near-death experiences. Researchers need to be able to eliminate all experiences due to subjective influences and show whether NDEs are indeed the products of an objective reality. At the end, the assumption of this idealized world carries a definite bias toward a well-defined, tangible and material world. However, once a person lets go of this assumption, Blackmore's test for veridicality goes with it. The test becomes unusable.

What happens then when one lets go of all assumptions of the nature of reality that most people rely on to find a definition or test for veridicality of NDEs? What can one say about the veridicality of NDEs then? Is there anything useful to be gained from such an approach?

### Suspension of Judgment

In general, people rarely appreciate the seriousness of awarding metaphysical or ontological significance to objects by heightening their importance in terms of their supposed primary qualities and thereby diminishing the significance of the subjects in the world. To put it simply, if one believes that the objective world is real and the subjective world is dependent on the conformity of the subject to this objective world, then, the judgment of veridicality of an experience always unfairly favours this biased attitude. However, judging veridicality should not be based on a bias; it should be aiming at a bias-free version. For this reason, the temptation often exists to build a bias-free version of veridicality based on a bias-free reality. Unfortunately, the problem with a bias-free version of things is that it makes next to impossible to judge anything in such a reality. Edmund Husserl can demonstrate this problem.

Husserl has demonstrated the importance of the removal of such bias when he suspended the natural attitude in his philosophy (Husserl, 1913/1983). In his critique of empiricism, Husserl points out that the empiricist who relies on empirical studies of nature to make judgments about the world makes a mistake when the empiricist "takes genuine science and experiential science to be identical" (§19, <35>; 35). The empiricist believes that real knowledge arises from empirical observation only. "All science, it is alleged, only deals with experienceable, real actuality. Whatever is not actuality is imagination; and a science based on imaginings is just an imagined science" (§19, <35>; 35). Basically, in a similar fashion to Blackmore, the empiricist connects the real with the actual observable world and the unreal with the imagination.

Husserl finds this view mistaken; a view, which is based on two highly suspicious empirical demands. First, the empiricist demands conformity to things themselves in the outside world that Locke termed primary qualities. Second, the empiricist demands that an experience be used to legitimize cognition at the same time. This latter demand cannot be fulfilled at all

because certain types of knowledge such as logical or mathematical knowledge do not necessarily arise from such experiences. For example, Husserl uses the following propositions in order to show that one does not need to check experiences of the outside world to realize the truth of the proposition: " $a+1=1+a$ "<sup>23</sup> "a judgment cannot be colored," "of only two qualitatively different tones, one is lower and the other higher," "a perception is, *in itself*, a perception of something" (§20,<39>; 39). According to him, these types of knowledge, normally referred to as a priori knowledge, cannot be derived from experiences of the outside world. In fact, in addition to Husserl's examples, it could also be potentially argued that inductive knowledge itself, knowledge gained from experiences of the outside world, cannot be accounted for or verified by using experiences of the outside world (Block, 2007). According to Husserl, both the narrow window allowed to the outside world of the things themselves and the inability to legitimize cognition using experiences of the world only point to the conclusion that the demands of the empiricist are a mistake.

To get away from an empiricist and other types of bias, Husserl finds that it is best to adopt an attitude that is free of presuppositions. He thinks that "a new *style of attitude* is needed which is *entirely altered* in contrast to the natural attitude in experiencing and the natural attitude in thinking" (§20,<3>, XIX). This new attitude is what he terms the science of phenomena or phenomenology. Phenomenology sets aside all presuppositions and it adopts a technique of observation, description and classification that allows it to reveal structures and connections not available to experimental science. Husserl's main tool to achieve his goal is the "epoché", a suspension or parenthesizing of judgments (§32,<56>; 61). He states his intention the following way: "I *exclude all sciences relating to this natural world* no matter how firmly they stand there for me, no matter how much I admire them, no matter how little I think of making even the least objection to them; I make *absolutely no use of the things posited in them [von ihren Geltungen]*" (§32, <57>; 61). Husserl is not trying to negate the world or be sceptical about it, but simply remove the judgmental attitude toward it. The phenomenological attitude allows for a modified consciousness where things can be described as they are originally presented to consciousness in

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<sup>23</sup> Mathematicians may object to this example today because of the questionability of its truism. In his era, this example was acceptable, though.

its intentional mode; in its mode where consciousness is "of" or "about" something. This way, all unwanted bias can be dismissed.

Husserl's effort to remove unnecessary bias is important. It removes an identification of the real with the outside world and the devaluation of the subject in relation to this outside world. It shifts one's attitude toward both the subject and the outside world when trying to provide a proper description of things and events. If one applies Husserl's approach to veridicality, his approach provides a more humble attitude about what can be properly deduced about the veridicality of a subject's experience in the world in general.

In such a Husserlian sense, near-death experiences need to be described in a humble manner. From a first person point of view, a person is conscious of, for example, feeling peaceful, being out of body, floating in darkness, encountering a presence, having a life review and, entering a light and a world beyond. This humble description of the observations during a near-death experience allows for suspension of judgment. It encourages the suspension of the natural world and the things posited in them. This is not a negation or scepticism about the world experienced, but the presence of what Husserl refers to as a modified consciousness of things originally available in an intentional state.

The problem is that this humble description of an intentional state does not help the project of veridicality move forward. Assessing the example above in Husserl's phenomenological manner offers a simple description of a near-death experience--nothing more. An evaluation is not possible, if one does not move beyond the description. This is the problem with Husserl's phenomenological project itself. Philosophical historians have argued about whether Husserl's project should be interpreted along the lines of direct realism or transcendental idealism (Sawicki, 2003). A phenomenological description simply does not allow for an evaluation that is necessary to arrive at a conclusion about veridicality because it does not allow for any judgments to be made about an experience of the world in which one finds oneself. However, an investigation into veridicality of near-death experiences necessitates judgments about both the experience and the world that one experiences. It is not a lack of judgment but a lack of unnecessary bias that is needed. So, how does one judge the world without any bias? Is it even possible to be bias free and still make judgements?

## Trusting Experiences

It has to be stated at the outset that it is impossible for any human being to be completely bias free. As it was painstakingly argued in the previous chapter, an individual is the result of an accumulation of education, religiosity, moral standards, psychological attitude and cultural upbringing and, also, the result of a unique experience of ethnicity, age, race and gender; all of which, may influence the person's belief system and, possibly, all decision-making. An evaluation never happens in an epistemic vacuum. Still, it is possible at least to judge without relying on any seriously developed metaphysical theory that is generally found in academic circles. This style of judging can be done by turning to a metaphorically understood "gut feeling" of a lay person as this person is trying to decide whether an experience is veridical. As it was stated in the introductory part of this chapter, a lay person does not provide a well-developed definition of veridicality at the beginning of this process or even any time after. Instead, the lay person simply provides a natural sense of what appears to be metaphysically or ontologically significant at the everyday level while moving around in the person's world based on personal experiences and, of course, without any sophisticated academic assessments. As it was stated at the outset, this type of veridicality can be referred to as "veridicality in the natural sense" or "natural sense of veridicality". This is the closest anybody can come to a bias-free approach in a sense of working without a seriously developed metaphysical theory.

At the level of this simple gut feeling, many people would be sceptical about the veridicality of the experience used in the previous example. In this first scenario, a person may be conscious of feeling peaceful, being out of body, floating in darkness, encountering a presence, having a life review and, entering a light and a world beyond; but, such a description of the experience does not offer confidence to many people about its veridicality. On the other hand, in a second scenario, if one were to describe an experience where one is conscious of feeling peaceful, being in the body, walking through a dark tunnel, encountering a person, discussing previous experiences, walking out of the tunnel and into the light outside to admire the landscape around; many people would feel more confident about the veridicality of the experience. The gut feeling would be to believe in its veridicality. What is the reason for the difference between the experiences described in these scenarios? Why is one type of experience

more confidently accepted than another? How does one of these conscious experiences become more believable than the other in this natural sense of veridicality?

John Hick's pluralistic theory may shed some light on this difference. Hick believes that the world is ambiguous and this ambiguity allows for a variety of ways the environment can be constructed (Hick, 1989). He argues that the world can be constructed perceptually, ethically and religiously. Perceptually, people are both observers and agents in their environment. This fact forces them to interpret the world in favour of their biological needs. The world imposes itself on the individual where the individual needs to choose information that allows her to live in the world in the most successful manner. The punishment is so great for following false information that one could lose her life acting upon wrong beliefs. At this level, meaning is created based on patterns that are helpful in succeeding in the environment. Overall, one's cognitive freedom to choose beliefs appears to be minimal.

In addition to dealing with objects in the environment, Hick argues that the individual also finds herself in a social environment where she needs to act ethically. She interacts with others who appear to be similar to her in that they are conscious centers of being. She is now part of a system of inter-personal relationships and such a system of relationships depends on mutually agreed upon rules of behaviour to satisfy an individual's moral disposition toward acceptance, reciprocity and even mutual valuing of love. Although one is compelled to behave in an ethically responsible manner, there is a possibility for rejecting individual moral claims. Thus, unlike the perceptual realm of a physical state, the moral state allows for more cognitive freedom by allowing for acceptance or rejection of certain individual claims.

Hick finds that the greatest cognitive freedom is found at the religious level where the individual encounters ultimate reality. The point of religious transformation happens at the boundary between the psyche and the ultimate. The individual experiences the world religiously in so far as she is religious, in which case she employs religious concepts in her experiences. Her liberation or salvation involves a conversion to a new way of experiencing the world. Her maximum cognitive freedom exists at this level because she can accept or reject any or all parts of the religious domain. If she rejects the entire domain, she can fall back on a naturalistic interpretation of the world. In this case, she experiences the world naturally in so far as she is a



naturalist, in which case she employs naturalistic concepts in her experiences. Her liberation or salvation involves a naturalistic way of experiencing the world. Her maximum cognitive freedom exists because she can accept or reject any or all parts of her naturalistic domain. Hick argues that, "The universe is religiously ambiguous in that it is possible to interpret it, intellectually or experientially, both religiously and naturalistically" (Hick, 1989: 12).

Hick refers to this maximally cognitive freedom at the religious level as faith. He argues that both the naturalistic and religious constructions of the world are based on faith. Faith is a cognitive choice one makes in her maximal freedom. At this level, the world does not force any interpretation on the individual; it does not impose any value-laden reality an individual is unable to accept. Here, any so-called evidence can support both alternative views. This means that the individual can make a maximally cognitive choice in her freedom based on her whole experience of the world. An individual is free to have faith in whatever interpretation she is ready to accept.

Hick's analysis may shed some light on people's gut feelings between a near-death experience and an everyday experience. If one describes an experience in the second scenario where one is conscious of feeling peaceful, being in the body, walking through a dark tunnel, encountering a person, discussing previous experiences, walking out of the tunnel and into the light outside to admire the landscape around, the experience is associated with the everyday perceptual realm where people are both observers and agents in the environment. Since the world imposes itself on the individual where the individual needs to choose information that allows her to live in the world in the most successful manner, it is assumed that such an experience is the result of successful participation in this world. The description of such experience seems to be beyond suspicion because the everyday perceptual world does not allow for almost any cognitive freedom. This means that very few people would question the veridicality of such an experience in the natural sense.

As opposed to this everyday experience, the description of a near-death experience brings out a different gut feeling in a large number of people. If a person describes the experience in the first scenario of being conscious of feeling peaceful, being out of body, floating in darkness, encountering a presence, having a life review and, entering a light and a world beyond, the description of the experience does not offer confidence about its veridicality to a large number of

people because the experience is not necessarily associated with the everyday perceptual realm. Rather, many people associate it with the religious realm where, in her maximally cognitive freedom, the individual is thought to be offering an interpretation based on faith. She has faith in a value-laden reality she is ready to accept. This categorization of the experience is not beyond suspicion because of the maximally cognitive freedom available to the individual. This means that the veridicality of the experience is questioned by many people.

Naturally, the individual who has the experience described in the first scenario may interpret the situation differently. She may think of her own experience as a perceptual experience where she is an observer and an agent in her environment and where the world imposes itself on her during the experience, leaving her with very little cognitive freedom. However, even in the case where she possibly associates the experience with the religious realm, she can still think of the experience as an interpretation based on her faith, fully realizing that it may conflict with other people's gut feeling who may also act on their own faith in this religious realm. Basically, if one interprets it religiously, everyone's gut feeling in this situation brings out every participant's maximally cognitive freedom to have faith in the value-laden reality each participant in the discussion is ready to accept. So, the first scenario either taken as a perceptual experience or a religious interpretation may cause deviation from other people's gut feeling in people's naturally acquired sense of veridicality.

Of course, there are two larger questions being raised in this discussion. First, do these two experiences belong to two different categories? Is it the case that near-death experiences do not belong to the perceptual realm? How does one make such a case for or against this position in the absence of any set metaphysical theory to fall back on? Second, if judgment about the veridicality of near-death experience is in the religious realm, is it possible to ever find out its veridicality in an ambiguous world? What is the true meaning of veridicality, if the world is indeed ambiguous in any way? This second question cannot be answered in this chapter<sup>24</sup>.

To respond to the first question, though, it is helpful to look at attempted test procedures for experiences similar to near-death experiences and see how their veridicality is determined in

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<sup>24</sup> This second question is tied to the nature of reality, which will be looked at in later chapters.

a case of conflict in people's gut feelings. Mystical experiences can serve as a good example. Evelyn Underhill, an early researcher into mysticism, has developed a five-stage process of mystical experiences (Underhill, 1911/2018). She argues that the presence of this five-stage process determines the veridicality of any mystical experience. The first stage is awakening where the individual faces a cosmic issue that he is not capable of solving by ordinary means. The issue deeply concerns him. He suddenly realizes that there is hope for solving the problem, but he would have to make some serious changes in himself to find the solution. The second stage is purification where the person feels unworthy of the path he has taken unless he purifies himself. The purification includes eliminating all that is evil or negative in his way of perceiving the self, consciousness or the world. The third stage is illumination where he becomes enlightened and, usually, feels unified or merged with the Absolute. Using specific techniques such as, for example, repetitious exercises, the person experiences a state, which could include and often does include timeless, spaceless, formless and ineffable reality. In this state, he seems to find his solution to the problem, often realizing that it was never really a problem in the first place; the problem just seemed to be one from an unenlightened view. The fourth stage is the dark night of the soul where he has periods of doubts. The person is overwhelmed by thoughts of imperfection that periodically return. Once he deals with his doubts by eliminating all leftover ego-centered tendencies, he arrives at the last stage. The last stage is the mystical stage where he is fully integrated and possesses a transformed consciousness. He functions easily in this reformed state and spends much of his time actively involved in the community.

Even though Underhill's description is a classical and an idealized version of mysticism, her overall argument is significant in that her argument on the evolution of the mystics through these five stages marks the veridicality of mystical experiences (Underhill, 1911/2018). Since mystical experiences are subjective experiences, any experience should be judged veridical by following the mystic's first person point of view through these five stages. Even if the testimonies of mystics are collected and assessed by others, this type of experience needs to be based on the mystics' testimonies. People who have never had the experience should not judge a mystical experience based on their own non-mystical experiences and views. Moreover, the evaluation should be focused on identifying the presence of these stages in a first-person testimony to see if the experience is veridical. There may be slight variations in the testimonies

due to cultural influences, but the five stages will be identifiable. These five subjective core elements are of key importance because they make the experiences veridical.

The problem with Underhill's test of veridicality is that it is very subjective. It relies on the words of the mystics to judge the experience. In order to remedy this situation, James R. Horne has introduced an objective measure to decide on its veridicality (Horne, 1978). He arrives at two distinct sets of criteria in his work to judge both the religiously oriented and the non-religiously oriented mystical experiences:

To sum up on the subject of judging mysticism: if a mystic goes beyond reporting his experience in psychological terms, and if he interprets it in some generally accepted religious terms such as those of Christianity or those of the perennial philosophy, or in some other variation of the doctrines of a specific religion, then there are traditional theological criteria for judging whether to believe him, and...whether to follow his teaching. On the other hand, if he is not a traditionalist, but what he does and says has a creative effect in the life of his community, and if he has the sort of totally integrated personality that allows him to admit and understand and exploit even his own doubts, then he is a man to be trusted in this area (Horne, 1978: 116).

Horne's point is that even though mystical experiences are subjective in nature, an objective standard can be created to evaluate them. If the experience of the mystic fits the objective standard, the experience can be trusted to be veridical. This way, one can rely on more than just the words of the mystics to pronounce judgments on the veridicality of their experiences. The objective standard allows others, such as the experts on the field, to reject some experiences and decide that they do not meet the criteria for them to be deemed to be veridical.

Horne's objective standard may remedy the problem of Underhill's highly subjective measures, but it still does not necessarily help with the proper understanding of veridicality. To help to put it into perspective, the first scenario that consists of a near-death experience can be used again. A person describes an experience of being conscious of feeling peaceful, being out of body, floating in darkness, encountering a presence, having a life review, and entering a light

and a world beyond. It is true that using Underhill's subjective measure, this NDE passes the test of veridicality because it contains most core elements of near-death experiences, at least, for example, according to Ring's description of the core elements. Adding Horne's objective measure, if the person is a well-integrated and changed individual, living a more meaningful life, he also passes the objective test of veridicality. For better understanding the perceptual tests used, the following table can be consulted:

	First Person Viewpoint	Third Person Viewpoint
Everyday Perceptual Realm	Successful Participation	Successful Participation & Intersubjective Agreement
Beyond or Outside Everyday Perceptual Realm	Underhill's Subjective Test	Horne's Objective Test

Table 1

According to this table, in the everyday perceptual realm, Hick argues that, since people are both observers and agents in the environment, they are forced to interpret the world according to their biological needs. Here, from a first person view, the requirement is that they successfully participate in this realm. From a third person view, the requirement is the same, except for the test of an intersubjective agreement that most people also use<sup>25</sup>. For experiences outside everyday perceptions, from a first person view, Underhill's test can be used. Success means the passing of her subjective test. In the third person view, Horne's objective test can be used to declare success. But, realistically speaking, what does this all mean? What does it mean to say that the experience is veridical in this complex scenario that the table reveals? Is a near-death experience a perceptual experience or a religious experience, according to Hick's understanding? Does the first person view or the third person view matter more?

The problem is that most people with a gut feeling to this type of experiences are unimpressed, unmoved and remain sceptical by a type of test Underhill or Horne suggests to use. They demand more. Using their natural sense of veridicality, they want the word "veridical" to represent something that comes closer to a perceptual experience that they are less sceptical

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<sup>25</sup> The test for an intersubjective agreement will become clearer in the next section.

about. They are simply not ready to have a conversation at the religious level. In the religious realm, people's maximal cognitive freedom allows anyone to interpret NDEs religiously or naturally. The religious level comes with a choice. All that Underhill and Horne manage to do through their discussions is to systematize people's subjective experiences without moving people out of their conviction that their natural sense of veridicality has provided through their gut feeling. Underhill and Horne just fail to provide a universal criterion that convinces people to adopt this criterion. It is simply the case that people's overall experience of the world may dictate their personal interpretation, leaving the question of veridicality a personal choice rather than a properly answered question.

People's gut feeling that requires more than the religious realm of maximal cognitive freedom can raise even more questions than provide meaningful answers. First, are perceptual experiences as believable and reliable as people make them out to be? What are perceptual experiences in the first place? Can they fail people? Second, are perceptual experiences veridical? What does it mean to say that a perceptual experience is veridical? Finally, what is the relationship between the veridicality of perceptual experiences and the veridicality of near-death experiences? Is there any relationship at all?

### The Reality of Perceptual Experiences

As Hick suggests, perceptual experiences are trusted because people are observers and agents in an environment where the world seems to impose itself on the individual. Success is measured by the ability to operate within this world. Yet, despite the harsh punishment of potentially even losing one's life in case of failure, the idea of complete success is deceptive. The success that results from this process is not all-or-nothing. One does not either completely succeed or completely fail when the person relies on perception. On the perceptual field, attention is selective and limited, and the information is highly organized. Hence, the perceptual realm is not all that it seems to be.

To delve more into this perceptual world for answers, on the most basic level, one starts out by selecting a limited amount of information through attention. Attention is the process that determines the sensations that are selected to be perceived. Attention is neither continuous nor

unlimited. It is impossible to hold one's attention on any object or thought for more than a few seconds (Hoffman, 1998). A person's concentration easily shifts between images, thoughts and events. William James was one of the first psychology experts to acknowledge this constantly shifting and continuous awareness and to refer to this experience as the stream of consciousness (James, 1890).

Attention is also not unlimited in a sense that a person attends to only a limited portion of the available stimuli from the environment (Hoffman, 1998). The best example of this process is the unintentional blindness demonstrated in an experiment where the viewers are asked to watch a video of a ball game (Simons, 1999/2010). Two teams of six players pass the ball around in this experiment. One team is dressed in white and the other team is dressed in black. An instruction is given to the audience for counting the number of times the ball is passed around by the white team only. At the end of the video clip, the audience is asked to reveal the number of passes made. The people who pay close attention normally count between 12 and 15. At this point, the narrator asks if anybody has seen the gorilla. The natural reaction is: "What gorilla?" Then, the clip is shown again. This time the audience is asked not to count the number of passes made. To everyone's surprise, a person dressed in a gorilla suit is seen walking into the scene, waving at the crowd while standing amongst the players and then slowly walking out. Most people are stunned. It is hard to believe that one has missed the gorilla in the middle of the screen! Yet, this is exactly what happens because of the selective process of attention. The audience pays attention to the ball so closely that the big black gorilla is not seen in the middle. Attention also shifts from players to players and opinion on the number of passes made differs because some people can pay closer attention to the ball than others. Hence, attention is selective, discontinuous and limited by a constantly shifting awareness. The information that appears on the perceptual field is just fragments of the available sensory information.

Once the limited information appears on the perceptual field, it is then organized into specific forms and patterns. According to Gestalt psychologists, information from sensory stimuli gets organized based on figure-ground relationship, similarity, proximity, closure, simplicity and good continuation (Hoffman, 1998). The mind also regulates information using perceptual consistency. The result is an already carefully selected and regulated image. The

whole image becomes comprehensible because the image is interpreted as something greater than the sum of its chosen fragmented parts.

Consequently, it is important to remember that a perceptual experience does not offer a mirror image of the environment. The act of perception is not analogous to camera recording. Constant selection and organization of information allow for a variety of viewing possibilities and interpretations; but, at the end, it also limits the available information and resulting image. Perception is an active and constructive process, not a mirror image of the environment (Hoffman, 1998). Thus, even if one records a surgery during which a person, for example, has a near-death experience, the person's experience and the recorded image should not be compared as evidence for so-called mistakes because the human mind does not give back the same kind of image a camera does. The human mind is too complex and too active to be measured in comparison to a simple recorder.

It is true in general that, even if there is a camera recording, the recording itself in any camera setting makes it simply available for the stimuli to be repeated to those watching the recording in order for these observers to isolate particular segments they repeatedly wish to focus on. Repeated availability of stimuli helps to gain better identification and memory, which is not available for the spontaneous observer when the event actually takes place. Of course, even the presence of a camera recording may not always ensure positive identification and accurate memory of events. The investigators viewing the footage may also be prone to making the same so-called mistakes eyewitnesses of the original event do. Repeated availability of stimuli helps but does not guarantee a desired success. As Barusš and Mossbridge argue this point, "Independent replication consists of recording another first-person observation that could be subject to the same flaws as the original observation, which would be consistent yet nonetheless potentially incorrect" (Barusš & Mossbridge, 2017: 148). Simply, a camera recorder is incapable of providing the same type of image a person has when experiencing an event and two people may get different results from viewing the same footage or even get the same wrong results.

The success that results from this entire process is not all-or-nothing, but a matter of degree. Since a perceptual event is always limited and constructed, what in fact happens at a certain time and place is just a compilation of subjective descriptions of a person or people



present. In case of one person present, success is determined, according to Hick's model, by a fair degree of successful participation in the environment. In case of more than one person present, it seems that a determination of an observed event is achieved not just by a fair degree of successful participation in the environment but also by the overlapping perceptions of people. The information selected and organized by most people at the same time and place is accepted as a sign of success because the information overlaps. Information that fewer observers select and organize becomes more questionable than the ones many observers select and organize. It seems that a fair degree of successful participation in the environment and an inter-subjective agreement are what people generally use to identify something they often call a veridical perception using their natural sense of veridicality.

However, the perceptual process can fail in at least two ways. First, inter-subjective agreements depend on numbers that may not guarantee a fair degree of successful participation. Upon closer examination of a perceptual event, it becomes very difficult to isolate the overlapping elements. For example, if one person perceives elements A and B, another person perceives elements B and C, and a third person perceives elements C and D, it becomes a matter of dispute which elements could be counted as overlapping elements. Since not everyone shares all the elements, not all elements can be included amongst the overlapping elements. It is often tempting then to try to include the overlapping elements that most people share, instead of arguing about each specific element. In practice, this means trying to identify elements, such as E and F, that the majority of participants do share. However, "majority" in this instance has to be defined. It usually means picking a number that represents the percentage of people that share a particular chosen element. Unfortunately, the number that one designates this way as the magic number is a fairly arbitrary pick. In the absence of any antecedent reason to pick that specific number, the number that a person picks will artificially shape the elements that make the cut.

This artificially picked number becomes a problem because the overlapping elements represented by this number do not necessarily indicate a fair degree of successful participation in the environment. A hypothetical example can demonstrate the issue. Let's assume that one lives in a world where all women see a colour they call red and all men fail to see this colour; otherwise, they agree on all the other colours. Every time a woman points to an object that she

identifies as red, a man who is present in the room sees the object as grey. For example, there is a flower in the vase on a table nearby. The woman sees a red flower in a grey vase. The man sees a grey flower in a grey vase. In this scenario, whether the colour red is counted as an overlapping element depends on the ratio of women and men in the room. The more women there are in the room, the higher the percentage gets. But, how does the designation of a certain percentage help in this case? Whether one picks thirty-three percent, fifty percent, fifty-one percent or any other number, is it meaningful in any way when it comes to a fair degree of successful participation in the environment? Do the women or the men participate in the environment more successfully? So, does this artificial number really help one determine whether the perception of the colour red is veridical? If one wants to be fair, it is possible to include equal number of women and men in the room, especially, since women make up approximately fifty percent of the population and men make up the other fifty percent. However, this move still does not help. After all, a split in number means a split in perception right in the middle and the same questions arise. In this fifty-fifty split, do women or men participate with greater success in the environment? So, is the perception of red colour veridical or not?

This is a good moment to return to the near-death example again. A person describes an experience of being conscious of feeling peaceful, being out of body, floating in darkness, encountering a presence, having a life review and, entering a light and a world beyond. Even though it has not been positively decided yet whether this experience is truly perceptual in nature, it is worthwhile to think about the percentage of people who have this type of near-death experiences in the larger population. What does the number of people who have the above overlapping elements in their overall human experience really say about the veridicality of near-death experiences? Whether thirty-three percent, fifty percent, fifty-one percent or any higher number of people have these experiences of all people existing in the world, does the percentage of participation make any difference? Does the percentage change the experience, making it more or less veridical? It seems that it does not. Even if there is just one person who has this experience in a room, the potential to be veridical does not necessarily change.

The problem with the number game takes one to the other way the perceptual process can fail a person. Since the world seems to impose itself on the individual, successful participation is the key to trusting perceptual experiences. However, success is not an all-or-nothing measure in

perception. Rather, as it was stated, success is a matter of degree. One needs a fair degree of a successful participation to trust a perceptual experience to be veridical. If veridical perception depends on a fair degree of successful participation in the environment, given the fact that intersubjective agreements do not necessarily help and that most people do spend time by themselves, it is difficult to say what a fair degree of successful participation in the environment actually means. How much is a fair degree?

One way to measure a fair degree is to focus on the so-called failures in perception, mainly illusions and hallucinations. Basically, an illusion happens when the person's "perception of an object does not agree with the true physical characteristics of the object" (Crider et al, 1993: 121). The common view is that "an illusion is essentially seeing, hearing, tasting, feeling, or smelling something that is there, but perceiving it or interpreting it incorrectly" (Hahn, 2007). A good example is a stick emerged partially in water. The stick looks bent for the eyes, but feels straight for the touch of a hand. Hallucinations are "strong mental images that are experienced as if they were perceptions of external reality" (Crider et al, 1993: 588). The common view is that a "hallucination is a false perception occurring without any identifiable external stimulus and indicates an abnormality in perception" and, "a hallucination essentially is seeing, hearing, tasting, feeling, or smelling something that is not there" (Hahn, 2007). According to this view, a simple example is seeing a person or an object that is not really there. Illusions and hallucinations are considered failures of perception. This means that they can be argued to be less than a fair degree of successful participation in the environment. They are not considered to be veridical in nature.

Of course, these definitions seem to be oversimplified when putting them under a philosophical magnifying glass. First, an illusion certainly creates a problem for the perceiver, but it is a biased assumption to say that the problem has to do with a misperception of true characteristics of an object. This interpretation assumes that one is in possession of knowledge about the true characteristics of the object in question. However, the failure of perception itself questions this certainty. It is difficult to ascertain the true characteristics of this object when the perception has just failed to determine them. Here, the true characteristics of the object are actually in question.

Instead, what really happens is that the perception fails human expectations. For example, in case of the stick partially emerged in water, the perceiver receives confused messages from the senses. One sense registers the stick as bent and the other sense registers it as straight. Normally, the five senses agree; but, in this case, they are in disagreement. The person's expectation that the senses should agree is shattered. In a case where an expectation has been shattered, a decision has to be made either in favour of the sense of sight or the sense of touch. The convention is to side with the sense of touch. Naturally, there is not one good philosophical reason to side with the sense of touch. Therefore, a scientific reason is usually cited instead to favour the sense of touch. The usual scientific reason to side with the sense of touch is due to a phenomenon called refraction. The argument is that as light moves from one medium to another, it changes direction, or bends. So, when light hits the stick in the air, it is straight for the eyes. When light hits the stick under water, it is straight for the eyes. But, when light hits the stick partially submerged in water, part of it is straight and part of it is bent for the eyes.

The problem with this explanation is that it is not helpful. It still does not explain whether refraction changes reality or just makes it look different. It is still possible to argue that the sense of sight is correct because reality is bent in this case and the stick only feels straight to the touch rather than to argue that the sense of touch is correct because reality appears bent for the sight and the stick is actually straight as the sense of touch reveals. The judgment can go either way depending on human preference because there is no prior universal reason that can be applied to make a decision. Hence, the decision is most often made to favour the sense of touch and interpret the stick as straight, but looking as bent. Therefore, in case of a failed human expectation where the senses disagree, human judgment is exercised to decide on the true characteristics of the object. In short, illusion shows that the true characteristics of an object is determined by human judgment and illusion is not necessarily a misperception of already determined true characteristics.

Ultimately, an illusion is not necessarily a failure in perception. Instead, it can be a simple failure of judgment (Berkeley, 1713/1990). Human beings have a tendency to expect reality to present itself in a certain way. One of the expectations is that reality be uniform. Since most of the time the senses show reality to be uniform, the human expectation is that it always be

uniform. When reality disappoints human beings through illusion, they resort to the number game they usually play. Since most of the time reality seems uniform, they decide that reality is indeed uniform and the failure exists inside the human being to determine reality's uniform nature. However, just because reality most of the time appears uniform, it does not mean that it has this characteristic as part of a fixed nature. After all, how would people judge the situation if reality showed itself to be uniform to the senses only fifty percent of the time? Would people still fault the senses to determine a uniform reality? How would people judge the situation if the percentage dropped to twenty-five? Would people still think that the senses that determine the uniformity of reality have failed? At what percentage point would people stop blaming the senses and simply conclude that reality may not be uniform at all? Since, as it was shown before, the number game does not work when one is trying to determine the truth about reality, it simply does not matter whether reality shows itself to be uniform at a higher percentage point or a lower percentage point. Illusion simply shows that reality does not necessarily appear to be uniform at all times for the human senses. That is all it shows--everything else is a matter of judgment.

Second, hallucinations are even more oversimplified. It is assumed that a hallucination is not just an incorrect perception of something that is supposedly there, but of something that is not there. It is supposedly a mental image created by the mind without an external object or stimulus. The argument is that there are independently existing objects in the world that the mind perceives in some fashion and, in certain cases, the mind creates an object that is not present in the world. There are several assumptions made in this argument. The first assumption is that there is a world that exists independently of the mind. The second assumption is that objects in this world are well known and well determined. The third is that the mind is directly or, at least, indirectly capable of perceiving these objects in this world. The fourth is that the mind sometimes creates objects that are not present in the world and confuses people about this well-known and well-determined world. And, finally, it is possible to tell the difference between a created object that mimics an object available through perception.

The fact is that all these assumptions are standing on shaky ground. Philosophically, it is not possible to prove that there is even an independently existing world outside the mind. It is possible that the world is the creation of a Cartesian evil-demon or the creation of a mad scientist

who placed a brain in a vat of fluid and, therefore, the world just appears to be there for the human mind, but it is not really there (Descartes 1641/1993, Putnam 1981). This means that the status of objects are at least indeterminate, if not outright unknown. It is possible that objects are independently existing of the mind or that they are dependent on the mind. Since the status of objects is uncertain, it is difficult to say in what circumstances the mind creates objects in the world that are otherwise not present. Hence, nobody can state it with certainty whether an object is a type of creation of the mind that does not belong to the world.

In the above red colour example, is the colour red a creation of the women's mind that does not exist in the outside world or is it a lack of ability of the men's mind to perceive a colour that does exist in the outside world? Of course, scientists can rush in to help determine the physical properties of colour and conclude that the red colour falls between 635 nanometre and 700 nanometre while grey reflects all wavelengths equally on a non-shiny surface that reflects light partially. Again, the problem is that the scientific analysis does not help to answer a question about reality. If these scientists existed in the hypothetical world where men and women saw the colour in question differently, the analysis would be different. The female scientists would uphold that the scientific explanation above means that there is an extra colour between 635 nanometre and 700 nanometre that the men cannot see and mistake it for the colour grey. On the other hand, the male scientists would insist that the visible electromagnetic spectrum extends up to 635 nanometre only and anything above this colour does not exist and that the women hallucinate an extra colour, which is in reality grey that reflects all wavelengths equally on a non-shiny surface that reflects light partially. The women cannot possibly see a colour that does not exist! If the political situation on this hypothetical world is what it normally is in the present world, in their scientific textbooks, the explanation would be that women hallucinate a non-existent colour while the men see the world correctly.

Nevertheless, the point is that if the colour is a creation of something extra, which otherwise deemed to be non-existent, the colour is a hallucination. If it is a lack of ability to perceive something that otherwise deemed to be existent, the colour is not a hallucination. Since an intersubjective agreement does not help to decide such a matter, the decision whether the colour red is a hallucination or not becomes a matter of judgment. The women will judge the colour to be existent, while the men will judge the colour to be non-existent. Naturally, it is

possible that some women and some men will change their judgments to fit the scientific, cultural, religious or even political norms of their society.

This type of difficulty is not restricted to the hypothetical colour example. There are other scenarios where the same dilemma exists. If one sees an angel in the room that nobody else can see, the same issue arises. The person can clearly see the angel the same way as any other objects. The angel appears as any other person, but she has wings. Nobody else can see the angel. For the person, this is an example where the others have an inability to perceive the angel, but the angel exists. For the others, this is an example where the person's mind creates something extra that does not exist. Another example is a near-death experience. A person describes an experience of being conscious of feeling peaceful, being out of body, floating in darkness, encountering a presence, having a life review and, entering a light and a world beyond. The person can see this chain of events unfold that nobody else may see. For the person who has the experience, this is an example where the others have an inability to perceive these objects, people and spaces, but they do exist nevertheless. For the others, this is an example where the mind creates something extra that does not exist. Whether or not a person treats the object or objects in question as a hallucination becomes a matter of judgment. People judge the scenario based on personal experiences but, naturally, they have an ability to change this judgment to fit the scientific, cultural, religious or political norms of their society.

The point is that it is difficult to say in what circumstances the mind creates objects in the world that are otherwise not present. There may not necessarily be an independently existing world outside the mind to begin with. Since the statuses of the objects in this world are uncertain, it is difficult to say in what circumstances the mind creates objects in the world that are otherwise not present. Hence, it is difficult to say what hallucinations are or if they are hallucinations at all. Do people hallucinate the red colour in the hypothetical world or angels and near-death experiences in the presently available world? At this point, the answer depends on human judgment and not on clear-cut failures in perception.

Since illusions and hallucinations are not necessarily clear-cut cases of failures in perception, they are not a good benchmark against which a fair degree of participation in the environment can be measured. Without any metaphysical assumptions, illusions and

hallucinations are anomalous phenomena that leave the perceptual world a mystery. An illusion is a registration of confused messages from the senses. These confused messages question the consistency of objects apart from the mind; objects, which are difficult to make judgements about. Hallucinations are objects that certain people judge in one way while others, usually people numbered in the majority, judge them in an alternative way and blame the minority of people for the failure to see the assumed correct view of the majority. In these cases, the real problem is human judgement. Illusions and hallucinations are anomalous phenomena, which are problematic for humans to judge because they do not fit the usual schema. Basically, they do not produce the usual expected results when the schema is applied. However, anomalous phenomena are not a sign of failure; but, rather, a sign of imperfect understanding of perceptual reality. They do not necessarily fail people, but simply puzzle people. Nevertheless, an imperfect understanding of cases that puzzle people is not a good benchmark to use to measure success. It is not the case that puzzling cases of which people have imperfect understanding are not veridical. They may be veridical once the perceptual world and the nature of reality are better understood.

Participation in the world is not an all-or-nothing determination. People's success comes in degrees. However, the degree of success cannot be determined through observations about illusions and hallucinations. Therefore, instead of focusing on the problematic phenomena of hallucination and illusion in order to determine a fair degree of participation in the world, it may be simpler to measure this fair degree of participation by the degree that is just enough to successfully operate in the world. First, the individual's mind needs to select the right type and amount of information through attention from the available stimuli and be able to shift awareness from one information to the next as required. Then, the mind needs to be able to organize the result into specific forms and patterns in order to achieve enough consistency to build a comprehensive image. The entire process has to be just enough to successfully operate through the temporal and spatial aspects of the world that seem to force themselves on the person. Basically, to successfully participate in the world using this process, the individual has to be able to learn, at least, just enough to operate in the perceptual world well enough to solve issues of navigation within the world. If an obstacle comes up, the individual should be able to find solutions to overcome it to be successful. He needs to develop a mind that is refined enough to



be well-integrated and merged within the perceptual realm of reality. He may have doubts in the perceptual process at certain points, but sharpening the process over time helps to have a type of refined mind that operates in the perceptual realm based on a well-integrated and merged perceptual consciousness in the required environment. If this argument is successful, it becomes a minimal requirement that allows an individual to have a fair degree of successful participation in order to call the experience veridical in the natural sense.

Does this description sound familiar? Previously, Underhill has provided a five-stage test for a mystical experience to be veridical. These stages describe a person who realizes that she needs to make changes in herself, a new way to operate, to solve an issue. She needs to eliminate certain negative tendencies in her way of perceiving the self, consciousness or the world. She discovers an illuminated mind she calls enlightenment, which may allow her to feel unified or merged with a greater sense of reality where regular time and space shifts to a timeless, spaceless, formless and ineffable version. She may have some doubts, but, overcoming all negative tendencies, she develops a type of refined mind that operates in the larger realm of reality based on a well-integrated and merged consciousness in the required environment. It allows the person to have a fair degree of successful participation to call her experience veridical.

It seems that the implementation of this minimal requirement causes Hick's distinction between the perceptual realm and the religious realm to collapse upon close examination of the perceptual and mystical processes. The distinction between the normally over-constrained perceptual realm and the under-constrained religious realm ceases when a minimal requirement for participation is implemented as the measure of success. With a minimal requirement and without any metaphysical assumptions, these two processes appear to be part of the same process. In both cases, the mind has to learn to select, organize and integrate information that allows for a fair degree of successful participation in the required environment. These are mental processes adopted to successfully operate in the world, depending on a desired focus or aim to achieve a particular outcome in a world that forces itself on the person. In neither case is the resulting image seems to be wilfully chosen by the person participating in the process. The process delivers a particular outcome that the participants in the process share by and large. Overall, this means that if this minimal requirement for success is adopted, the perceptual,

mystical, near-death and other similar experiences should be equally convincing for people as veridical experiences in the natural sense of veridicality.

Yet, at this point, it is simply puzzling that despite the fact that the perceptual realm and the religious realm are not necessarily distinguishable anymore, at the simple level of gut feeling, many people are still very sceptical about experiences that do not seem to be everyday perceptual experiences and are a lot less sceptical about everyday perceptual experiences. A person may be conscious of feeling peaceful, being out of body, floating in darkness, encountering a presence, having a life review and, entering a light and a world beyond; but, such a description of the experience does not offer confidence to many people about its veridicality in the natural sense. On the other hand, if one describes an experience where one is conscious of feeling peaceful, being in the body, walking through a dark tunnel, encountering a person, discussing previous experiences, walking out of the tunnel and into the light outside to admire the landscape around; many people feel more confident about the veridicality of this experience in the natural sense. If they are part of the same process under the minimalist requirement, there must be a reason that people's confidence level changes when they judge these experiences side by side. So, what is it that is still missing in this natural sense of veridicality that makes people judge near-death experiences differently from everyday perceptual experiences? What has not been considered so far?

#### Levels of Confidence and Epistemic Rationality

There has to be some kind of epistemic rationality that everyday lay people apply in their gut feeling to shape their confidence levels toward their experiences. Of course, as it was previously stated, lay people do not provide a well-developed definition of veridicality at the beginning of a process of deliberation. In fact, they do not provide a definition at any point. Instead, they simply offer a natural sense of what appears to be metaphysically or ontologically significant at the everyday level, as they move around in their world, based on personal experiences and, of course, without any sophisticated academic assessments. Whatever this rationality is, it seems that its goal is to measure the truth and succeed in arriving at the truth about veridicality. Its process is reflective in a sense that people build a strong sense of confidence about their natural sense of veridicality as a result of this largely mental process.

They are positively confident about one type of experience but less confident about another type. This reflective epistemic process may not be a deliberately created, academically styled and deeply philosophical process, but it has the power to shape people's sense of veridicality. So, what is this epistemic process that has the power to shape confidence toward veridicality of experiences in the natural sense?

As difficult as it may be to capture this epistemic process, Richard Foley has tried to offer a general philosophical description of it. Foley has developed a theory of epistemic rationality in the form of a first person persuasive argument out of Aristotelian inspiration of rationality as a goal oriented exercise that tries to capture the subjective reflective process people in general apply (Foley, 1987). Foley's theory tries to show what a person does when the person is carefully reflective. Foley's overall theory is trying to avoid a situation where, on the one hand, the rules of the theory are so strict that this subjectively-oriented theory either ends in scepticism about knowledge or denies the possibility of making errors, on the other hand, this subjective oriented theory is not fundamental enough to provide a proper distinction between truth and falsehood. Basically, he is trying to build a sensible first-person persuasive theory where he can follow a carefully reflective person in his epistemic process while he is trying to arrive at true beliefs and avoid false beliefs.

It would be possible to consult other epistemic theories for the purpose of finding out more about epistemic rationality. However, Foley's theory in particular is worthwhile to study in some details because it is a first person epistemic process that does not rely on any objective measures. His process simply follows a carefully reflective person in his subjective epistemic pursuit. Therefore, following Foley's theory, it is possible to come closer to understanding how an average carefully reflective lay person attempts to arrive at true beliefs and attempts to avoid false beliefs about everyday perceptual experiences and experiences that fall outside of them. If this process is applied to the problem of perceptual and near-death experiences, it may offer a glimpse into the reflective process that shape people's confidence level to create two different levels of interpretation, one for perceptual experiences and another for other types of experiences. Following Foley's process will basically allow for a better understanding of lay people's judgment of veridicality in the natural sense that is reflected in their gut feeling.

To begin, Foley focuses on the goal of having true beliefs and not having false beliefs in the present time. In order to engage in the careful deliberation of an effective pursuit of this goal, the person is required to use reflection. Foley connects rationality with the act of reflection. A rational person is the one that pursues the epistemic goal that he believes is effective if he were to be carefully reflective. Foley states: "In particular, if a person has a goal X and if he on careful reflection would believe Y to be an effective means to X, then, all else being equal, it is rational for him to bring about Y" (Foley, 1987, 6). He refers to all else being equal as a situation in which there is no alternative that is more effective in bringing about X; in which, there is very little chance that this effective means leads to a disastrous outcome, and; in which, another alternative is not available that can bring about a set of multiple goals more effectively of which X is also a part. Given that all else is being equal, it is rational for the person to believe that the product of his careful reflection is an effective way to achieve his goal.

Firstly, Foley does not dispute that it is irrational for a person to have a certain kind of goal. A goal may not be an ideal goal to pursue or it may interfere with other goals. However, Foley insists that his theory is not interested in finding out which goal a person should pursue. Such pursuit belongs to a theory of rationality and not to the theory of epistemic rationality. Instead, the focus is on finding out if the person's goal in question is coherent. According to Foley, an epistemic goal is strictly concerned with having true beliefs and not having false beliefs in the present time. He says that, "the epistemic goal is concerned with now believing those propositions that are true and now not believing those propositions that are false" (Foley, 1987: 8).

Accordingly, an epistemic goal does not engage with either practical or future concerns. Foley admits that it is possible to adopt a belief for a practical reason. The person might gain desirable good future consequences by it. An example for Foley's point, here, would be for a wife to believe that a cheating husband is faithful for the practical reason of saving a marriage. It is a rational goal, but not an epistemically rational goal. Also, it is possible to adopt a belief in order to realize a future goal. Perhaps, a good example for this goal is a belief that would help in the realization of a complete material explanation of reality in the future. It is a rational goal, but not an epistemically rational goal, according to Foley's theory. An epistemic goal is neither practical nor future oriented; it is truth oriented in the now.

This goal oriented attitude is reflected in the assessment of judgements about near-death experiences. It appears that the goal is neither practical nor future oriented in assessing any experiences. A person's gut feeling toward a particular experience does not seem to have practical concerns in a sense of wilfully adopting a particular stand based on consideration other than what appears to be true when looking at experiences side by side. It also does not seem to be future oriented. A future promise of the development of a grand theory of reality may not affect most people. Most people may not know or care about any future grand theory. An average lay person's gut feeling is simply not tied to any such concern. Most people assess their experiences on the basis of how they see them and what they can say about them now.

According to Foley, since the epistemic goal is present oriented, a person has to find now an "effective means to his goal" (Foley, 1987: 9). Accordingly, the person has to use his available resource to come up with a direct effective means to his epistemic goal. This resource is made of his current belief about what he believes is a direct effective means to this goal. In short, the direct effective means depends on the person. Foley provides two extreme scenarios to demonstrate the range of possibilities. On the one extreme, the person may believe that he is infallible. In this case, he believes that the most effective means to achieving his epistemic goal is to believe what he currently believes. On the other extreme, he may be a sceptic. In this case, he believes that there is no desirable means to achieving his epistemic goal.

Although Foley does not mention it, there are actually two types of scepticism a person can entertain: global scepticism and local scepticism. Super global sceptics maintain universal doubt, which includes not just the denial of metaphysical or ontological truths but also mathematical and logical truths (Pojman, 1993). They universally doubt all human knowledge. Descartes is an excellent example of super global scepticism. He doubts everything that cannot be known for certain. He says, "I should withhold my assent no less carefully from opinions that are not completely certain and indubitable than I would from those that are patently false" (Descartes, 1641/1993: 13). To remove all that are not just false but are uncertain, he puts the bar so high in his quest for a foundation of knowledge that he wipes out all knowledge in his way to arrive at certainty. This includes knowledge gained from logic and reason. All he is left with at the end of his quest is his certainty that he exists.

This type of global scepticism is not helpful as Descartes demonstrates. Once he wipes out all sources of knowledge, he tries to use the standard of clear and distinct perception to establish certain knowledge. The problem is that this standard is unavailable to him because he has removed all knowledge, which includes reason, that would enable him to use this standard. Basically, a proposition--which relies on reason--cannot be established by reason in the absence of reason. Ultimately, Descartes becomes a type of gravedigger who digs himself a deep hole and forgets to keep a ladder that would help him climb out. This shows that the problem of global scepticism is that it leads to complete distrust of human knowledge and, therefore, a complete lack of confidence in human knowledge. On the other hand, the advantage to super global scepticism is that it is an equal opportunist; it treats all knowledge equally. This type of scepticism does not have a chance to unfairly discriminate. When one embraces this type of scepticism, everything is equally eliminated, including the ladder.

The second type of scepticism is trickier. Local scepticism targets a very specific subject matter, such as metaphysical or inductive knowledge (Pojman, 1993). David Hume is a good example for this type of scepticism. He has accepted logical, mathematical and rational knowledge, but rejected empirical or metaphysical knowledge. For example, he questions the continued existence of objects apart from perception (Hume, 1739/2003). The good news about this type of scepticism is that it is generous to a degree. It allows for some kinds of knowledge and is only sceptical about others. It allows a philosopher to keep a ladder to climb out of a deep hole she may find herself in. For example, if logical or mathematical knowledge is allowed, it is easier to justify the use of a particular rational standard. It helps to retain confidence in at least some areas of knowledge. The disadvantage to local scepticism is that it is discriminatory. It encourages people to hold confidence in some types of knowledge and discourages people from holding confidence in others. With proper justification, if such justification is available, this may not be an issue. The problem is that it can lead to unjustified bias in the absence of proper justification.

Although they are part of the same process, the perceptual experience and the near-death experience generate different levels of confidence due to the application of local scepticism. People's gut feeling generally permits them to hold confidence in perceptual experiences, but discourages them from granting the same confidence in near-death experiences. Their gut

feeling appears to be discriminatory. They are not super global sceptics who disperse the same amount of scepticism to all areas of knowledge about experiences. They measure out uneven amounts, depending on the experience.

People's gut feelings may allow for a variety of degrees of local scepticism. Just like Foley suggests, it may vary from extreme scepticism to complete infallibility. An extreme sceptic may dismiss all experiences that fall outside of everyday perceptual experiences. For example, Russell has demonstrated this tendency when he claimed that "we can make no distinction between the man who eats little and sees heaven and the man who drinks much and sees snakes" (Russell, 1935: 188). In his pathomorphic attitude, he treats all mystical and similar experiences as abnormal states due to abnormal conditions. He takes everyday perception to be the only normal state and compares other states to this normal state. Naturally, in his theory, the normal state yields veridical experiences while the abnormal states are non-veridical. This is an example of a high-degree of local scepticism.

The tendency for local scepticism can be seen in near-death experiences. High degree of local scepticism can be seen in cases where some people take the everyday perception to be normal and follow studies done in the brain's physiology to determine what the brain does when it is involved in everyday perception. Then, they use this brain operation as a benchmark against which they measure all other so-called abnormal states. All deviation from a normal brain state signals an abnormal state. This tendency has shown up as early as in Moody's first book where he already talks about possible explanations for near-death experiences in terms of pharmacology and neurology (Moody, 1975). The normal state of everyday perception is treated as veridical and all abnormal states deviating from this state are non-veridical. The slightest deviation from what is considered normal that may occur is suspicious and untrustworthy. This is an example of a high-degree of local scepticism where confidence is encouraged in the so-called normal perception and complete lack of confidence is encouraged in anything else that falls outside of it.

Less extreme versions of local scepticism can also be found in explanations of near-death experiences. For example, a less extreme version can be detected where the experiences are treated as false, but still part of a natural process. A good example of this type of scepticism is Noyes and Kletti's interpretation of a subjective phenomenon experienced during life-threatening

situation in terms of depersonalization (Noyes & Kletti, 1976). In depersonalization, the world appears strange or even dreamlike. The person's perception is altered. Emotions disappear. At the end, the person feels that she became a stranger to herself. Noyes and Kletti think that this process is a normal reaction to a life-threatening danger. It is a coping mechanism to the frightful prospect of a suddenly approaching end of life. It is a way to end life in serenity, peace and acceptance. The reason this theory can be considered less extreme is because the experience gains meaning. Even though the source of these experiences is treated as still false or, in short, non-veridical compared to everyday perceptual experiences, near-death experiences are still thought to be significant and meaningful. They are considered to be part of the natural process of dying and they are no longer treated as a sign of simple abnormality.

An even less sceptical outlook to near-death experiences can be found in Zaleski's interpretation. Zaleski argues that near-death experiences are not otherworldly journeys in the literary sense (Zaleski, 1987). They are socially conditioned imaginary forces of the human mind. They are not an account of what truly happens after death. This can be shown by the fact that otherworldly narratives change with historical and social times. This means that there is no raw experience. A culture's conceptual and linguistic influences are imbedded in the stories. Yet, the stories are individualized, revealing an extraordinary human being with all her depth, human abilities and creative forces in each person. The person learns about her extraordinary being by engaging in an otherworldly journey. A religious truth revealed in the journey is true in so far as the religious person makes it her own truth. The journey is not a simple defence mechanism for survival as it is treated in Noyes and Kletti's argument. Instead, near-death experiences are treated in a less sceptical way as deeply meaningful events that reveal something crucial and valuable about the human character.

As the pendulum swings in the other direction away from scepticism, some people adopt an even more positive attitude toward near-death experiences that dismisses the idea that these experiences are false in any way. They have more confidence in these experiences. In particular, researchers who defend the Afterlife Hypothesis may defend core elements of near-death experiences as not just meaningful but similar to everyday perceptual events (Fox, 2003). For example, an element, such as the dark tunnel, may be described in a number of ways. It could be described as "a cave, a well, a trough, an enclosure, a tunnel, a funnel, a vacuum, a



void, a sewer, a valley, and cylinder” (Moody, 1975: 30-31). However, the tunnel may be thought to have the same underlying essence to it. During the experience, a person conceptualizes and understands this element based on her own culture, tradition and personal preference. That is the reason that the element can take a specific form for each individual. The actual element is rather flexible and fluid in nature that can be shaped by the human mind into a comfortable form that a specific person can relate to. Underneath all the different forms, though, there is an actual ultimate element. This attitude toward near-death experiences shows a fairly high level of confidence toward them.

As the pendulum hits the opposite end of scepticism, one finds complete acceptance or infallibility of near-death experiences. For example, if one encounters the darkness as a cave, the person is fully confident that it is indeed a cave (Fox, 2003). The person's confidence is as high in the cave part of the near-death experience as it is in any other everyday experience of a cave. The experience of this cave is not thought of as flexible, fluid, symbolic or open to interpretation. It stands in par with an everyday experience of the same object or event. This attitude means complete acceptance at the infallibility level and total lack of scepticism.

This means that in case of evaluation of near-death experiences, in their gut feeling, most people use local scepticism rather than global scepticism. People do not generally worry about the potential presence of a Cartesian evil-demon or a mad scientist. They tend to be local sceptics with a range of scepticism toward experiences. Their attitude toward near-death experiences can range from radical scepticism to a sense of infallibility depending on the individual while seemingly staying more stable about everyday perceptual experiences.

Foley argues that most people in general fall between these two extremes of infallibility and radical scepticism in their everyday lives. "Between these two extremes, the optimistic and the pessimistic, is the middle ground, which is occupied by all (or almost all) human beings" (Foley, 1987: 9). They believe that they can sort their ideas to discard some and to improve on others. Using Foley's language of analytic philosophy and explaining the idea in terms of propositional knowledge, the overall point is that it is up to a person's current belief system, for her to identify, using careful reflection, unsuspecting premises that support the conclusion for that person to believe that the conclusion of the argument is an effective direct means to her

epistemic goal in the present time. In applying Foley's theory, this means that if the epistemic goal is to have true belief about the veridicality of perceptual and other experiences and to avoid false belief about them, the person will use her current belief system to find unsuspecting premises to support her conclusion and to develop the level of scepticism as a result of this process in the present time. If this process holds, it is epistemically rational for her to believe in the conclusion about the veridicality of her experiences.

How do people choose their positions between the extremes of infallibility and radical scepticism? Basically, they look for truth preserving arguments. According to Foley, for a person's argument to be successful, his own argument that the person presents to himself has to be "sufficiently likely to be truth preserving" (15). On reflection, the person has to be convinced that if his premises are true, the conclusion is true in the argument. There are arguments where the premises imply the conclusion. However, in many cases, the person would just find the conclusion to be sufficiently probable in this highly subjective assessment. The presence of probability means that the person has to accept at least some risk of ending up in falsehood.

Foley suggests that the relevant possible situations where the premises and the conclusion should be true at the same time "the percentage has to be at least fifty" (19). He admits, though, that there is no quantity that can really be attached to the desired success of the conclusion. Foley claims that the reason for this is that the epistemic goal pulls the individual in two different directions. On the one hand, the person works toward believing in truth in a sense that he wants to arrive at the truth at the end of this process. This aspect of the epistemic goal encourages the person to believe in the conclusion. Believing in the conclusion helps in the success of believing in truth. On the other hand, the person works toward avoiding falsehood in a sense that he wants to avoid falsehood at the end of this process. This aspect of the goal encourages the person to avoid believing in a false conclusion. Avoiding the belief in a false conclusion helps in the success of avoiding falsehood. It is puzzling for any person to find an appropriate balance between these two competing forces. Foley suggests that there is no quantitative answer to the manner in which these two forces should be weighed in the decision whether the argument is sufficiently truth preserving. There is simply no way to calculate; there is no principle on which one can decide on the matter. There is no number or technique that can be attached to the

determination of how likely a conclusion is true, given that the premises are true. Yet, people in general manage to make a decision about the conclusion anyway.

According to Foley, given that the epistemic goal pulls the individual in two directions, people manage to make a decision about the conclusion based on their risk-taking attitude. The epistemic risk a person is willing to take in an instance can shape the decision whether an argument is accepted as uncontroversial. The person measures the risk by weighing the relevant situations. Basically, it is up to the person to decide if a specific percentage of relevant situations is high enough not to risk ending up in falsehood, but ending up believing in truth instead. If it is high enough for the individual to accept the risk, it is epistemically rational for the person to believe that the conclusion is uncontroversial. Foley states it the following way:

He must decide, that is, whether or not the conclusion would be true in a high enough percentage of relevant situations in which the premises are true to make the risk of believing a falsehood in such situations an acceptably low risk, insofar as he wants to believe truths and not to believe falsehoods (Foley, 1987: 21-22).

It seems that in this epistemic risk-taking calculation some people may err on the side of caution. Often times, they take a low-risk attitude that even means suspension of judgment about a particular experience of which they are uncertain. Even some philosophers endorse this approach. For example, as Clifford has suggested, one should refuse to believe anything in the absence of insufficient evidence (Clifford, 1869/1993), whatever this insufficient evidence may represent. However, James points out the problem with such justification, which is an overly cautious attitude. According to James, avoiding an error by refusing to believe anything upon insufficient evidence is an expression of the fear of being duped (James, 1897/1977). It is an expression of one's passionate life. This means that James finds the low risk attitude overly cautious; it is based on an unnecessary fear.

According to James, the problem is that the type of attitude, for example, Clifford and Russell have toward the truth does not necessarily lead to the knowledge of truth. Just like Foley, James argues: "We must know the truth; and we must avoid error,--these are our first and greatest commandments as would-be knowers; but they are not two ways of stating an identical

commandment, they are two separable laws" (James, 1897/1977: 726-727). This means that avoiding an error does not lead to the truth; instead, it can lead to other errors. For this reason, for James, avoiding errors is not enough; one must also seek the truth. The extreme desire to avoid mistakes that Clifford, Russell and like-minded people entertain does not justify the discriminatory process against experiences, for example, that may fall outside of everyday perceptual experiences. In fact, James believes that it is better to embrace the alternative; it is better to take a chance on the possibility of finding knowledge with a risk of error. He says:

For my own part, I have also a horror of being duped; but I can believe that worse things than being duped may happen to a man in this world: so Clifford's exhortation had to my ears a thoroughly fantastic sound...Our errors are surely not such awfully solemn things. In a world where we are so certain to incur them in spite of all our caution, a certain lightness of heart seems healthier than this excessive nervousness on their behalf (James, 1897/1977: 727).

Since the attitude of overwhelming fear of error is not productive, it seems for James that it is better to drop this attitude. Instead, adopting the goal of finding knowledge with a risk of error is a better choice. Following James' argument, it is better to be more charitable to experiences that fall outside everyday perceptual experiences. Thus, the argument above between Clifford and James clearly shows Foley's point on people's risk-taking attitude. Some people have a low-risk tolerance because they try to desperately avoid mistakes at any cost while others have a high-risk tolerance because they are not afraid of being duped.

Ultimately, using Foley's line of thinking, any subject matter is decided on reflection, using the epistemic risk-measure of the person. The person will measure her beliefs against her argument the way she sees fit in her current situation. She will determine if the case falls outside similar actual situations or, if it falls within the acceptable realm of probability. According to Foley, most people fall between the positions of being too conservative and being too liberal in their assessments. A person in a conservative position would only admit almost identical situations for assessment. For example, this person may only accept an experience to be perceptual in nature if it is positively proved to belong to this category. On the other hand, a person in a liberal position would allow for extremely dissimilar situations for the same purpose.

For example, an experience that even remotely looks and feels like a perceptual experience in nature may be added to this category. Foley confidently states, though, that most people would neither be too conservative, nor too liberal in their assessments. Nevertheless, wherever the person locates herself on this scale, she would look for situations that are not too improbable for her own assessment.

This risk taking attitude is the reason that scepticism toward near-death experiences ranges from one extreme to the other. It seems that some people may take a conservative position and dismiss all experiences that fall outside everyday perceptual experiences, treating them as a sign of abnormality. With less fear, a less sceptical attitude toward these experience may be implemented where some treat these experiences as false, but part of the natural process. With even less fear and less scepticism, the experiences may still be false, but deeply meaningful, integral to the human growth process. Being more charitable, some people may be more liberal toward these experiences and may show confidence toward some core elements of the experiences, treating them with similar confidence they show toward everyday experiences. Finally, some others may end up at the other end of the spectrum where they show the same type of charity and confidence toward these experiences as they show toward any other everyday experiences. The ranges of people's attitudes mean that some may be more afraid to make mistakes when it comes to experiences outside the everyday perceptual realm while others are more trusting, more confident or, as James put it, possess more lightness of heart.

Foley argues that in this epistemic process, it should not be forgotten that, since this is a first person persuasive epistemic theory, it is up to the person to determine the kinds of situations that are relevant to the argument. Nobody imposes upon the person "a view about what kinds of possible situations are relevant to a determination of whether the premises of an argument make its conclusion sufficiently probable" (Foley, 1987: 22). It is always up to the person to determine this by careful reflection. The person makes decisions based on her presently available general beliefs. These general beliefs will shape the ability of the argument to be truth preserving. In considering how truth preserving her argument is, a person may sometimes be faced with what she regards to be highly unrealistic possible situations. These situations are so far-fetched for the person that the person finds them unlikely to be relevant. In this instance, the individual is likely

to reject the conclusion. If an argument conflicts with the person's general beliefs, these general beliefs are most likely to be defended and the argument to be dismissed.

Foley thinks that, most of the time, the person rejects an argument that conflicts with a general belief. According to him, it is possible, however, that the opposite may happen. Sometimes, the person's general belief that conflicts with her argument is found to be false. In this case, the argument is defended and the general belief is rejected. Still, her other general beliefs are upheld. Basically, the person accepts that if she were in the situation where these premises materialize, it would be rational for her to believe in the argument in question. For Foley, the important point is that "what counts as a situation that is relevant to the assessment of the truth-preservingness of the argument is something that an individual is to decide for [herself] on reflection" (Foley, 1987: 24).

In this risk measuring process, what has the power to overturn an argument? Foley provides one important condition for accepting an argument. He argues that "p is epistemically rational for S just if propositions that are uncontroversial for him tend to make p epistemically rational for him and there are no defeater propositions that are uncontroversial for him" (40). To simply put it, if the person finds the proposition strong enough to accept it based on his risk calculation, it is epistemically rational for him to accept the argument, unless there is a defeater proposition that the person also finds strong enough to accept based on his risk calculation. This means that the person should be confident about the truth of the original proposition. Upon reflection, he should have no reason to doubt it. The strength of his belief depends on the person's confidence level of acceptance of this truth. The higher the confidence level is, the more likely the person finds that the proposition is uncontroversial. If he finds the potential defeater proposition that is argued against the original proposition just as convincing, the person's confidence level drops in the truth and the original proposition becomes controversial. In this case, the original argument is no longer accepted; the original argument has been defeated. Therefore, the defeater has the power to overturn the original argument.

To apply this idea to near-death experiences, this means that if a person believes that near-death experiences are unlike perceptual experiences, he will defend this general belief. He will reject an argument that conflicts with this general belief. However, there may be times

when this general belief may be overturned. For example, if a person has a near-death experience, his belief that near-death experiences are unlike perceptual experiences may be overturned. His newly found experience may help him to defend the argument that the two types of experiences are alike and to reject his previously held general belief that they are not. All his other beliefs about his experiences may remain untouched. On reflection, he decides what is relevant for the truth-preservingness of the argument in question despite what others may say about his conclusion.

Foley gives a curious example to show the manner in which a defeater can fail, which explains the confidence people have in their perceptual experiences in general. The example states that a person believes that a giraffe is in front of him. The defeater points to two facts. The first states that the person is standing on Wall Street. The second states that there are almost never any giraffes on Wall Street. From these two facts, one can conclude that the belief that a giraffe is in front of the person is dubious. Foley points out that, despite the presence of a strong defeater, the success of the defeater seems intuitively wrong. He says:

Yet, intuitively this does not seem right; it seems as if when S believes with great confidence that he sees a giraffe in front of him, this proposition might very well be uncontroversial for him even if he believes with equal confidence that he is in a situation in which, all else being equal, he is unlikely to see a giraffe (Foley, 1987: 62).

It seems that, in the giraffe case, the defeater does not have the power to make the belief in the giraffe sighting suspicious enough to defeat the sighting. Given a person's risk calculation, the giraffe sighting seems to remain uncontroversial. Foley finds that this is a curious case because the defeater's premises are also held with great confidence. A person confidently believes that he is standing on Wall Street and that there are almost never any giraffes on Wall Street. Yet, he still upholds the giraffe sighting as uncontroversial. Foley concludes that it seems that there is something very special about certain general beliefs such as the general belief about perceptual experiences as this case indicates. It may be difficult to make them controversial in certain cases.

It appears that many people seem to hold most everyday perceptual experiences with a lot of confidence. For this reason, everyday perceptual experiences in general are not defeated. If one describes an experience where one is conscious of feeling peaceful, being in the body, walking through a dark tunnel, encountering a person, discussing previous experiences, walking out of the tunnel and into the light outside to admire the landscape around, the experience is uncontroversial for many people. The defeater is usually not strong enough to defeat the experience and move it into a controversial category. Certainly, the possibility of global scepticism holds that an evil-demon or a mad scientist is tricking a person to believe that all experiences, including perceptual experiences are real when, in fact, they are not real. However, this global scepticism is totally unconvincing for most people and, therefore, cannot defeat the argument. Instead, most people utilize local scepticism to decide on the matter of perceptual experiences. However, the type of local scepticism mostly used does not seem to ever touch the force of belief in most everyday perceptual experiences. Except for a minority of philosophers who doubt perceptual reality for a living, most people hold everyday perceptual experiences with undefeated great confidence.

Of course, there are instances where judgments about perceptual experiences can be defeated. For example, in the movie *A Beautiful Mind* (Howard, 2001), based on the biographical novel by Sylvia Nasar, part of the life of John Nash, an American mathematician who is a Nobel Laureate in Economics, is explored where Nash during his graduate studies develops a condition that doctors refer to as paranoid schizophrenia. He is convinced that he has three people in his life that other people either cannot perceive or lie about perceiving. He maintains this belief until he finds a convincing defeater. One of the three people is a little girl. He realizes that this little girl cannot be a physical being in physical reality that he believes her to be. He makes the logical conclusion that if she were a physical person within the physical world, she would have already grown up to be an adult over the number of years that he has seen her. This conclusion convinces him to believe that she is not a physical being like others around him. Thus, in this case, Nash's confidence is lost and the perceptual experience is defeated based on a logical deduction Nash makes about the little girl. This logical deduction is based on his other general beliefs that he holds about the presence of physical beings around him--a belief that people get older over time. Therefore, in this case, the defeater is strong enough to shatter a



person's confidence in a particular perceptual experience that is normally strongly held in place for perceptual experiences in general. This means that it is possible for a person to defeat his own belief in a perceptual experience, but it is extremely rare. Most perceptual experiences are held in place with undefeated great confidence most of the time.

For most people, the story is different when it comes to near-death experiences. These experiences can be defeated because for many people these experiences are not held with great confidence after their risk calculation. If a person describes an experience of being conscious of feeling peaceful, being out of body, floating in darkness, encountering a presence, having a life review and, entering a light and a world beyond, for many people the experience does not offer enough confidence for it to be uncontroversial. The defeater is strong enough because, most often, not having had the experience, it is viewed from a distant, third-person viewpoint where the experience is moved into the controversial category. In this controversial category, many people's local scepticism weakens its force to the point where the belief in the experience, given their risk taking attitude, may be easily defeated.

In fact, any lack of experience with death forces most people to compare this type of experience with other types of experiences they can immediately relate to. However, these other types of experiences are already controversial for them when measuring the risk. Rosenberg has turned to the sleep-wake cycle to make his argument on the death process (1998). Marsh has attempted to compare near-death experiences to drug-induced states and fainting experiences (2010). Wilson and Barber have tried to connect near-death experiences to fantasies (1981). It seems that people have a general tendency to make sense of near-death and dying experiences by linking them to and comparing them with those experiences with which they are already familiar in first person but which already fall into the controversial category.

The result is that judgements about the veridicality of experiences mirror the judgments about these similar experiences in a sense that these experiences are not uncontroversial. For example, Rosenberg claims that death is similar to the condition of the sleep-wake cycle without the waking up part that ends with no experience at all (1998). This judgement puts death related experiences into the same category as sleep, which people normally do not place into the same category as waking experiences and where they are already typically judged to be less veridical

in the natural sense than waking experiences. Overall, this means that a lack of experience near death forces people to lump near-death and dying experiences into other categories of which they have intimate knowledge, but where this knowledge is not uncontroversial. These experiences that are placed in other categories most often are not sufficient enough for a person to defend the veridicality of near-death experiences in the natural sense.

On the other hand, people who have had near-death experiences possess a type of intimate knowledge of these experiences that allows these experiences to be uncontroversial. The first person viewpoint does not allow their local scepticism to defeat this type of experiences because the belief is successful as the result of their risk measurement. These people judge the experience without lumping their near-death experiences in with other types of experiences that are already controversial. For example, one person commented that, "It was too real. Dreams are always fictitious" (Ring, 1980: 82-83). Since the person has experienced both dreams and a near-death experience firsthand, he was able to compare them side by side to judge their qualities. Hence, people who have had near-death experiences have an ability to rely on a first person, phenomenal viewpoint that others cannot rely on to hold a strong result from risk measurement that the defeater cannot overturn. While others are outsiders to this viewpoint, simply imagining near-death experiences to be similar to other types of experiences of which they have a first person viewpoint but which are already controversial, those people who have had near-death experiences are not forced to simply rely on their imagination, but have an ability to compare these types of experiences based on memory. This difference elevates them to a strong belief where the force of the belief is enough for the belief in near-death experiences not to be defeated.

Throughout the entire epistemic process, Foley believes that the person does not have to limit himself in any way. Since this theory represents a type of subjective epistemic foundationalism, a person can take anything into consideration during his reflection to reach his epistemic goal. Simply, his argument just needs to be truth preserving to reach his goal of believing in truth and avoiding falsehood in the present time. According to Foley, if the argument is sufficiently truth preserving, "then the argument reflects his deepest epistemic standards" (Foley, 1987: 35). A person is required to continue this reflection until his view stabilizes. Of course, there is no set limit to the duration or depth of reflection a person has to be

engaged in. The individual simply arrives at a point where further reflection would not alter his view. At this point, he has reached a reflective stability.

People's gut feelings, ultimately, reflect their deepest epistemic standards once they reach reflective stability. Since all people have had everyday perceptual experiences, they are in general thought to be strongly held beliefs reached and preserved in reflective stability. However, the diversity in gut feeling toward near-death experiences reflects a variation in the general consensus. People who have had near-death experiences find them uncontroversial and, for this reason, they are willing to pronounce them veridical. On the other hand, most people who have not had near-death experiences may not find them as convincing as everyday perceptual experiences and conclude that they are not uncontroversial and, for this reason, they are unwilling to pronounce them veridical. Some find that the propositions are not strong enough to make the argument of veridicality uncontroversial and, for this reason, usually adopt a theory, such as the Brain Hypothesis, that may reflect more closely this belief. Some find that the propositions are strong enough to make the argument of veridicality uncontroversial and, for this reason, usually adopt a theory, such as the Afterlife Hypothesis, that may reflect more closely this belief. At the end, whether the propositions are found to be strong enough to make the argument veridical in the natural sense depends on each person's risk-taking attitude and degree of local scepticism. The following chart explains people's reactions:

	People who had near-death experiences	People who did not have near-death experiences
Evaluation of everyday perceptual experiences	Generally Not Defeated	Generally Not Defeated
Evaluation of near-death experiences	Generally Not Defeated	Propositions May Be Defeated (Brain Hypothesis) or, Propositions May Not Be Defeated (Afterlife Hypothesis)

Table 2

Ultimately, the lesson is that it is difficult to even generalize people's gut feeling about near-death experiences. When one claims that most people's gut feeling shows that they do not have the same confidence in near-death experiences as they have in everyday perceptual experiences, it is legitimate to be sceptical about the category that this so-called "most people" actually represents. Who are these people? They are most likely people who not only did not

have near-death experiences, but also probably did not have any experiences that put them on a par with their perceptual experiences. They find perceptual experiences the benchmark for veridicality in the natural sense against which all other experiences are judged with more or less local scepticism.

Foley's first person epistemological approach gives an insight into the analytical mind of the individual who possesses an epistemic goal of seeking true beliefs and avoiding false beliefs. His theory is not an abstract philosophical theory, but a realistic theory of epistemology that describes how people normally function in their epistemic goal seeking project. It demonstrates that people fall within ranges of possible responses. It always depends on each individual what the final conclusion is for the person's specific epistemic goal. As it was shown, this is true when making a decision about veridicality. However, knowing that the generalization of people's epistemic responses is not simple or uniform, it is legitimate to ask a variety of related questions. How many different viewpoints can one adopt when judging veridicality in the natural sense? What are the different basic items, experiences or events one can perceive in relation to these viewpoints? And, how does this complex picture of viewpoints and objects shape people's judgments of veridicality in the natural sense?

### The Complex Picture

Using a subjective epistemic approach, people can end up having a variety of viewpoints when judging the veridicality of an experience in the natural sense. It is possible to have a first person phenomenological view, normally referred to as a subjective view. It is also possible to have a distant, detached third person view, normally referred to as an objective view. Moreover, even though, philosophically speaking, the intersubjective view may be ineffective, most people may also make use of this view mostly in order to make an effort to gain an agreement on a subject matter with others. This latter view can be of two kinds: 1) It can be of a subject matter of which a person has a direct experience or, 2) It can be of a subject matter of which a person does not have a direct experience. Although this may be more complex and complicated than it looks, these viewpoints may possibly and roughly correspond to the pronouns *I*, *he* or *she*, *we*, and *they* and to the possessives *my* view, *his* or *her* view, *our* view, and *their* view.

There can also be a number of objects of perception present and judgments made about their veridicality. A person can perceive her own existence and make a judgement about whether she exists or not. If she judges herself to exist, she will pronounce her self-existence veridical. A person can also perceive others and make judgements about their existence. If she judges them to be other conscious beings, they exist for her as veridical people. Finally, a person can perceive objects and make judgements about their existence. If she judges them to exist in a metaphysical and ontological sense where she believes these objects to be basic building blocks of reality, the person thinks of them as veridical in nature.

This reflection process can be repeated with the objective and intersubjective views as well. To focus on the intersubjective view, it is possible to judge self-existence, other people and objects from this view. Of course, the intersubjective view becomes very complex very quickly. Since there is a difference between views and experiences, people can have views about people and objects that are based on their own experiences and the experiences of others or, have views that are based on other people's experiences alone. Intersubjective views can also refer to groups of people--in whatever way the word "group" may be defined--of which one is not a member. These groups can make a decision about experiences about people and objects this non-member had or experiences this non-member did not have. The possessive pronouns *our* and *their* become relative to the combination of views and experiences people may have.

The cause of the disagreement amongst individuals and groups in near-death studies becomes very clear with these options in mind. Since every person consults her own experience first using self-reflection in order to make a decision about the veridicality of near-death experiences, the results may vary. If the person had a near-death experience, she turns to it every time to arrive at a conclusion about the veridicality of her own experience. She uses this experience to build an analogy about another person's experience. This affects her own conclusion and the intersubjective agreement of a group she may belong to about veridicality in the natural sense. If the person did not have a near-death experience, she resorts to other arguments, probably based on other types of experiences she deems similar to near-death experiences which she did have, and to the use of logic and reason. Her lack of near-death experience affects her own conclusion and the intersubjective agreement of a group she may

belong to about veridicality in the natural sense. This causes serious disagreements amongst individuals and groups. The following chart can visually demonstrate this complex situation:



**Table 3**

In this complex situation, it is hard to follow who is making judgments about whose experiences. For example, a person could belong to a group where she is discussing a first person experience with others to reach a decision about the veridicality of the experience or, she could read an article about somebody else's experience where a group that she does not belong to assesses the veridicality of this other person's experience to reach a conclusion. This complexity shows that judgments born out of either personal assessments or intersubjective views may cover a variety of views and experiences that influence the conclusions about veridicality in the natural sense.

At the end, a variety of viewpoints and objects are available to determine veridicality in the natural sense using subjective epistemic reflection. If a person concludes that she exists, her self-existence is pronounced to be veridical. If the person concludes based on analogy that another person is conscious, she pronounces the other person to be a veridical human being. If a person finds that an object is metaphysically or ontologically significant in a sense that the object is deemed to be a basic building block of reality, the object is pronounced to be veridical. If there is an intersubjective agreement in a group about a person's self existence, this person's self-existence is pronounced to be veridical. If there is an intersubjective agreement in a group about another person's conscious self, the person is pronounced to be a veridical human being. If there

is any intersubjective agreement in a group about the metaphysical or ontological significance of an object, the object is pronounced to be veridical. The question in this complex picture is: Whose perspective is it that one is talking about at any point? Whose judgment of veridicality a person is referring to at any particular instance? If one goes back to basics and argues without a presupposed theory, the phenomenological assessment does not lead to a unified vision of veridicality.

To sum it up the whole argument, once the serious problems with the definitions of veridicality that the experts have provided are revealed, it is possible to remain at a Husserlian level and simply suspend judgement. Certainly, this leads to a fairly bias-free vision, but it prevents one from pronouncing a verdict on veridicality. Naturally, if one wants to make a judgement, an investigation into experiences is necessary. The investigation through the eyes of the lay person shows that everyday perceptual experiences and experiences outside them, such as near-death experiences, are decided based on people's subjectively determined epistemic rationality. A lay person who relies on the metaphorically understood "gut feeling" tries to decide whether an experience is veridical without providing a well-developed definition of veridicality at the beginning of the process or any time after. Instead, the lay person simply provides a natural sense of what appears to be metaphysically or ontologically significant at the everyday level while moving around in the person's world based on personal experiences and, of course, without any sophisticated academic assessments. The results of lay people's epistemic rationality lead to a range of possible responses and these responses at the end cannot offer a unified vision.

An attempt to work without a theory, therefore, shows the eventual downfall of such an approach. Without a theory, the discussion eventually collapses into relativism. Of course, if everything is relative, it is not possible to offer a definitive answer to the question of veridicality of near-death experiences. Therefore, it is obvious that this approach cannot be the final answer to the veridicality of NDEs. The answer has to be elsewhere. Basically, some kind of a theory is necessary after all.

The good news is that pluralistic interpretations of the world or reality do not mean that the world or reality does not have intrinsic characteristics that can be captured in a theory. It is

simply possible that these characteristics are not fixed, but rather flexible, offering an opportunity for a variety of participations and interpretations. Reality may resemble the observation of Heraclitus: "No man ever steps into the same river twice" (Reeve, 1997: 402a). The river has the intrinsic characteristics of a river, which includes its fluidity, and it allows every person to have a variety of experiences every time that person steps into that river.

So, what is the true nature of reality? Given the plurality of answers coming from the lay perspective, how can one determine the true nature of reality? And, what does this mysterious reality that is flexible enough to carry these pluralistic interpretations say about near-death experiences? In the next chapter, I will argue that, given the available evidence, the nature of reality can be best explained using the philosophical theory of idealism.



## CHAPTER 4: THE NATURE OF REALITY

I'd visited banks before. I remember the sounds of the spring, the wind, the ticks at one particular location. Ticks, ticks and more ticks. The passing of the ticks was seriously annoying at the end of the golden hour. Then, the situation became worse. Actually, it got out of control. I don't remember the exact moment the bat started flying; I just remember the blood. It was ugly.

--M. J. Mandoki (2018, p. 39)

Relativism is not satisfactory. It signals the inability to possess knowledge that all people can share. It denies the ability for people to come to an agreement about a subject matter. In terms of the nature of reality and of all subjects, such as near-death experiences, that depend on the understanding of reality, relativism robs human beings of the possibility of ever making progress. If understanding reality is relative to each person, then, the definition of veridicality varies with each person's understanding. Undoubtedly, relativism may satisfy some fans of this theory. However, stopping at the theory of relativism puts a definite halt to progress toward any possible universal knowledge of reality and definition of veridicality. Therefore, it is worth pushing beyond relativism and striving for some further progress even in light of the diversity of opinions people possess.

Leaving relativism behind, what can one say about the nature of reality that can offer a better understanding of veridicality? Is it possible to make any universal statements that do not carry an ideological bias muddying the road to better understanding? In what follows, I will answer these questions by defending the theory of idealism based on the idea of simplicity. Simplicity can be described in a number of ways, such as, for example, quantitative and qualitative ontological parsimony, common cause explanation, symmetry, uniformity and so on (Fitzpatrick, 2013). However, in the case of reality, the rule of parsimony seems to be the important type of simplicity. Simplicity, in the form of the principle of parsimony, requires that

either the number of ontological posits or the ontological posits that do not play a genuine explanatory role in a theory be eliminated (Barnes, 2000). Essentially, in the spirit of this type of simplicity, reality needs to have a simple basic form based on which all configurations become possible. I will argue that this simple basic form cannot be gained from material reality only because things that appear to be mental in nature cannot be properly demonstrated by strictly resorting to physical explanations of reality. Also, dualism is not a solution either because dualism does not have the minimal number of ontological posits. However, idealism satisfies both the ability to deal with things that are mental in nature and the ability to possess the most minimal number of ontological posits. For this reason, I will argue that the required simplicity can be best captured in the theory of ontological idealism in order to make any universal statements.

A more detailed understanding of ontological idealism can reveal a more proper way of describing veridicality and come closer to answering the question, "Are near-death experiences veridical?" Once ontological idealism is described, it turns out that consciousness understood as the basic building block of reality offers the best hope of understanding human experiences. Human beings seem to be conscious centres whereby consciousness can be experienced from a first person view. Eventually, the description of these conscious centres offers a better understanding of veridicality in general and in relation to near-death experiences in particular.

### Brain-Dependence

A good starting point for finding some universal statements that can be made about the nature of reality is to take a closer look at the brain and the mind. If one can make any universal statements about them, it helps gain some knowledge about the nature of reality. So, what does one know about their necessity? The brain-dependent theory is usually born out of a desire for simplicity. Be it an emergent theory or an identity theory of the mind, a scientific desire for simplicity is often cited for embracing the theory of brain-dependence. For example, J. J. C. Smart has wished to resist pain being identified as anything psychical in nature and, for this reason, has embraced the identity theory out of simplicity:

Why do I wish to resist this suggestion? Mainly because of Occam's razor. It seems to me that science is increasingly giving us a viewpoint whereby organisms are able to be seen as physiochemical mechanisms: it seems that even the behavior of man himself will one day be explicable in mechanistic terms (J. J. C. Smart, 1962: 161)

Although to make an effort for simplicity's sake is noble, be it in a form of Occam's razor or for any other scientific or philosophical reasons, the problem with this approach is that a brain-dependent theory ties one to a very specific interpretation of mind-brain functioning. And, this interpretation becomes anything but simple. A brain-dependent theory obligates one to equate certain brain parts or processes with certain mental parts or processes or, if not equating with, show an emergence of mental activity from brain parts and processes. This obligation ties one to the necessity of the identification of very specific brain parts and processes to demonstrate very specific mental functioning. For example, Adrian Owen has identified the brain stem and the thalamus as the most important brain parts for essential functions (Owen, 2017). He states that the "relationship between the brainstem and the thalamus is crucial for holding it all together, maintaining consciousness and keeping us alive. It's the be-all and end-all" (75). But, are specific brain parts and processes really necessary for mental functioning?

There is a good reason to deny this necessity. This reason has to do with the biology of the brain itself. If specific brain parts and processes are necessary for mental functioning, the brain has to be in an ideal form where accurate neural mapping is possible in order for the brain to properly operate. The theory is that if the brain is missing a part or gets damaged in any way, the brain can no longer operate properly and provide sufficient mental functioning. The only problem is that this theory is disputed in conditions where people's brain parts are missing and these people are still mentally functioning. A good example for this type of condition is people with hydrocephalus. In hydrocephalus, individuals have severely diminished brain tissue where the brain ventricles can take up to 95% of brain space; basically, the brain is almost completely full with cerebrospinal fluid (Lewin, 1980). About half of these individuals who fall within the over the 90% category have an IQ over 100 and live an academically and socially successful life.

Roger Lewin cites an example of a study by John Lorber of a first-year honour student to demonstrate this puzzling condition (Lewin, 1980). The young man has had an IQ of 126 and possessed about a millimetre of thin layer of brain tissue on the cortical surface as opposed to the normal 4.5 centimetre found in average cases. Most of his skull had been filled with cerebrospinal fluid. Despite his condition, the young man has earned a degree in mathematics and appeared to be socially well functioning. His condition was studied only after he had been referred to Lorber because he appeared to have a larger than normal head. Otherwise, his condition may never have been discovered.

In the hydrocephalic condition, it is impossible to provide an accurate neural map because crucial parts may either be missing or severely limited in proportion and, for this reason, brain processes are unclear. Hydrocephalus simply shows that the identity theory or the emergent theory is not possible. If essential brain parts and processes are missing, mental functioning cannot be either identical with or the result of essential brain parts and processes. Robert J. Geis argues this point the following way:

If consciousness is associated with neural reverberations in one brain area, and these reverberations cannot occur with the compromised brain tissue of the hydrocephalic, it is clear that the neural activity in that area, when uncompromised, does not produce consciousness. Nor is it consciousness. For there is normal awareness in these hydrocephalic humans while their brain tissue, whose different areas are supposed to be the sites of consciousness, has been compromised (Geis, 1995: 78).

Not only are these people conscious, but also capable of living a fully functioning mental and social life. As in the case of the young mathematics honour student, had he not been blessed with an unusually large head, his condition may have never been discovered. His case shows that fully conscious mental functioning is possible without appropriate brain parts and processes, disproving the soundness of the identity and emergent theories of mind.

The only objection that could be raised in this case is the adaptability of the brain. It is possible to say that the millimetre brain tissue the young honour student has had provided all the

necessities for mental functioning. Basically, the small amount of his brain tissue took on all mental functioning because the brain possesses plasticity and can adapt to challenging situations. This adaptability made him a mentally and socially well-functioning human being. The problem with this argument is that this adaptability idea is not helpful to the identity or emergent theories of the mind. This idea dismisses the necessity for certain brain parts and processes that can either be identical to or emerging from very specific parts and processes. There are two possibilities here. First, there may be redundancy in up to 95% of the brain. Alternatively, there may be homeomorphism where the original-sized parts are mapped onto smaller parts in the brain. Still, since either up to 95% of the brain parts and processes are not needed or up to 95% of the size of the brain is not needed in these scenarios, these theories of the mind become insufficient to explain mental functioning.

To complicate the matter further, the human mind occasionally seems to function better without the brain in certain cases. This is often demonstrated in near-death experiences:

Near-death experiencers often describe their mental processes during the NDE as remarkably clear and lucid and their sensory experiences as unusually vivid, surpassing those of their normal waking state...Furthermore, in our collection, people reported enhanced mental functioning significantly more often when they were actually physiologically close to death than when they were not (Greyson et al., 2009: 229).

If people's mental functioning is a lot more enhanced as the brain functioning is diminishing, it is unlikely that the mind necessarily depends on the brain for functioning either altogether or in certain cases. In fact, the opposite may be true. In the near-death cases, the mind seems to be gaining power with the diminishing brain capacity. This type of enhanced mental functioning goes absolutely against any brain-dependence theory where the mind is thought to be unable to function independently of the brain at all.

At this point, it would make better sense to embrace the theory of functionalism. As it was stated previously in this work, according to functionalism, mental states are functional states. Mental states are caused by the inputs from the environment, the interactions with other

mental states and the behavioural outputs into the environment. It is an input-output system of causal explanation. If the mind can adapt to an environment where only a severely limited brain tissue is available, it is perhaps the function, the mental process, fulfilled rather than the specific brain tissue that is important to provide mental functioning.

There are at least two difficulties that surface for any physicalist wishing to switch to this theory. The first one is that functionalism does not necessarily require brain tissue. The input-output system can run on a computer hardware, mental substance or even astral body. Daniel C. Dennett's fictional story, *Where am I?* (1978/1993), demonstrates this possibility. Dennett visualizes a scenario where his brain is removed from his body and put into a vat full of liquid, the two connected by specialized antennas. The purpose of the brain removal is to allow his body to disarm a radioactive device deep underground without his brain being negatively affected. Unfortunately, his body is destroyed. He receives a new body to which his brain is connected. However, for safety purposes, in addition to receiving a new body, his brain's power, in terms of content and function, is downloaded to a computer. Now, Dennett can flip the master switch between his brain function and the computer function. Although the story is originally created to demonstrate the problem of self-identity, dislodging the brain's power to a computer implies that even physicalists, such as Dennett, are willing to surrender to the idea that the brain may not be the only medium that can possibly carry out the mind's function. For functionalists, the brain is not an essential medium. What is essential is the mental function carried out by any possible medium sufficient to support the mental function.

A possible counterargument is that it so happens that the human mind runs on brain tissue and this is probably what Dennett would argue. This counterargument is suspicious though since the original question was whether specific brain parts and processes are necessary for mental functioning. To simply say that specific brain parts and processes are necessary for mental functioning because the human mind happens to run on brain tissue is rather circular. It assumes what it is trying to prove. But, this difficulty aside, it can be said that this possibility may only exist if material reality is proved to be the full extent of reality, which is not the case, as it was already seen in chapter 2. The materialists have never proved that physical reality exhausts the whole reality. This fact allows for a possibility of an alternative medium having an ability to

support mental function; a medium which is, in addition to computer hardware, can be a mental substance or an astral body.

A second difficulty with switching to functionalism is even greater. It appears that the human mind is not just a simple functional input-output system, similar to computer programs. Geis argues that the human mind is also capable of insight that a theory resembling a computer's input-out system cannot capture (Geis, 1995). Basically, human beings are "exercising an intellectual capacity the computer is known not to have" (91). In addition to insight, computers also seem to lack the capacity to imagine and have emotions that human beings also possess (Aanstoos, 1987). If insight, imagination and emotions are missing from any known computer model with an input-output system, the functional theory is not enough to capture the essence of the conscious human mind.

Probably, the greatest challenge to functionalism in this respect has come from John Searle's Chinese Room Argument, in which he takes a stand against Strong AI (artificial intelligence) (Searle, 1980). In this argument, Searle places an English speaker in a room who follows an English instructional book on manipulating Chinese linguistic symbols in the same way as a computer runs a computer program that is written in computer code language. Searle claims that in this scenario the English speaker can manipulate linguistic symbols the same way as the computer manipulates computer symbols, but neither actually understands the language in question. His point is that semantics cannot be derived from syntax alone and, therefore, computers can never possess understanding.

Over the years, the Chinese Room Argument has become "the most widely discussed philosophical argument in cognitive science to appear since the Turing Test" (Cole, 2020). It has initiated a large number of responses from philosophers. For example, the Robot Reply states that Searle is wrong because, if a robot is endowed with the right connections to the outside world such as right sensors to gain information from the environment, the robot could attach meaning to the symbols it is operating with based on the information received (Boden, 1988; Fodor, 1987; Rey 1986, 2002). However, Searle denies that robots could attach meaning to symbols this way. In his opinion, more sensory information simply means more syntactic inputs that the robot has to deal with. Syntax still does not offer semantics; the computer still does not

associate the symbols with meanings (Searle 1984). Ultimately, he concludes that “Formal symbols by themselves can never be enough for mental contents, because the symbols, by definition, have no meaning (or interpretation, or semantics) except insofar as someone outside the system gives it to them” (Searle 1989, 45).

It is not difficult to see Searle's argument that syntax does not carry semantics in it. One does not even have to attempt to learn a foreign language to see this point. The use of homonyms in the language can demonstrate it in the following text:

I'd visited banks before. I remember the sounds of the spring, the wind, the ticks at one particular location. Ticks, ticks and more ticks. The passing of the ticks was seriously annoying at the end of the golden hour. Then, the situation became worse. Actually, it got out of control. I don't remember the exact moment the bat started flying; I just remember the blood. It was ugly (Mandoki, 2018: 39).

This scenery can either take place at a river bank with living creatures in the story or it can take place in a bank building at closing time during a bank robbery with the character engaging in a violent act. The meaning is not obvious for the reader because the syntax can be associated with more than one meaning; therefore, the reader is free to interpret the story based on her choice. Hence, syntax clearly does not carry the semantics in it. The semantics is attached by a third party, in this case, by the reader.

Later, Searle emphasizes the idea that someone outside the system offers meaning to words in the Chinese Room Argument. He states that computation is always relative to an observer or an agent who provides an interpretation (Searle, 2002). This observer or agent has intentionality, the property of being about something or having content. Searle argues that although computers carry content, they do not have original intentionality that human observers do. This means that they cannot interpret symbols. As a result, he takes understanding to be a feature of the brain that is not possible to be reproduced in computers, thereby, undercutting the functionalist argument. In addition to what Searle suggests, it can be also argued that part of the understanding that is not captured by this process is existential qualia.



It appears that the goal of simplicity cannot be achieved by either any kind of brain theory or functionalist theory of the mind. The problem of simplicity is important here because the original desire to account for the human mind in terms of the brain is born out of simplicity. Simplicity requires that these theories completely account for the conscious phenomenological human mind in their explanations, which they obviously cannot do. It seems to be the case that either the brain is not necessary or the mental function of understanding, intentionality, consciousness, in short, some form of qualia, is missing. In the latter case, David Chalmers' hard problem arises where an explanatory gap between physical states and phenomenological experiences exist (Chalmers, 1995). Here, the explanation of a brain or functionalist theory simply cannot be successful because these theories cannot explain why conscious human experiences exist at all--and they clearly do.

It appears that simplicity cannot be achieved because redundancy is always present. If the conscious human experience is accepted then, at least in some hydrocephalic cases and in near-death cases, the brain becomes by and large unnecessary. If the brain explanation in some form is accepted, the conscious human experience is unnecessary. Simplicity, in the form of the principle of parsimony, requires that either the number of ontological posits or the ontological posits that do not play a genuine explanatory role in a theory be eliminated (Barnes, 2000). In short, one of these two elements has to be eliminated in order to put an end to the superfluous features. This is the only way to achieve the required simplicity. Furthermore, since the gap cannot be closed, either the physical state or the mental state has to be definitely eliminated to make the gap of the hard problem disappear. Something has to go. It seems obvious that the denial of the conscious human mind is a not an option; it is not possible to stand in the middle of a room and say, *I am not conscious right now*. This means that the only choice is to let the requirement for the physical state go. But, what does *letting go of the requirement for the physical state* mean exactly?

### The Bare Necessity of Reality

It is obvious that the conscious human mind is absolutely necessary. Without being conscious, it is not even possible to express being conscious. Without being conscious of something, there could not be any epistemological or metaphysical statements made. Without

the proper mental activity, it would not be possible to consider the question of veridicality in relation to either the world or near-death experiences. As Searle has shown, unlike in programmed robots, the human mind has to be there in order to even consider the mind's own mental activities. In the case of human beings, something is definitely there to doubt, think, cognize and have a relationship with the world.

Something is definitely there. The mind is there. But, what is this mind that is there? To understand more about this essentially existing mind, it is important to look first at what is actually positively known about the sensory world to which it is related. William Braud explains the limits the sensory system imposes on human beings. He says: "Our senses reveal, but they also conceal. Each sense is able to access only a certain aspect of the world, and even then, it is able to process only a limited range of frequencies (qualities) and intensities of that aspect" (Braud, 2012, 120). Human beings build their visual phenomenological experiences based on the electromagnetic spectrum of between 380 to 760 nanometres in wavelength. Colours above and beyond are unseen. Auditory phenomenological experiences are based on the frequency range of 20 to 20,000 Hertz. Sounds above and beyond are unheard. Of course, some animals are not just capable of seeing colours and hearing sounds that humans cannot, but also smell and taste things people are unable to. In addition to Braud's observation on sense limitations, it can be also argued that human beings are also limited to the spatial appearance of the world in the three dimensions of length, width and depth and the mysterious time limitation of chronological motion from past to future through present.

When Thomas Nagel wrote his well-known article, *What is it like to be a bat?* (1979/2008), his argument has demonstrated the difficulty of building theories of the world based on conscious phenomenological experiences. Essentially, phenomenological experiences are subjective first person experiences. Human experiences are not just limited, but also vary from humans to other species. No human being can know what it is like to experience the world as a bat. Yet, bats seem to experience the world around them and they seem to do so in a dissimilar way to humans.

The fact is that this phenomenological experience is what human beings use to build arguments about the existence of the world apart from the mind. Of course, they could not do so

otherwise. When one looks at an object, the phenomenological experience is all there is. Even if the object is in front of a telescope or under a microscope, the observation is phenomenological. Without the senses, there is nothing to describe or explain. All descriptions and explanations are born out of the phenomenological experiences of this world.

This experience is what the mind has direct access to. Naturally, this leads to the question as to whose phenomenological experiences should be the norm to describe and explain reality. There are completely blind people whose experiences do not include the electromagnetic spectrum of 380 to 760 nanometres in wavelength or completely deaf people whose experiences do not include the frequency range of 20 to 20,000 Hertz. There are also animals that do not have such experiences. Of course, other senses could also be absent and all senses could be diminished to some extent. On the other hand, there are people whose phenomenological experiences include out-of-body and near-death experiences, shamanistic-type journeys to other realms and mystical awareness of reality. Some animals also gain experiences from the senses that people cannot and perhaps from other senses or sources people are unaware of. Whose phenomenological experiences should be the norm to determine reality? Is there any way to tell?

To answer this question, it is best to follow the information from the senses to the human mind. For example, visual information is captured by the wavelength available to the eyes that transfers that information to the mind for it to make sense of it (Santrock & Mitterer, 2001). The pupil captures the wavelength in the form of photons of light and, using the cornea and the lens of the eye, it focuses the image on the retina. The light receptors, rods and cones, of the retina engage in a chemical reaction to convert the light into neural impulses in the brain. The impulses travel through the optic nerves to the occipital lobes in the back of the brain where the image is registered for the mind to see. At least, this is what the general explanation is from brain scientists.

Although this process seems simple, it is actually very complex. Firstly, the image is captured upside down and the information from the left side of the visual field is captured by the right side of the occipital lobe and the information from the right side of the visual field to the left side of the occipital lobe. This orientation problem needs fixing. Secondly, the visual cortex of the brain also has specialized neurons that are looking to capture specific lines and angles.

For example, to capture the shape of a triangle, a variety of neurons may be triggered to capture the lines and the angles separately, to form a triangle out of it. This means that the visual system is not a simple, passive, receiving system. It does not just receive information. The information is oriented, fixed and built to gain an image. As Donald D. Hoffman argues, the process is creative rather than passive:

Your retinal image is discrete, not continuous. So if you see continuous lines and surfaces (and you do), then you must construct them from discrete information. And, if you construct them, then we should see evidence of this in the brain's activity. In species after species, we find clear evidence of great neural resources employed in constructing lines. So it's not just the borders of Kanizsa's figures that you construct, it's every line and blob of his drawing as well. If you see it, you construct it (Hoffman, 2000: 71).

The argument is that the entire world is a constructed image for the mind. It is a construction out of wavelengths to build a specific image of the world. The world is a constructed place.

The obvious counterargument is that even though the world is constructed, it actually resembles the world as it is apart from the mind. Any basic psychology textbook would probably suggest this interpretation. For example, John W. Santrock and John D. Mitterer put it this way: "The challenge today is figuring out how the brain, once it has broken the sensory landscape into pieces, stitches them back together again" (2001, 110). The suggestion is that the landscape is given and the brain simply breaks it up and reassembles it again. The problem is that it is not obvious that the original landscape is given as it is. After all, if the brain simply reassembles the given image, it has to already know what it looks like prior to the reassembly in order to guide the process (Geis, 1995). But, prior to reassembly, it simply has pieces. So, how does it know what image it should be building?

Geis states that this cannot be solved on the material level: "But that awareness, that percept, for the materialist can occur only by first a synthesis of the object's data. And that synthesis itself requires a percept. The end result is a vicious circle..." (81). If the brain does not have an already synthesized percept, it basically has no map to guide the reassembly. It has no

way to know what the world actually looks like. Here, the philosophical mystery of the epistemic veil behind which the unknown world exists reappears with a vengeance, begging to know if the world behind such a veil even exists.

The mystery thickens. In fact, it has a final kick that puts an end to the hope of looking for the mind in the brain or in any physical system. The explanation of this point requires the return to Dennett's fictional story of brain removal. In this story, *Where am I?* (1978/1993), Dennett finds himself looking at his brain after the doctors have removed it and fitted both his body and the brain with antennas to create a connection between them:

Still feeling lightheaded, I was helped over to the life-support vat. I peered through the glass. There, floating in what looked like ginger ale, was undeniably a human brain, though it was almost covered with printed circuit chips, plastic tubules, electrodes, and other paraphernalia. "Is that mine?" I asked (327).

Dennett is looking at his own brain. This may be strange to think about since such a fictional operation is not possible. However, coroners look at dead individuals' brains all the time. So, it is only a stretch of imagination to think that one could look at one's own brain. This means that, technically, an object called the brain can be observed. But, what is an object? For the sense of sight, an object is a phenomenological experience of the electromagnetic spectrum of between 380 to 760 nanometres in wavelength. So, the brain is an object of certain wavelengths in the world that is perceived. But, the question is, "Perceived by what?"

If one imagines a hypothetical, fictional scenario of opening up the skull and looking at one's own brain in the mirror, what does one see? One simply sees an object in the mirror that is a compilation of electromagnetic wavelengths one perceives. In fact, the mirror itself is such compilation. But, if all objects, including the brain, are just compilations of wavelengths, what is doing the perceiving? This observation was innocently made by more than one author without considering the implication for the nature of reality. Hoffman argues the point this way:

This argument implies an interesting conclusion about neurons themselves. We can see neurons (with the help of stains and microscopes)...So if we construct all we see, then, since we see neurons, we construct neurons. Neurons, no less than

the subjective triangles of Kanizsa, are the clever construction of your visual intelligence (Hoffman, 2000, 71).

It is very interesting that Hoffman has used the idea of visual intelligence to express the idea of construction of neurons. He could not have said it otherwise. Had he used the word "neuron" instead of visual intelligence, it would have sounded not just odd but rather controversial. The statement, "your construction of neurons are the clever construction of your neurons" makes very little sense. It implies some kind of self-creation.

Blackmore has also suggested a Buddhist inspired answer. She claims that reality and the self is a mental model that can explain all experiences, including near-death experiences:

So my proposal is quite simple: that the system takes the most stable of its models and attributes to it the status of 'real'...If there is no underlying reality then the NDE, like every other experience, is a matter of the mental models being constructed by the brain at the time (Blackmore, 1993, 161-163).

Blackmore assumes that the brain constructs all mental models. However, if there is no underlying reality to support such a model, then, the brain itself is a mental model with no underlying reality. If Blackmore left the argument alone at this point, the question would have been answered with a Buddhist-inspired philosophy. Unfortunately, she continues her argument by pushing the discussion back into the material universe trying to rely on the brain for mental modelling.

However, if there is no underlying reality, then, what is responsible for the construction of the mental model of the brain in the first place? The brain cannot be responsible for the creation of its own mental model if everything is simply a mental model. If it is something else that is responsible for the mental modeling of the brain, the next natural question is, "What creates the mental modeling of the next level?" It seems that one might easily fall into a regress problem if one does not find a proper explanation of the mental modeling of the brain itself. However, without an underlying reality, it is difficult to see how this can be done in Blackmore's case.

Both Hoffman and Blackmore have touched upon the problem of the phenomenological experience of the brain. The result of this phenomenological experience is that the brain and its neurons are turned into constructors and constructed objects at the same time, which is seemingly impossible. So, the question still remains as to what is capable of supporting all of this configuration in this phenomenological experience. What is perceiving and constructing the brain image of one's own brain that falls between the electromagnetic spectrum of 380 to 760 nanometres in wavelength? The brain is an object like any other object of perception. So, what captures the image of this object that is called one's own brain?

The answer actually lies within the activities themselves. There are perceiving, constructing and perhaps mental modeling going on. These are the descriptions of mental activities. These mental activities can only be done by conscious centres whereby consciousness can be experienced from a first person view. Without conscious centres, none of them are possible. This means that the only possible answer is that consciousness is that something that allows for all possible configurations created based on the activities of perceiving, constructing and modelling in this phenomenological experience. Consciousness is perceiving and constructing one's own brain and its neurons when gaining its image. If one is conscious, one can perceive and construct the image one calls one's own brain. Ultimately, the bare minimum requirement for reality that one is capable of accessing is consciousness itself. One needs to be conscious to even perceive and construct one's own brain within one's own phenomenological experience. This means that the conscious mind is indispensable for the purpose of perceiving and constructing one's own brain. Its indispensability means that it has to be a basic building block of reality relevant to human experience. It is simply ontologically basic.

What does it mean that consciousness is ontologically basic? First, an ontologically basic consciousness entails both the possibility of dualism and idealism. It is possible to have a two-tiered reality of two substances or a purely mental substance. Of course, substance dualism has always been problematic, one of its major issues being the inability to deal with the already mentioned interaction problem. William Jaworski argues the problem this way:

But if you and I are entirely nonphysical, then we have no spatial location; and it is not clear how something without spatial location could influence something in

space, or in general how something could manipulate forces or energy states without being in some way physical (Jaworski, 2011: 56).

Yet, despite this seemingly insurmountable difficulty, not everyone has given up on dualism. For example, John Foster has taken up the challenge to respond to the complaint about the interaction issue. According to him, this problem has been created by the fact that the nature of causation is typically conceived of and demonstrated by physical types of causation (Foster, 1991). These types involve spatial contacts. This means that it is difficult for people to conceive of any other type of contact. However, spatial contacts also run into a limit of explanation when they arrive at the theory of causation. Foster observes that "In the physical realm too our explanation of causation has to terminate in the postulation of certain causal laws, without any further explanation (other than in terms of divine volition) of why these laws obtain. So why should the dualist be required to do more?" (Foster, 1991: 161). Foster not only defends the physical-nonphysical interaction, but also defends dualism overall in one of his works. This means that dualism is not necessarily a discarded theory. It is possible to justify its use despite its bad reputation for issues such as the interaction problem.

Dualism can save both the physical states and the mental states. It does not require that the physical states be completely eliminated. Still, dualism is not the simplest theory. It creates more than the minimal number of ontological posits, violating the rule of parsimony. It can be argued that perhaps the rule of parsimony is not that important. After all, simplicity can be described in a number of ways, such as, in addition to quantitative and qualitative ontological parsimony, simplicity can also be described in terms of common cause explanation, symmetry, uniformity, unification, lower level processes, familiarity, paucity of auxiliary assumptions and paucity of adjustable parameters (Fitzpatrick, 2013). Moreover, the requirement for simplicity itself can also be critiqued. Francis Crick argues that the requirement of simplicity is often assumed on the assumption that nature is simple, which is anything but true when looking at the apparent complexity of the biological world (Crick, 1988).

Despite these valid critiques, the rule of parsimony seems to be still important in the case of reality. When a quantitative ontological parsimony is demanded and a lower number of entities are posited, this types of parsimony seems to satisfy all other types of parsimony. For



example, greater unity seems to be present when changes from the physical to the mental or from the mental to the physical is not required; there is one less change to account for. Also, simplicity itself has always been important to account for the nature and structure of reality. If one is looking for a unified answer to the question of reality, reality has to have a basic nature and structure; an endless complexity could never capture the essence of reality in this unified picture. For this reason, at least in the case of reality, the rule of parsimony appears to be important, which makes dualism not the simplest theory possible.

The simplest theory is idealism. There are two possible ways to conceive of idealism. Paul Guyer and Rolf-Peter Horstmann explain these two conceptions in the following manner:

1. something mental (the mind, spirit, reason, will) is the ultimate foundation of all reality, or even exhaustive of reality, and
2. although the existence of something independent of the mind is conceded, everything that we can know about this mind-independent "reality" is held to be so permeated by the creative, formative, or constructive activities of the mind (of some kind or another) that all claims to knowledge must be considered, in some cases, to be a form of self-knowledge (Guyer & Horstmann, 2015: 2).

They refer to the first type as metaphysical or ontological idealism and the second type as epistemological idealism. To begin with the second type, a variety of philosophers can belong to the category of epistemological idealism. For example, Descartes, Spinoza and Kant all fit the description, even though Descartes is a substance dualist, Spinoza is a neutral monist and Kant is a transcendental idealist. The reason that they all qualify as epistemological idealists is that they all focus on human mental activities to capture the possibility of knowledge. Descartes insists on the use of clear and distinct perception (Descartes 1641/1993). Spinoza advocates the use of intuitive knowledge to gain insight into essences (Spinoza, 1677/2000, Ethics II, Prop. XL). And, Kant believes that the mind organizes human experiences according to the forms of intuition, called space and time, and categories of thought (Kant, 1781/1993). This means that despite their differences in their ontological beliefs, they all focus on the powers and activities of

the mind to discover the true nature and structure of reality. They consider discovery as a form of self-knowledge.

Although epistemological idealism is important, it does not necessarily lead to the simplest form of metaphysical or ontological idealism. It does not fall in line with the rule of parsimony. Basically, it is possible for an epistemological idealist to be an ontological dualist. Therefore, the stronger version of idealism is the simplest form of idealism, which means embracing a metaphysical or ontological version of idealism. According to this theory, the mental reality is either the foundation of or the only reality. This is the stronger position that eliminates any excess number of ontological entities, falling in line with the rule of parsimony. For example, George Berkeley is a good example of ontological idealism. Berkeley has argued that human beings can never experience anything apart from their minds and separate from their ideas (Berkeley, 1710/1990, I, 2-3). They simply experience ideas. Therefore, an idea exists only when it is being perceived. This means that nothing exists other than minds and ideas. Berkeley's ontological idealism entails epistemological idealism because, if there is nothing but minds and ideas, it is possible to know the world strictly through the mind. Basically, epistemological idealism does not necessarily lead to ontological idealism, but the commitment to ontological idealism entails the acceptance of epistemological idealism (Guyer & Horstmann, 2015). This stronger form of idealism captures the requirement for one single reality in the form of the mental with a commitment of knowledge strictly through the mind.

The simplest theory to embrace is ontological idealism. To the question, "what does *letting go of the requirement for the physical state* mean exactly?" the answer is that it means that one embraces ontological idealism. This idealism eliminates the requirement for the physical state by making mental reality the only reality in some form. The hard problem disappears with all the redundancy issues. In this reality, each person's conscious phenomenological experiences are valid because each person uniquely participates in this mental realm. How is this possible? What about mistakes and coincidences?

## The Reality of Idealism

In response to Berkeley's idealism, Samuel Johnson tried to refute Berkeley in 1763 by kicking a stone (Boswell, 1791/1979). The non-existence of physical matter can create confusion because idealism or, as Berkeley called it, immaterialism seems counterintuitive. For the most part, objects seem to be extended, solid and detectable. At first sight, idealism seems to contradict this intuition, as Johnson has demonstrated. Yet, in actuality, most types of idealism do not deny the existence of objects. Berkeley argues this point in a straightforward manner:

I do not argue against the existence of any one thing that we can apprehend either by sense or reflection. That the things I see with my eyes and touch with my hands do exist, really exist, I make not the least objection. The only thing whose existence we deny is that which philosophers call matter or corporal substance. And in doing this there is no damage done to the rest of mankind, who, I dare say, will never miss it (Berkeley, 1710/1990: §35, 164).

Most types of idealism never try to make objects disappear or make them unreal. The objects are really there in the world. Idealism simply transforms objects into mentally existing things in one form or another, depending on the type of idealism. It allows for a vision that makes room even for an afterlife. So, there is no reason to kick any stones.

Foster distinguishes between a variety of idealisms (Foster, 1982). First, he outlines an idealist's attitude with respect to the physical world in terms of realism and antirealism where "realism asserts that ultimate reality contains a physical portion and anti-realism denies it" (14). He divides realism into (1) "standard realism, which takes the ultimate physical reality to be (at least in part) non-mental, and (2) mentalistic realism, which takes it to be wholly mental" (14). He divides anti-realism into (3) nihilism and (4) reductivism. Nihilism "denies the existence of the physical world altogether", while reductivism "accepts the physical world, but as something logically produced by, and nothing over and above, the ultimate non-physical reality" (14). Of the four types of idealism, nihilism (3) is the only type where the existence of the physical world is completely denied. This type of idealism is reminiscent of the already mentioned behaviourist position in materialism where the behaviourists deny the existence of mental states. In idealistic

nihilism, instead of the mental states, the denial is of the physical world. The physical world is illusory. At the opposite end, standard idealism (1) admits the existence of the physical world apart from the mental world. It comes very close to the position of dualism with the exception that dualism has two completely separate substances while standard idealism advocates a region where the two substances overlap.

Reductivism (4) is comparable with the identity theory in materialism. The identity theory supporters take mental states to be nothing over and beyond the physical states. In the reductivist theory of idealism, the opposite holds. The physical world is nothing over and beyond the mental; basically, the physical world is reducible to the mental. The mentalists (2) do not have a straightforward materialist counterpart. Although the identity theory comes the closest in that the advocates of the theory declare the physical world the only reality, the identity theory still has to deal with the reality of the obviously existing conscious human mind. The mentalists do not have to do the same with the physical world. Declaring the physical world mental is less controversial in a sense that, just like Berkeley says, it does not do any damage to people's common sense perceptions and beliefs. Of these four types of idealism, mentalism (2) and reductivism (4) are probably the easiest to work with for a defender of idealism.

Using any type of idealism, a theory can be worked out that explains the inner workings of reality. This means that, even though each person has a unique participation in this mentally designed realm, the theory is not relativistic. An idealist theory has very specific universal rules, which allow for mistakes. For example, Berkeley is a mentalist, according to Foster (1982). Berkeley argues that only minds and ideas exist in reality. Since to be means to be perceived, only those things exist that are being perceived (Berkeley, 1710/1990). To compensate for potentially unperceived items in the world, Berkeley claims that God perceives objects at all times even when no other conscious being does. This move makes him a mentalist. Foster concludes, "This is Berkeley's final solution--a version of mentalistic realism which accepts the hard-line doctrine of *esse est percipi* [*to be is to be perceived*], but locates the whole physical world in the mind of God" (Foster, 1982: 30-31).

In this mentalistic reality where God perceives everything, it is possible to make mistakes. With the presence of God in his argument, Berkeley concludes that one knows that not all ideas are self-created:

When in broad daylight I open my eyes, it is not in my power to choose whether I shall see or no, or to determine what particular objects shall present themselves to my view; and so likewise as to the hearing and other senses, the ideas imprinted on them are not creatures of my will. There is therefore another will or spirit that produces them (Berkeley, 1710/1990: §29, 162).

If another spirit or will, namely God, produces the ideas, humans are vulnerable to mistakes. It is always possible to make mistakes about things of which one has no direct control. Ideas that are not produced by the human mind can be mistaken. Ideas are not imaginary that can be made up haphazardly. Overall, this means that idealistic theories are not relativistic. They are not produced by an imaginary mind in a lawless and disorderly reality.

In this rather lawful and orderly reality, the consequence of embracing an idealistic theory is that it allows for an afterlife. If reality is mental in nature, there is nothing that can stop the mind from continuing its existence and operation after the perceived demise of the body. Often times, the argument from sceptics is that death is the end of a person's existence. For example, Rosenberg has argued that the person becomes a corpse and this person's history comes to an end: "If what becomes a corpse is the person himself, then, that person's history will come to an end with his death" (Rosenberg, 1998: 50). Richard Sorabji also wonders whether it can be philosophically sound to argue that "there can be any mental activity at all in the absence of a body" (Sorabji, 2006: 305). Most philosophers who are relying on the brain or body dependence in this era have doubts about the possibility of an afterlife. However, in the absence of brain or body dependence, scepticism can be lifted. In a purely mental reality, the brain or the mind, in whichever type of idealism it is conceived, cannot stop the mind from continuing to exist after death. The mind is ontologically basic; it is the basic building block of reality. This means that it does not stop existing, even if the body disappears from its horizon. In an idealist theory, the mind can perhaps transform itself at death, but there is nothing to stop it from continuing on.

In this scenario, although not all but, many near-death experiences make sense when listening to them. Some people experience themselves as minds or souls. For example, Michael Sabom cites a case where a person states the following: "[I] was out in infinite space...What it felt like was that I didn't really have a body. It was like a mind or soul" (Sabom, 1998: 63). Others may describe people as being made of the same stuff. Sam Parnia offers such an example: "I saw this like a liquid-golden ocean out of which each person rose, made of this ocean, in their own individual shape, but all one originally, basically" (Parnia, 2006: 64). This mind, soul or stuff may be described as something that normally falls outside of people's perception. One of Johann Christoph Hampe's original cases testifies to this observation: "Light in profusion shone around me. The main colour was red, passing into yellow and orange. When I say 'shone around me', I can remember it as being a reality which eluded the mode of our perception" (Hampe, 1979: 64). Basically, some near-death experiencers may describe themselves in ways that is compatible with idealism. They are minds, souls or stuff that participate in a reality that normally does not fall within the reach of perception in people's everyday lives. However, at death, this mind, soul or stuff accesses this extra perception and switches over to it. This seems to be a kind of explanation where one moves from this type of reality to another type at death. Nothing seems to be lost; it is a switch in the mind. In this process, the mind seems to remain intact.

The ability to switch between states of mind signals the presence of multiple states. These states can be understood as multiple layers of reality, which are available to consciousness. But, how does consciousness function in these states or layers of consciousness? What do people know about its functioning?

#### States of Consciousness and State Specific Knowledge

It is not easy to judge consciousness even in the waking state. The function of consciousness in this state seems to elude human understanding. It is difficult to gain knowledge about it. It appears that even experts do not know how to judge conscious human experiences simply because they do not take into consideration the different states of consciousness and their state specific knowledge. Basically, the function of consciousness is usually oversimplified.

In the waking state of consciousness, depending on the amount of scepticism one possesses, an experience is usually judged in two ways: 1) an experience can be potentially false until proven true or, 2) an experience can be held to be true unless it is proven false. In relation to sensory experiences, Jerome Gellman refers to these two ways of judging experiences as weak foundationalism and strong foundationalism (Gellman, 2001). He provides the following definitions for these two theories. According to him, weak foundationalists believe that "a sensory belief is justified somewhat, but not sufficiently, by relevant sensory experience" (23). Basically, the belief is not automatically held to be true but requires supporting evidence to be proven true. On the other hand, strong foundationalists believe that "a sensory belief (that is a belief formed on the basis of a sense perception) is sufficiently justified by the relevant sensory experience independent of any confirming beliefs or evidence" (23). This means that the evidence can be defeated; however, until it is defeated, the evidence is held to be true.

Weak foundationalists require that sensory belief be supplemented by additional evidence. This evidence can include a number of techniques. According to Fales, it can include multiple observers, multiple observations, additional testing, use of inferences and coherence with other beliefs to show whether an experience is pronounced veridical (Fales, 1996). He believes that these techniques show that sensory experiences have additional support and, therefore, they can be accepted as veridical. On the other hand, he believes that religious and related experiences do not enjoy the same support. Hence, their veridicality can be rejected. In his argument against the veridicality of mystical experiences, he states that mystical experiences may be caused by God or by another source, such as the physical realm. If an experience cannot be shown decisively that it is from God, a person cannot be confident that God is the source. This means that mystical experiences as veridical God-given experiences need to be rejected.

One way to counter the harsh treatment of weak foundationalists is to satisfy their demand for more evidence. For example, Jeffrey Long has presented nine lines of arguments to show that NDEs are veridical (Long, 2017). Amongst the evidence, he cites lucid organized experiences, out-of-body experiences, visions and supernormal visions while people are unconscious or even clinically dead. He states, "Any one or several of the nine lines of evidence would likely be reasonably convincing to many, but the combination of all the presented nine lines of evidence provides powerful evidence that NDEs are, in a word, real" (63). In short, it is

possible to argue that the weak foundationalists are wrong about religious and related experiences simply because there is enough evidence to support these experiences; there is as much evidence for them as there is to support any regular sensory experiences. Controlled experiments in which near-death experimenters place objects near the ceiling, invisible and unknown to the hospital staff working in operating rooms to gain evidence for the veridicality of NDEs are examples of trying to satisfy the demand of weak foundationalists. Of course, not all weak foundationalists can be convinced. In fact, some are so sceptical of these experiences that no amount of evidence will ever satisfy them as it was argued in the previous chapters.

According to Gellman, the argument to prove veridicality of religious and related experiences usually relies on strong foundationalism to make its case (Gellman, 2001). The argument is that evidence both for sensory beliefs and religious beliefs are true as long as there is no evidence to the contrary. Gellman's argument can be best demonstrated by Richard Swinburne's theory. Swinburne argues for the veridicality of experiences that are claimed to originate from God based on strong foundationalism. He introduces what he calls the Principle of Credulity to decide whether an experience is veridical. He says:

So, generally, contrary to the original philosophical claim, I suggest that it is a principle of rationality that (in the absence of special consideration) if it seems (epistemically) to a subject that x is present, then probably x is present; what one seems to perceive is probably so. How things seem to be is good grounds for a belief about how things are (Swinburne, 1991: 252).

Having formulated his principle, Swinburne outlines his special considerations, which are capable of defeating a claim. These are the four special considerations (260-264):

1. First, one may show that the apparent perception was made under conditions or by a subject found in the past unreliable.
2. Secondly, one may show that the perceptual claim was to have perceived an object of a certain kind in circumstances where similar perceptual claims have proved false.



3. The third consideration that defeats a claim to have perceived x involves showing that on background evidence it is probable that x was not present.
4. Fourthly, the claim to have perceived x may be challenged on the grounds that whether or not x was there, x was probably not a cause of the experience of its seeming to me that x was there.

Swinburne uses examples to show how his argument about experiences caused by God works in practice for the first two points. First, focusing on the subject, if the person is not functioning at an optimal level, the experience claimed by the subject can be questioned. Swinburne uses the example of drug use. An addicted person who hallucinates frequently may not be reliable. Second, focusing on the circumstances, if it was already shown that in similar circumstances the subject could not recognize the object in question, the experience is a mistake. Swinburne uses the example of a man dressed in toga. If the subject could not recognize a toga in other circumstances because the subject is unfamiliar with togas, the experience is unreliable. Swinburne argues, though, that, in the case of religious experiences, it is up to the sceptics to prove that a person is unreliable or that religious experiences in general are unreliable.

Swinburne continues to put the burden of proof on the sceptics to disprove the third and the fourth objections. For the third objection to be true, it has to be shown that God did not cause the experience. In particular, it has to be demonstrated that God is not present to cause it. For example, if God does not exist then that is a good reason God could not have been present. The fourth objection demands that even if God exists and God was present at the time, God is not the source of the experience. Once again, Swinburne puts the burden of proof on the sceptics to show that these objections apply. Basically, the experience is true, unless the sceptics can positively defeat the argument.

Although the Principle of Credulity is effective in that it puts the burden of proof on the sceptics to demonstrate that the evidence is false, Swinburne's special considerations are capable of undermining the evidence for many religious, anomalous and related experiences. For example, Swinburne's example of drug use for the first consideration rules out all religious experiences gained under the influence of hallucinogens accepted in many cultures. Or, the

second example that cites the toga recognition problem can rule out even any unusual experience of a biologist who encounters a new species that is unfamiliar to her because she has never seen it before. Also, it is next to impossible in many cases to rule out the possibility for certain presence or certain sources for a cause, potentially leaving multiple interpretations for any religious, anomalous or related experiences.

In the case of near-death experiences, Swinburne's rules allow these experiences to be completely dismissed. The sceptics to these experiences can point out that NDEs do not happen in ideal circumstances because the person is physically or psychologically distressed and often times close to death when the experience takes place. Also, the person encounters unusual circumstances, such as an out-of-body experience, for example, with which he may not be familiar. Moreover, the perception of an otherworld is questionable because, according to some sceptics, there is no other world; and, even if there is another world, this other world does not cause NDEs. Even if it is up to the sceptics to prove their case, some of them may be convinced that they have enough evidence to dismiss near-death experiences based on Swinburne's Principle of Credulity. This means that strong foundationalism with special considerations that Gellman requires may not lead to positive results.

The problem with theories based on strong foundationalism has to do with the special considerations, the tests, they set up to allow for the belief to fail. The issue is that these tests are centred on mental operations in the waking state of consciousness. Swinburne's example of drug use for his first consideration demonstrates this problem well. In the waking state, drug use can diminish a person's capacity for perception. For example, alcohol impairs intellectual functioning and motor skills by slowing down inhibition and judgment (Santrock & Mitterer, 2001) There is a good reason that people are not allowed to drive under the influence of alcohol; it diminishes their capacity to perceive the world appropriately, which could allow them to react on the road in an undesirable manner. In the waking state, altered states brought on by drug use often incapacitate the person or at least diminish a person's ability to properly participate in the waking state of reality. Therefore, altered states are often seen as undesirable in this waking state. Altered states seem to cause unnecessary disruptions in a person's life and, therefore, they are judged to be better eliminated. Swinburne's first consideration is a testimony for such a

desire for elimination of altered states that are conceived as disruptive and, hence, mistaken about perception.

However, equating the presence of altered states with mistakes in perception is an erroneous conclusion for at least two reasons. The first reason has to do with the difference between an ordinary state of consciousness and an altered state of consciousness, present even within the waking state. For example, Imants Barušs asks the basic question, "What is the ordinary waking state against which changes take place?" to which his response is that, "...[T]he state of consciousness that is to be taken as the baseline is neither universal nor uniform but could itself be conceptualized as a collection of altered states" (Barušs, 2003, 9). Basically, the argument is that one person's or group's altered state can be another person's or group's ordinary state and vice versa. Moreover, a person's waking state is also not uniform because this state is the collection of focused attention, daydreaming, emotional reactions and so on. This means that it is simply uncertain what an ordinary state or an altered state really is. Technically, they can all be thought of in terms of a variety of states a person possesses with no particular baseline to speak of. So, there is no ordinary state in the waking state.

The second problem has to do with the nature of consciousness itself within and outside of the waking state. If consciousness can shift from one state to another and if consciousness is the basic building block of reality, then, the ordinary state of waking consciousness may not be the baseline that can provide the norm for all states of consciousness. Different states or realms of reality may provide different norms for an individual. Whatever is the norm in one state may not be the norm in another state. For example, in the waking state, time flows in a regular and predictable manner in a linear way from past to future. In a dream, a person can walk into a house through the front door at night time and walk out the back door at daytime. A regular and predictable flow of linear time is suspended and an irregular and unpredictable time-flow takes over. The same way, space can change quickly and unpredictably in a dream. A person may enter into a house only to find herself on a train. In a dream, the regular and predictable structure of time and space is absent. But, this is the norm in a dream. It is not a sign of a broken, faulty or mistaken perception. Inside the dream, this time and space flow makes sense and is perceived as natural. This perception is specific to this state of consciousness.

The knowledge gained in this state is what Charles T. Tart calls "state-specific knowledge" (Tart, 1972, 1998, 2009). He offers a personal example of this type of knowledge:

When I was a child, for example, I learned to fly in my dreams. At first I had to dream of being in little airplanes, and then I learned to run and flap my arms to take off without the little airplanes. Finally, I learned to create a certain mental attitude so that I could just float up, and I got pretty good at that. I had cultivated a gradual learning in my dreams, a small revelation, a noetic knowledge of how to fly (Tart, 2009, 41).

This type of knowledge is specific to a state, in Tart's case the dream state, because it does not translate over to other states, such as the waking state. In fact, Tart was very disappointed that the ability to fly did not translate over to the waking state. Certainly, transportation would be cheaper and more environmentally friendly if people could just float up in the air to move from one place to another. Unfortunately, this can mostly be learned and practiced in dreams! Yet, the ability to fly demonstrates the norm in dreams. Certain things can be learned and practiced only or mostly in dreams, but not in the waking state, while others can be acquired only or mostly in the waking state but not practiced in other states, such as the calculation of the time of sunset and sunrise, and of the accurate spatial configuration of a house. The norms and the knowledge of these norms change with the change of states.

The mistake that strong foundationalists, such as Gellman and Swinburne, and also many weak foundationalists make is that they take the waking state to be the absolute norm or the baseline against which all other states are measured. They take the position of pathomorphism in which whatever happens in the waking state is the desired norm and whatever happens in the other states is abnormal and less than desirable. The issue is not that different norms are acknowledged to exist; but, instead, the issue is the judgment that is made in favour of the norm that exists in the waking state. The norm of the waking state and the knowledge gained based on this norm is judged to be qualitatively better and more desirable than the norms of other states and the knowledge gained based on those norms. The impression is that norms and the knowledge that altered states produce are always faulty, mistaken, broken and, therefore, should

be avoided for their less than desirable qualities. This is the attitude that probably leads Swinburne to reject any perceptual experience gained from persistent drug use.

The bias in favour of the norms within the waking state has developed over time and is closely linked with the performance of the focused, rational human mind. As it was argued before, the philosophical world has celebrated the human being as a rational animal, an idea that originates in Aristotle's observation that a human being has a "rational principle" (Aristotle, 1947: *Nicomachean Ethics*, I. 13. 30, 329). Since the time of the Enlightenment, instrumental reason has been treated as the key to knowledge based on objectively verifiable facts and, any alternative modes of representing reality have been rejected and undermined (Adorno, T.W. & Horkheimer, M., 1979). This attitude has shaped human thinking over time, accepting the norms for knowledge in the waking state that are produced by the focused, rational mind. Any other types of mental functioning or any other states are strictly rejected by this thinking because they are thought to be less ideal than the focused, rational human mind can produce.

Yet, this rejection does not solve any philosophical problems. In fact, it just creates more problems because the assumption is that the focused, rational mind and its results are superior and is available in the waking state only and that is the reason this state should be the norm. Therefore, the reasoning is that the waking state is superior and preferable to others. But, this is not true. One of Barušs' dreams and his subsequent point about the dream can demonstrate the falseness of this conclusion. In one of his lucid dreams, Barušs remembered Johnson's refutation of Berkeley that consisted of kicking a stone and decided to do the same (Barušs, 2010). He tried to test the materialists' claim that the world was material in nature made of particles that resembled billiard balls. He pounded on the wall several times and concluded that it was solid. He made the following observation about the materialists' claim:

The wall was solid. There was no question about it. The environment in which I found myself was indistinguishable from physical manifestation. Clearly, finding the dream wall to be solid does not prove that my dreamscape is made out of billiard balls. Nor, of course, does such action while awake prove that the landscape of my ordinary waking state is made out of billiard balls. What it does, however, is to present some data about the nature of consciousness (220).

The growing problem with the idea of the superiority of the focused rational mind and its presence in the waking state is that the focused, rational mind with all its principles can be infused into other states of consciousness where it functions similarly to the waking state. In Barušs' dream, he went through the same focused, rational exercise of pounding on the wall and making a conclusion about it the same way he or anyone else can make standing next to a wall in the waking state. Moreover, the same exercise offered him the same result. This means that the focused rational mind can work in other states just as well as in the waking state, potentially offering the same results, the same conclusions about the nature of reality. So, clinging to the focused, rational human mind as the baseline that provides a superior type of knowledge about reality in the waking state is false. Since the focused, rational mind can cross into other states, often offering the same results, it cannot provide assurance for any superior knowledge in either the waking state or any other state. As Barušs suggests, it can only provide some fascinating data about the nature of consciousness.

The obvious objection to this argument is that even though the focused, rational mind can offer the same results in a variety of states, in the waking state, the results can be questioned because the other states in retrospect are judged to be less than real. In short, one can wake up and simply say: "It was just a dream!" Based on this observation, one can conclude that while the wall is solid in the waking state and made of particles that are like billiard balls, they just appear to be the same in the dream. However, this reality-versus-appearance argument can only be held true if the waking state is held to be more real than every other state consistently, every time one judges another state in the waking state. If the waking state is held to be as real as another state or it is held to be less real than another state, then, the argument falls apart because the waking state is not judged to be the most real using people's natural sense of veridicality within the waking state itself. The problem for this objection is that this is actually well known to be the case. In depersonalization disorder the reality of self and in derealization disorder the reality of the surrounding can be held to be unreal, similar to a dream-like state (Simeon et al., 2008). On the other hand, religious, spiritual, near-death and mystical experiences can be held to be not just as real as the waking state but in the majority of cases more real than the waking state (Yaden et al., 2017). Hence, the results of other states are not always questioned in retrospect in the waking state and dismissed as untrue. Many times, they are held to be true. This means that

the waking state is not a special state where the focused, rational mind is producing results that can be judged to be truer and more reliable than in other states. The waking state is simply not special.

Ultimately, epistemic examinations both by strong and weak foundationalists are oversimplified. They do not take altered states and their state-specific knowledge into consideration when addressing the issue of reality and veridical experiences. Instead, they falsely privilege the focused, rational human mind and its function in the waking state. The result is a biased epistemic assessment about what experiences can be veridical and about the reality that captures them. Basically, their final assessment is the product of oversimplification.

If the norms and knowledge vary with states, it seems that there is no baseline against which an experience can be measured. Naturally, one can be tempted to fall back to relativism. Just like a designated geometrical graph requires a (0;0) point to measure all points against it, reality needs some kind of a solid starting point to measure what is real or veridical in its system, if one does not want to end up in relativism. When one claims that something is more or less real, it has to have a basis for comparison. But, what is this basis one can use to measure reality? Is there a structure that allows for measurement?

### The Structure of Reality

The struggle to find a fixed point for the measurement of reality is not new. For example, J. M. E. McTaggart has struggled with such a fixed point for the explanation of time, only to declare time unreal when he could not find it (McTaggart, 1908). McTaggart builds an A-series that consists of past, present and future, and a B-series that consists of earlier and later. He argues that two events are fixed in terms of earlier and later; one event always remains earlier in relation to the other that happens later. However, the A-series is an impossibility because past, present and future determinations are incompatible with each other. Basically, an event can be described as past, present and future at some point. However, if something will be past or has been future then the explanation for the past or the future has just involved time. Thus, time is being involved here in the description of time. This means that the presence of time is

presupposed in the explanation of the A-series, which, for this reason, needs to be rejected. Ultimately, the problem is the dynamic movement in the A-series.

Of course, if all orderly-consisting set of events are viewed all at once, the system seems to be static from this bird-eye-view from outside the system. Still, this view can only show the system itself, not the motion in it. The dynamic A-series and the orderly set of events cannot pinpoint an actual time in the system. It cannot offer a fixed point against which the A-series can be measured. That point is possible only from a view inside the system. Michael Dummett introduces consciousness into this system to get that fixed point which is capable of moving through time:

[W]e are sometimes inclined to suppose that what we observe at any one time is a three-dimensional segment of a static four-dimensional physical reality; but as we travel through the four-dimensional structure we observe different three-dimensional segments at different times (Dummett, 1960: 502).

The conscious observer can move through the events one by one, describing each event in terms of past, present and future. This offers an explanation for the dynamic system of movement in the A-series, making time possible from a view within the system. However, both for McTaggart and Dummett the conscious observer is not enough to describe reality because this observer cannot offer a complete description of reality as the observer moves through time. Complete description is possible only from the outside view, which does not offer any movement. This renders time ultimately unreal. Still, a first person view of consciousness can at least offer the fixed point necessary for time to happen at all.

A fixed point in reality in terms of consciousness has been suggested in other areas, as well. For example, one of the quantum interpretations cited by Nick Herbert suggests that consciousness is necessary for the description of reality (Herbert, 1985). It appears that physical reality does not have a fixed state before an observation happens. Reality consists of a number of potential realities. When an observation occurs, one of the many potential possibilities emerge as an actuality and all other possibilities fall into the background. Physicists call this mathematically demonstrable event the collapse of the wave function or the state vector collapse.



The cause of the collapse is a mystery where one theory suggests that consciousness is responsible for it. According to this theory, "The one observer that counts is a conscious observer" (Herbert, 1985: 24). Of course, there are other possibilities suggested for this collapse. However, the point is that consciousness seems to be a fixed point suggested both in temporal and spatial theories that can bring stability to the system of reality. In short, the conscious observer seems to play that important fixed point which is necessary to account for the structure against which reality can be measured.

This explains the reason that people's feeling of reality, or natural sense of reality, does not match with some expectations. The natural expectation would be that the content of consciousness dictate a person's feeling of reality. If the content is unlike the waking state, it is normally expected that one would rate the experience as less than real. But, as it was shown above, this is not what is happening in religious, spiritual, mystical and near-death experiences (Yaden et al., 2017). These experiences are often cited as at least as real as the waking state or more real than the waking state. On the other hand, in derealization disorder the content in the waking state is judged to be less than real, closer to a dream-like state (Simeon et al., 2008). It seems that the detection of what is real is not necessarily content dependent; it is not bound to sensory objects available in the waking state. Rather, the feeling of reality is consciousness dependent. The conscious observer decides what feels more or less real that is not strictly dependent on the content she is facing. Thus, the conscious observer compares and contrasts the different states this observer participates in to decide how these states fare in comparison with each other. In short, consciousness creates the fixed point necessary for a baseline to exist against which experiences can be measured in different states using different knowledge.

Reality can be imagined similar to a kaleidoscope. As the patterns of pictures change, the conscious observer can see new images, applying a variety of adaptive techniques to deal with these images. The patterns of pictures are the conscious states that the conscious observer is switching into and the images are the content the observer is dealing with using certain types of knowledge available to the observer in a particular given state. For example, A. Ashanen Carmen has provided alternative views to the traditional subject-object view (Carmen, 2004), which can explain this kaleidoscope analogy very well. According to one such view, alternative reality can be viewed in terms of perspectives rather than of things. Carmen takes the perceptual

shift that happens in the image that can be seen both as a rabbit or a duck to explain. The rabbit or the duck does not usually exist at the same time. However, the reason they do not exist together is not because they represent two things that cancel each other out but because they exist as two perspectives. One can switch from one perspective to the other. Carmen's example shows that reality can be understood as made of conscious perspectives to which an observer can switch, judging its content in relation to its own functioning in that state and in relation to the functioning and contents in other states. Of course, to call one an observer in this situation may not be entirely accurate since, as Hoffman has demonstrated, one is not just an observer but a creator of reality. It is better to call the observer a conscious centre, a centre from which a first person's perceptions and operations are possible within a given framework. The idea is that the conscious centre offers the fixed point necessary for a baseline. This conscious centre provides the point against which reality can be measured in the ever-changing patterns of pictures in the kaleidoscope.

So, how is reality structured then in an idealistic theory? As Tart has suggested before, the material view has a hierarchy of development (Tart, 2009). It starts with the existence of matter from which physics, chemistry, biology, and based on these disciplines, consciousness evolve in this order. Tart changes this hierarchy where the mind is represented "as an independent reality of its own, just as important as matter, energy, space and time" (71). This inclusiveness creates a kind of dualism in his theory, but still captures the importance of consciousness. In an idealist theory, this hierarchy can be further refined. It starts with consciousness and its mental activities focused in mental states. In these states different rules apply. The rules change from state to state. For example, in the waking state, physical rules heavily dominate.

However, these states are not demarcated by strict boundaries. It is not like walking from one room to another quickly shutting the door behind. It can be explained as a gradual and continuous movement from one state to another state. As Rosenberg observes, although the two states of being awake and asleep are distinct from each other, "[t]here is no customary procedure for deciding when, after tossing and turning for several minutes, I finally begin to fall asleep" (Rosenberg, 1998: 46). Basically, it all ends "when I, finally, fall asleep" (46). Although falling

asleep and waking up are events, they gradually happen as a process. The movement from one state to another seems to be gradual.

Moreover, the quality of the states changes from more real to less real. This could be conceptualized in a number of ways. For example, mystics have argued this in terms of sensory-intellectual consciousness or the lack of this consciousness (Stace, 1960). As Walter T. Stace argues, this structure includes "sensations, images, concepts and their attendant desires, emotions, and volitions--our sensory-intellectual consciousness," or the absence of any of these qualities (12). These qualities may be incorporated in the waking state, dream state or in certain religious state. However, it is possible to have a mystical state that is completely devoid of sensations, images and thoughts. In this state, the mystic experiences "an ultimate nonsensuous unity in all things" (14). The mystic takes this unity to be the ultimate reality. In the Brihad Upanishad, the Hindu mystics have also claimed that in a dreamless state, the soul returns to this true reality (Hume, 1971: IV. 3.21). Consequently, there is a movement from less real to more real. The more of the sensory-intellectual consciousness is present, the less real the state is. The less of the sensory-intellectual consciousness is present, the more real the state is. According to this Upanishad, one is closest to the ultimate reality in a mystical state and a dreamless state.

Another way to conceive of a state is in terms of elasticity. Plotinus has captured this idea in his argument for a number of realms, which expand from not-being to absolute being of The One (Plotinus, 1960). In a fully shaped material form of reality, one is faced with "not-being," a "ghostly image," a "phantom" (III. 6. 7., 241). In its more sophisticated form, one participates in the realm of Intellect where Plato's Forms or Ideas exist. This is a more perfect but less concrete realm because, instead of the examples of the Forms, the Forms themselves are found in it. In its most sophisticated form, the realm of The One exists, which is the ultimate transcendent source of all, the origin, that is devoid of all multiplicities and divisions. The soul participates in this elasticity, taking part in the material realm but, through the realm of the Intellect, returning to the origin that lacks any form. The material realm has most of the multiplicities and divisions, and it is the least real for this reason. The One has no multiplicities and divisions and, therefore, it is the most real. Thus, the quality of the realms or states changes as one moves through these states that stretch out from The One that has no multiplicities and divisions to the material realm that has the greatest number of multiplicities and divisions.

The gradual and continuous movement of the conscious centre whereby consciousness can be experienced from a first person view offers participation in a number of states of consciousness, each with its own qualities and knowledge. The conscious centre learns to sort out the reality of these states. For example, a dream with its flexible temporal and spatial qualities may feel less real than the waking state, and the mystical state may feel more real than the waking state. The conscious centre can create an overall rank of states from less real to more real. Basically, according to an idealist view, the conscious centre seems to have an ability to determine its overall position in different mental states.

Of course, near-death experiences seemed to be ranked by those who have experienced them as more real than the waking state, according to certain surveys in up to 95.6% of the cases (Long, 2017). Since religious, spiritual and mystical experiences are also cited as more real, some have argued that near-death experiences are a kind of mystical experience (Ring, 1984; Cressy, 1994). For example Judith Cressy states, "The vision of the interconnectedness of all knowledge and all life that characterizes many NDEs is a reflection of the high mystical state of unity consciousness. NDErs have experienced the essential oneness of being" (Cressy, 1994: 74). Anita Moorjani's experience can certainly testify to this observation. She made what she considered a stunning realization during her experience: "I realized that the entire universe is alive and infused with consciousness, encompassing all of life and nature. Everything belongs to this infinite whole" (Moorjani, 2012: 70). Although mystical experiences can be described as being devoid of sensory-intellectual awareness or lying beyond all divisions and multiplicities, the realization of oneness can be argued to be very closely aligned with the mystical state. It seems that in a mental reality of idealism, on the scale of reality, near-death state is more real than the waking state and closely aligned even if not on a par with the mystical state.

Ultimately, reality is structured in idealism in such a way that the conscious centre is capable of becoming the fixed point against which reality can be measured. This conscious centre acts like a kaleidoscope, gradually and continuously moving from one state to another. This centre can evaluate the reality of a state, given its quality and knowledge of that state and in comparison with other states. It can offer an overall evaluation of states in such a way that certain states are ranked higher on the reality scale than other states. Near-death experiences are

ranked usually high in this overall picture, closely aligned with mystical states. But, given this ranking does it mean that near-death experiences are veridical?

### Veridicality of Near-Death Experiences

Wil Waluchow, a constitutional expert, argues that the meanings contained in a constitutional document should not be fixed (Waluchow, 2007). Some suggest that a constitutional document should be fixed according to the original meaning the founders have intended to be true in their own lifetime while others suggest that it should be fixed according to the hypothetical meaning they would have meant for current conditions. Waluchow contends that neither solution is sufficient because neither takes into consideration the problem of change. Times change and situations change, and fixed meanings are ineffective in changing times and situations. Instead, Waluchow envisions a constitution as a living tree that constantly changes with times and situations.

The lesson from this constitutional expert is that definitions can be dangerous. If one offers a fixed meaning to a concept, idea or word and the situation, time or person changes, the understanding of it can be utterly distorted, rendering it unusable. Veridicality is in this position. If reality is mental in nature and a conscious centre is gradually and continuously changing from one state to another, this change prohibits it from providing a fixed definition for veridicality. A fixed definition can only be provided if reality is fixed. But, in a continuously changing condition, a conscious being, as a conscious centre, sorts out the reality of one's states based on one's available conscious experiences at the time, offering a personal order to it. In this order, some experiences become more veridical for a person than other experiences. The problem is that not all conscious centres have the same experiences and even happen to be in the same state when creating this personal order. Moreover, they may not use the same types of knowledge or have the same background influences to sort out the reality to create this order.

To focus on experiences, one's personal order will be greatly influenced by the types of experiences one has had. For example, it is possible to have what Ellen Suckiel has referred to as an impoverished or inappropriate view in the absence of an experience (Suckiel, 2002). A spectator to a mystical or near-death experience, for example, who has never had such an

experience and who is detached or disengaged from the experience is not in a position to judge it the same way as the participant of such an experience. Such a spectator will not sort the experience in the same personal order as the participant.

Secondly, the types of knowledge applied to create the order may not be the same. For example, Tart lists four types of sources through which one can gain knowledge: experience, authority, reason and revelation or noetic knowing (Tart, 2009). According to him, they are all valid sources of knowledge as long as they are applied in the right circumstances in the right balance. But, often times, they are not used in the appropriate proportions. Some people may use more of one type and less of the other types. Tart warns people that this could be an issue:

"When you believe some authority even though the person's statements contradict experience or reason, for example, or insist that your reasoning is correct when it leads to predictions of things in life that don't work out, you aren't using your full abilities and are misusing what you do have" (41).

Although Tart targets scientific knowledge in specific, he also seems to suggest that this critique is true for all knowledge. The right sources of knowledge in the right combinations need to be applied in specific circumstances. Yet, as the above example shows, people may apply separate sources of knowledge in different proportions in the same circumstances. When this happens, the consequence is that people get different results. Thus, the personal order in which they sort out reality will be different, as well.

As it was pointed out before, the background influences also have a powerful effect. The accumulation of religiosity, educational and moral standards, psychological attitude and cultural upbringing and, also, the unique experience of ethnicity, age, race and gender amongst other factors have an influence on the personal order one develops. As Wallace has already pointed out, in certain cases, for example, where scientific materialism dominates, more people may hold this belief and try to dominate over other alternative views (Wallace, 2000). This could be true regarding any types of influence. Sabom's attitude towards and arguments for near-death experiences are a good example for the influence of religiosity (Sabom, 1998). People are not immune to these influences and they do incorporate them when creating their personal order.

To see how these factors affect people's order, three examples will be considered. The first example is A. J. Ayer's near-death experiences. A. J. Ayer was an analytic philosopher who promoted logical positivism. A belief in an afterlife had no place in his philosophy. Yet, a short time before his death, A. J. Ayer had a near-death experience which he recounted and analyzed (Ayer, 1988/1994). In his experience, he focused on a red light emanating from space and on two guardians of space arguing with each other. The guardians could not fit space together properly: "These ministers periodically inspected space and had recently carried out such an inspection. They had, however, failed to do their work properly, with the result that space, like a badly fitted jigsaw puzzle, was slightly out of joint" (228-229). Because of the badly fitted space, "the law of nature had ceased to function as they should" (229). Ayer thought that it was up to him to fix the situation. To remind these guardians of Einstein's theory of relativity, Ayer waved his watch at them. However, they ignored him altogether. He became increasingly desperate until his experience ended.

In this experience, Ayer zeroes in on the fact that space is defective in the state in which he finds himself. Applying the laws of physics normally applicable to reality in the waking state, he tries to fix space that is satisfactory to his own scientific knowledge of physics. Unfortunately for him, he cannot make the guardians he encounters in this state to fix space according to his specification. The tension shows in this narrative between his perception that space is out of joint and his inability to fix it according to the knowledge he would apply in the waking state. His inability to apply such knowledge leaves him desperate. In short, the experience reflects his scientific beliefs and knowledge he is used to in the waking state.

In addition to his scientific knowledge, his philosophical education and influence also make a tremendous impact. When he wakes up only to find his friend sitting next to him, he starts speaking to her, rapidly recalling the event: "Did you know that I was dead? The first time that I tried to cross the river I was frustrated, but my second attempt succeeded. It was most extraordinary, my thoughts became persons"(228). Ayer speaks as if he were recalling an event that actually happened to him. However, with time to reflect, he starts reinterpreting it. Admitting that he cannot recall the entire incident, he decides that crossing the river is just an influence from his classical education, which includes details from Greek mythology. Moreover, he considers the experience with the guardians a possible delusion. Giving further philosophical

analysis to the possibility of an afterlife, he finds it implausible. Despite such a reflection and an analysis, he declares that his experience lessened his conviction in his previous certainty that there is no life after death: "My recent experiences have slightly weakened my conviction that my genuine death, which is due fairly soon, will be the end of me, though I continue to hope that it will be" (232).

Yet, just a couple of months later he has added a postscript to his previous conclusion in which he makes further clarifications. He now states, "What I should have said and would have said, had I not been anxious to appear undogmatic, is that my experiences have weakened, not my belief that there is no life after death, but my inflexible attitude towards that belief" (232). He basically reduces his previous explanation to showing sympathy to those who hold this view to be true. In his final analysis, he finds the brain theory most convincing. He states, "I thought it so obvious that the persistence of my brain was the most probable explanation that I did not bother to stress it. I stress it now. No other hypothesis comes anywhere near to superseding it" (233). He takes the presence of his diminished brain function to be the final explanation to his nearly four minute long cardiac arrest.

So, why does Ayer keep changing his story about what happened to him? He starts with the exciting utterance about crossing the river that appears real to him. He changes the story to consider his experience a delusion, only to declare that his previous condition about a lack of afterlife has weakened. Yet, a couple of months later, he retracts to show compassion to those who believe in an afterlife, but still accepts the brain theory to be his true belief. The answer to this change is the influence of his education and lifelong philosophical practice. He is an analytic philosopher who has an initial conviction that there is no life after death. This is a lifelong conviction that is hard to break. Even with a powerful experience, once he has time to reflect, he falls back on his philosophical influence that is capable of overriding his newly discovered noetic knowledge. He demonstrates a great bias that a person with a well-established conviction in a theory can have. When push comes to shove, he falls back on his intellectual knowledge and conviction in a long-held theory. His philosophical and scientific knowledge not only shapes his experience, but his philosophical and scientific education and influence override the reality of his newly found near-death experience and noetic knowledge.



Ayer is not the only one who has a strong enough bias to override the reality of an experience in an altered state. Blackmore has studied what she refers to as psychic phenomena and also had an out-of-body experience; but, despite all, she becomes a sceptic about the reality of experiences in altered states:

It was just thirty years ago that I had a dramatic out-of-body experience that convinced me of the reality of psychic phenomena and launched me on a crusade to show those closed-minded scientists that consciousness could reach beyond the body and that death was not the end. Just a few years of careful experiments changed all that. I found no psychic phenomena--only wishful thinking, self-deception, experimental error and, occasionally, fraud. I became a sceptic. (Blackmore, 2000, 55).

Just like Ayer, Blackmore starts with a powerful experience that she takes to be real. But, over the years and after some experiments, she reverses the decision. It is interesting that instead of asking questions about her experimental methods to see if, perhaps, they are inadequate, she just simply denies the reality of altered states that she herself previously discovered. Moreover, she reinterprets these experiences in terms of a brain theory with an influence from Buddhism (Blackmore, 1993). She also learns to believe that once the brain stops operating, consciousness ends. She cites the emptiness theory from Buddhism to back it up: "Behind all forms lies emptiness--not lack of something, but emptiness" (Blackmore, 1993: 162). She interprets emptiness as a negative concept and decides that the brain is responsible for the reality of the mental modelling. Of course, Buddhists never understood emptiness as a negative concept that would lead one to the conclusion of nihilism; the fact that Buddhists believe in reincarnation testifies to it. Still, Blackmore seems to suggest such annihilation at the end, once the brain dies. Basically, she starts with her own experience, reverses her belief about its reality and, finally, reinterprets it using her own spin on a religion. Very similar to Ayer, her intellectual reflections and subsequent beliefs override her original observation about the experience in an altered state that she has previously discovered. The danger of superseding an experience with the use of certain types of knowledge, such as intellect, and the background influences on the person is always a possibility. It is possible to sort out reality into a different order with such powerful effects.

The third example is Anita Moorjani's near-death experience. She has had her near-death experience while she was dying in the hospital of cancer (Moorjani, 2012). The doctors fully expected her to die that night because her organs were shutting down and Western medicine and knowledge could no longer help. There was nothing the doctors could do anymore. Her near-death experience that night could be possibly described as mystical in nature where she felt one with reality and understood reality as pure love at the core. She came back to life with the decision that she would live her life fearlessly and just be herself. Her well-documented recovery was miraculous. Her cancer disappeared within days at a rate which is deemed to be impossible by modern science. She moved on to live her life as a fully recovered healthy person, accepting her experience as a gift of knowledge gained from a fuller experience of reality.

Moorjani has not negated her experience. Six years after the experience, she sounds certain of its reality in her book. She accepts it as a great revelation that changed her life. She believes that, "Each of us, at our core, already is pure and unconditional love. However, when we express it here in this physical realm, we filter it through the mind, and it then expresses itself as human emotions" (Moorjani, 2012: 163). She explains that these emotions need to be accepted, not judged. Human beings need to learn to love themselves and accept each other for who they are. Moorjani never changes her mind about her experience. Of course, it is easier perhaps for her to accept the reality of it then it is for either Ayer or Blackmore. Previously, she had turned to an Eastern system of healing called Ayurveda and got better, but other people's subsequent scepticism of her healing path and their negative influences weakened her belief in her recovery. She relapsed and got to the point of falling into a coma and almost dying before her belief returned when she had her near-death experience. Hence, her previous knowledge of alternative healing systems and their influence helped her to accept the reality of her near-death experience much more easily. In her case, the types of knowledge and background influence helped her to retain her observation that her experience was real. She did not rearrange her originally sorted out reality.

Naturally, in a mental reality, nothing stops consciousness from existing. However, all experiences are filtered through the types of knowledge and background influences people have. The participation in the waking reality or in any other state is shaped by these filters. Both the experiences and the judgments of them may be continuously rearranged. Some content overlap.

Holden may be right in that some content during near-death experiences may correspond to "material consensus reality" (Holden, 2009: 186). However, since the mind continuously keeps sorting out reality through observation and creation using filters of types of knowledge and background influences, veridicality is not necessarily limited or defined by any consensus reality.

A content can be judged to be veridical if it falls outside of any consensus. For example, it is possible to judge an unusual perceptual experience veridical. Gören Grip has argued that certain people, such as one of his subjects he calls Anneli, may not even be aware of using unusual abilities to gain an unusual experience (Grip, 2012). Anneli has initially denied that she has out-of-body experiences just like her mother does, but after an interview she revealed that she viewed reality from what she referred to as a "wide-angle vision" (98). This vision allowed her on occasions to view the content of reality from a point of view not available to her physical eyes. Yet, she did not even realize that this type of perception was not available to everyone until it was pointed out to her during the interview. She took it for granted that she had a wide-angle vision that allowed her to experience reality in a particular way on certain occasions. Another example is the visions in near-death experiences of the blind. Kenneth Ring and Sharon Cooper have noted that instead of speaking of a simple vision, blind people experience what Ring and Cooper refer to as "transcendental awareness" (Ring & Cooper, 1997: 140). Their awareness can be better described as a "multifaceted synesthetic perception that seems to involve much more than an analog of physical sight" (136). Thus, unusual perceptual experiences, which do not correspond to any consensus reality, are judged to be veridical in many cases.

Given all arguments above, strictly from a first person view at this point, it is perhaps best to describe a veridical experience in a reality which is mental in nature, an experience that offers a meaningful understanding of and participation in reality when the person sorts out and integrates all states of consciousness through mental observation and creation using filters of available experiences, knowledge and background influences. Some of these experiences may overlap with other people's experiences and some may not simply because the term veridicality is not fixed to an identifiable fixed reality of objects. Rather, veridicality from a first person view is identified with conscious centres actively participating in a mental reality where the feeling of reality increases with states of consciousness that are less concrete, less sensory-

intellectual, less divisive and less multiplied. It appears that sometimes less is more. What is more real is more fluid and what is fixed is less real.

In such an elusive reality, veridicality cannot be offered a fixed definition. This eliminates the applicability of a correspondence theory because in the perceived content of reality, there are no fixed facts to which one can correspond. Perhaps, a better way to approach this reality is to turn to the truth-making theory and claim that, if something is true it is so because something makes it true (David, 2015), which in a mental reality means that this something that makes it true is consciousness. Consciousness makes it true in a sense that an experience offers a meaningful understanding of and participation in this reality for a person.

For most people who have had near-death experiences, the experience is judged to be veridical. When they sort out and integrate all their experiences, including their near-death experiences, it offers a meaningful understanding of and participation in this greater reality of which they have become aware. When they sort out and integrate all states of consciousness that became available to them through mental observation and creation and use filters of available experiences, knowledge and background influences, for most of these people the experience retains its veridicality. Of course, in certain cases, such as in the examples of Ayer and Blackmore, certain types of knowledge and background influences cause some individuals to reshape their feeling of reality and reorder the experience to judge it to be less veridical. A near-death experience is truth telling in a sense that it always tells the truth about a conscious centre's meaningful understanding of and participation in reality at any particular moment. Here, Blackmore is right in that consciousness does use the best model or archetype of reality at any time; but, she is wrong in tying this model to the brain. Blackmore should have tied this modelling ability to consciousness itself because the brain itself is already a mental model. In a mental reality, the power of creation belongs to consciousness.

The above argument is a good sketch for the judgment of veridicality in general within the system of idealism. However, there are still plenty of questions left. Veridicality still appears to be relative to a person judging it from within the system. The system is fluid enough to allow for changes and for a variety of judgments, but not fixed enough to stop being relativistic at this point in the argument. Therefore, it is time to press on and talk about

veridicality in reference to idealism as a system. In short, it is time to develop a structure of idealism that is fixed enough to offer stability to the system but flexible enough for people to have change and to have versatility of opinions within the system.

There are a number of theories of idealism that can be entertained. As it was seen above, an Indian school of philosophy, for example, may not agree with Plotinus' description of reality. For this reason, it is important to offer at least a few idealist theories that can accommodate near-death experiences in the proper way. It only makes sense to work out a variety of theories to explain what reality looks like to someone who wants to claim that near-death experiences are veridical in nature from a larger systematic viewpoint in an idealist system. In other words, this further discussion can shed light on the mystery of veridicality itself to see in what ways something can finally be said to be veridical from a more structural point of view.

## CHAPTER 5: NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES IN THE REALITY OF IDEALISM

I stood up and waited. Nothing else happened. I realized that, regardless of whether there are any fairies, the dance of the fairies was an answer to my pain. My experience with them was a sign that death did not destroy all. My mother was around, out there, in a better place. She was all right. As painful as it was to lose her, everything was in order. Everything unfolded the way it was supposed to.

--M. J. Mandoki (2016, p. 72)

Reality conforms to the thesis of idealism. In the discussion of reality, simplicity, in the form of parsimony, requires that either the number of ontological posits be eliminated or the ontological posits that do not play a genuine explanatory role in a theory be eliminated. Substance dualism already has too many posits for the building blocks of reality; two substances or two different "stuffs" have one too many posits. Materialism suffers from redundancy issues. If the conscious human experience is accepted as necessary, then, the brain, in certain cases, becomes redundant. If the brain or its function is accepted as necessary, then, the conscious human experience becomes redundant. Ultimately, materialism can never bridge the gap. The only theory that can answer to the call of simplicity in the form of parsimony is idealism. A mental reality is made of only one substance or "stuff" and it does not have to bridge the gap between the material brain and the conscious phenomenal experience humans are endowed with.

Within this thesis of idealism, reality can function similarly to a kaleidoscope. The patterns of pictures in the kaleidoscope represent the conscious states one is switching into and the images are the content one is dealing with using types of knowledge available in any given state. The person participating in it can be thought of as a conscious centre in this reality who offers the fixed point against which the reality of these changing patterns of pictures can be measured. With the absence of material reality, in the sense of an independently existing material realm, the conscious centre has no reason not to continue to exist when permanently

switching out of the pattern of waking images into another pattern people call an afterlife. Death is this transition into an afterlife and a near-death experience is a transition that gets reversed.

Although this short sketch that summarizes the main argument so far is a great start, there are plenty of questions that remain. What precisely is the nature of reality, given the fact that a number of theses can be presented within the theory of idealism? What roles do people, as conscious centres, play within this reality? What happens when the permanent switch occurs from this waking state to an afterlife state? And, how does one account for mistakes in perception, which could potentially occur during near-death experiences?

These questions are important because a great number of theories in idealism has been developed in the history of philosophy and all of these theories answer the above questions differently. For example, while the Advaita Vedanta of Hinduism teaches that reality is one and multiplicity is a mistake of illusion (maya), George Berkeley clearly distinguishes between God and minds existing in the world. Given this distinction, the role of human beings becomes different. Again, the goal of the Advaita Vedanta is to get off the wheel of rebirth, while the goal of the Christian God of Berkeley is to provide souls an adequate place after death. Eventually, the followers of the Advaita Vedanta keep reincarnating until they can get off the wheel of rebirth in order to assimilate into Brahman, the ultimate reality; while the followers of Christianity end up in heaven if they deserve it. And, mistakes people make in perception and judgment are due to the illusion of multiplicity according to the Advaita Vedanta, while Berkeley blames human mistakes on the faulty judgements made about the law of nature God has directly provided for the minds. Thus, depending on the particular theory of idealism one embraces, the explanation of near-death experiences may take different forms.

Given their strengths and weaknesses, the variety of responses necessitates the examination of at least a few theories to elucidate the potential interpretation of near-death experiences. The following approach is proposed. First, a number of idealist theories will be presented, with a focus in each to respond to the above questions. Of course, any number of theories on idealism could be included in this presentation. However, given the amount of space available, choices had to be made about this inclusion. For example, I could have included Gottfried Wilhelm Freiherr Von Leibniz who advocated idealism in the form of quantitative

monism. However, given the limited space, I found it more important to include George Berkeley from early modern philosophy who had a great influence on John Foster and his work in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries of idealism. Also, I could have included Edmund Husserl to represent the early twentieth century idealism, but his philosophy could be interpreted in both along the lines of idealism and realism depending on how the status of the intentional object is interpreted in his philosophy. Because I would have had to first defend the idealist interpretation of his philosophy in order to include him and it would have taken up a lot of space, I found it wise to leave him out of the list of philosophers to be examined. Hence, I limited the list to a few philosophers who could be covered in a limited space and still offer appropriate responses to the above mentioned questions.

Naturally, not every theory will be able to answer all questions. However, the expositions of these theories will potentially allow for each theory on its own to offer an explanation for dying, death and the afterlife, so that near-death experiences can be understood in light of the explanation. The theories examined will be that of the Advaita Vedanta of Hinduism, Plotinus, George Berkeley, John McTaggart Ellis McTaggart, John Foster, Imants Barušs and Wicca (modern day witchcraft). Of course, it must also be remembered that the examination of these theories is not a historical analysis of idealism. Rather, it is an exposition of a variety of possible views of idealism and their interpretations of their philosophy of death.

This rather lengthy exposition leads to the second important step at the end of this presentation. A more perfected overall theory will be carved out of the synthesis of these idealist theories, a theory that can offer the best hope for a thorough explanation of near-death experiences. The ultimate goal is to propose a final response to the question, "Are near-death experiences veridical?"

#### Advaita Vedanta of Hinduism

Adi Śaṅkara, the exponent of the Advaita Vedanta, offers his own interpretation of the Upanishad, which Radhakrishnan and Moore (1957) refer to as non-dualistic. The starting point of his philosophy is the conscious self:



Moreover, the existence of Brahman is known on the ground of its being the Self of everyone. For everyone is conscious of the existence of (his) Self, and never thinks "I am not". If the existence of the Self were not known, everyone would think "I am not". And this Self (of whose existence we are conscious) is Brahman (Śaṅkara, 1957: I. i. 1, 511).

Śaṅkara's starting point is eerily similar to that of Descartes' declaration of his indubitable piece of knowledge after his exercise of radical scepticism a thousand years later: "Here is my discovery: thought exists; it alone cannot be separated from me. I am; I exist--this is certain" (Descartes, 1641/1993: II. 27, 19). This subjectively oriented epistemology focuses on the fact that everything can be doubted except for the doubter who is engaged in the doubting. Without the doubter, doubting is not possible. Yet, despite their eerily similar launching point, Śaṅkara and Descartes' positions deviate right away. Unlike Descartes, Śaṅkara identifies the Self, which is discovered during the act of doubting, with Brahman, the ultimate ground of existence. Brahman is beyond all qualities and properties of the phenomenal world:

By that [appearance] of plurality which is the [product] of ignorance, which is characterized by name and form, which is evolved as well as non-evolved, which is not to be defined either as the existing or the non-existing, Brahman becomes the basis of this entire apparent world with its changes, and so on, while in its true and real nature it at the same time remains unchanged, lifted above the phenomenal universe (Śaṅkara, 1957: II, i. 27, 532).

The Self is identified with this ultimate base of reality, Brahman, which is devoid of all qualities and properties. In this identity, when one refers to the prevailing base of the apparent world, it is called Brahman; and, when one refers to the inner Self discovered during the doubting process, it is called Atman. Brahman and Atman are the same captured from different perspectives. Hence, Śaṅkara presents a vision of monism using a starting point of subjective epistemology, but this epistemology turns into a metaphysical explanation of the ultimate base of reality, which is responsible for the changing world people live in. Although in one sense, this unchanging Brahman is lifted above the apparent phenomenal world, in another sense, it is never separate,

since its reality is always one. This theory is often classified as absolute monism, but looking at its epistemological starting point, it certainly falls within the parameters of idealism.

Śaṅkara avoids Cartesian dualism by arguing that Atman is not a self that can be identified as an ego; Atman is not a type of mind that Descartes refers to as a "thinking thing" (Descartes, 1641/1993: II. 27, 19). Atman is never an object to be identified. In fact, the identification of the self with the ego is the ultimate mistake. Here, the ego is understood as a self that perceives itself as a separate entity, an entity that is separate from the rest of the world. Moreover, the ego sees multiplicity of objects in the world where it understands itself as just another thing amongst all things. The presence of the subject-object dichotomy and of the multiplicity in the world due to this ego destroys the person's ability to be aware of the true Self, Atman. Reality appears to be separate from this ignorant viewpoint of the ego while it is one from the viewpoint of Atman, the real Self, which is, of course, equivalent to Brahman. Dualism is a mistake. The self needs to retain its identity with the absolute.

Once the subject-object dichotomy is present, ignorance of the Atman-Brahman principle prevails. This ignorance is what keeps human beings tied to the existence in the world that they find themselves in. As Hiriyanna (1969) explains this point, "It is this complex entity again, which presupposes avidya or ignorance, that transmigrates--a fact which implies that liberation, which depends upon overcoming of ignorance, is transcending the notion of ego" ( 165). When an ignorant person dies, the ego rules and holds onto this dichotomy. In this condition, the ego seeks out its existence in the world where it is capable of continuing its ignorant view. This means repeated births into the phenomenal world where the ego can feel at home.

While the ego is present and ignorance dominates, a person cannot be saved from repeated deaths. The ego takes part in actions that have consequences, some of which are carried into the next lives. Often referred to as karmic debt, these consequences determine a person's future lives. Śaṅkara insists that, upon death, when a person performs good work, "such a man reaches the world of the blessed and is, later on, born again in a good family..." (Śaṅkara, 1957: III. iv. 51, 540). This means that there is a reward for good actions. A person can end up in an enjoyable place after life until ready for rebirth into good circumstances. These circumstances may help the person to be in a better position to destroy the influence of the ego. Thus, as long

as there are no karmic obstructions, the person is in a good position to be liberated from the bond of the ego:

When the means of knowledge which is operative is not obstructed by some other work the results of which are just then reaching maturity, knowledge already reaches maturity in this life. But when such an obstruction takes place, then in the next life (Śaṅkara, 1957: III. iv. 51, 540).

The person has a chance to be liberated in the present life if there are no obstructions. There are three important points to note here. First, a person cannot be saved from repeated deaths if something obstructs her ability to be enlightened and liberated. In this case, the person needs to return as an ego and continue to try to liberate the self in another life. Second, a person gains enlightenment by her own efforts for the purpose of liberation. Śaṅkara does not recognize the concepts of forgiveness or grace by some outside force; these concepts are alien to his philosophy. An outside agency does not exist in order to bring about liberation. Therefore, there is nothing to bring about forgiveness or grace; the person can only liberate herself from the clutches of the ego. Third, since the cause of ignorance is the ego's presence in the phenomenal world, ignorance can stop only with the release of the ego in this world. Liberation can only happen in the phenomenal world. In summary, as long as the person remains ignorant, the person cannot be saved from repeated deaths. When the person is ready, enlightenment happens and the person will liberate herself. She will liberate herself in this world. This liberation is into Brahman: "The state of final release is nothing but Brahman, and Brahman cannot be connected with different forms since many scriptural passages assert it to have one nature only" (Śaṅkara, 1957: III. iv. 52, 541).

It is also important to note that enlightenment does not happen by regular means of knowledge. Since Brahman does not have qualities or properties, Brahman cannot become an object of knowledge. As Śaṅkara explains, "it cannot become the object of perception, because it does not possess qualities such as form and the like, and as it is devoid of characteristic signs, it does not lend itself to inference and the other means of right knowledge" (Śaṅkara, 1957: II. i. 11, 524). He also warns that reasoning in general cannot help because "on account of the

diversity of men's opinions, it is impossible to accept mere reasoning as having a sure foundation" (Śaṅkara, 1957: II. i. 11, 524).

If none of the ordinary tools of knowledge is available, how does one know Brahman? Brahman can only be known by what Śaṅkara calls "true knowledge", which is a direct experience: "Hence, i.e. because the non-difference of all selves is essential and their difference due to ignorance only, the individual self after having dispelled ignorance by true knowledge passes over into unity with the highest Self" (Śaṅkara, 1957: III. ii. 26, 538). This direct experience is encouraged by meditative practices leading to a very specific kind of experience. Although Brahman is devoid of qualities and properties, the direct experience of Brahman is described the following way: "Brahman is eternal, all-knowing, absolutely self-sufficient, ever pure, intelligent and free, pure knowledge, absolute bliss" (Śaṅkara, 1957: I. i. 4, 512). Before the discrimination of the ego, the Self is also described as "(in reality) pure light" (Śaṅkara 1957: I. iii. 19, 515). At the end, the experience of this true knowledge frees the person from rebirths and "after the death of the body there no longer exists any cause for such continuance" (Śaṅkara, 1957: IV. i. 19, 542). The enlightened in possession of true knowledge does not return.

Śaṅkara's theory explains a near-death experience as the experience of the dying either on the path of rebirth or liberation. People who identify themselves as subjects and who are faced with the desire to experience objects are transported to the other side of life to be born again. According to this theory, Plato's story of Er, for example, is a demonstration of the path to rebirth. In the story of Er, Er witnesses the souls' departure to either the underworld or heaven (Plato, 1993). After a period of stay, these souls are brought before Fates, the daughters of necessity. One of the daughters, Lady Lachesis explains their fate: "Hear the words of Lady Lachesis, daughter of Necessity. You souls condemned to impermanence, the cycle of birth followed by death is beginning again for you" (Plato, 1993: 617d, 375). She then sends these souls on their journey to rebirth. Er describes this rebirth process as a result of moral choices, which inspires Plato to argue in favour of a contemplative philosophical life that leads to good moral choices for the purpose of better rebirth and a chance at philosophical enlightenment. Hence, this story represents the perfect tale of Śaṅkara's ideas on rebirth.

Other near-death stories also bear witness to this philosophical interpretation. For example, P. M. H. Atwater mentions a case where a little boy who had a near-death experience remembers having been with his family "in spirit form" prior to his birth (Atwater, 2007: 289). He visits his real-life sister before his birth while the family lives in New York City, but later remembers to refuse to be conceived and born until the family moves to Canada. Thus, it appears that he chooses his family's right circumstances to join the family. This example demonstrates Śaṅkara's idea of a person's action leading to a specific rebirth into a specific family and circumstances.

However, it is not just the motif of rebirth but also of enlightenment that can be found in NDEs. The pure light with which Śaṅkara identifies the Self is known to be an element of near-death experiences. Often times, a bright light a person sees at the end of a tunnel surrounds a being in the middle. For instance, Penny Sartori offers examples of this type of light in her work (Sartori, 2008). One patient sees a deceased relative who "was surrounded by a bright light" (197). Another patient encounters a man with "long hair" who "was surrounded by a bright light" (198). Yet, another patient experiences a light around himself: "There was a bright light and a mist around me" (198). Thus, the presence of the light is consistent with Śaṅkara's philosophy that the true Self, which is capable of enlightenment, is pure light.

The experience of enlightenment is also consistent with some people's near-death experiences. For example, Anita Moorjani's experience can be interpreted as a moment of enlightenment:

The understanding was so clear: I was looking into a new paradigm of self, becoming the crystalline light of my own awareness. Nothing interfered with the flow, glory, and amazing beauty of what was taking place...

I realized that the entire universe is alive and infused with consciousness, encompassing all of life and nature. Everything belongs to the infinite Whole. I was intricately, inseparably enmeshed with all of life. We're all facets of that unity—we're all One, and each of us has an effect on the collective whole (Moorjani, 2012: 70).

Moorjani's experience fits well both in form and content into Śaṅkara's philosophy. She discovers her true Self where a beautiful experience is possible that Śaṅkara describes as "eternal, all-knowing, absolutely self-sufficient, ever pure, intelligent and free, pure knowledge, absolute bliss" (Śaṅkara, 1957: I. i. 4, 512). In terms of content, Moorjani explains reality that, according to Śaṅkara, the enlightened will experience when becoming the true Self, which is Brahman—we're all One. In short, Moorjani seems to be on the path to liberation as a result of her enlightenment, according to the Advaita Vedanta.

All in all, Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedanta can potentially explain near-death experiences in his brand of philosophy of Idealism. Although reality is one, participation in the phenomenal world of multiplicity is the result of the mistaken view of the ego. As long as the ego is present, ignorance prevails and the person participates in a continuous rebirth pattern until enlightenment takes place. Upon enlightenment, the ego disappears and the true Self of Atman shines forth, which is Brahman itself. According to this theory, near-death experiences are a glimpse into the path of rebirth or enlightenment.

As neatly as this theory seems to explain near-death experiences and death in general, the philosophy itself does suffer from certain weaknesses. Another philosophical interpreter of the Vedanta, Ramanuja, points out one of the major weaknesses of the theory (Ramanuja, 1957). He examines the role of consciousness in this subjective epistemology and distinguishes between the persistent subject of consciousness and the content of consciousness:

The judgment "I am conscious" reveals an "I" distinguished by consciousness; and to declare that it [the "I"] refers only to a state of consciousness—which is a mere attribute—is no better than to say that the judgment "Devadatta carries a stick" is about the stick only (I. i. 1, 547).

Ramanuja's observation is that consciousness has to have a persistent subject, otherwise it remains a state of consciousness that is not rooted in anything. The lack of a persistent subject leaves a theory vulnerable to the type of criticism that Hume launched against Descartes' ego in which Hume noted that a bundle of perceptions never reveals the presence of an actual self when a person is reflecting on the fleeting perceptions of the mind (Hume, 1739/1978). To avoid such

criticism, Ramanuja insists that a state of consciousness is not enough. A persistent subject is necessary if enlightenment happens for the purpose of liberation. Something has to be liberated through enlightenment and this something needs to be a persistent subject; otherwise, there is nothing to be liberated.

However, with the presence of a persistent subject of consciousness, the metaphysical picture of reality changes. Ramanuja distinguished three classes of things existing in reality: conscious beings, non-conscious beings and Brahman (Ramanuja, 1957). The conscious selves and the non-conscious beings in the world make up the body of Brahman. The presence of the persistent conscious subject breaks the original idea of a phenomenal world as a mistaken perception of the otherwise oneness of reality. In the hands of Ramanuja, the transformation of Brahman is now an acceptable idea (Hiriyanna, 1969). The unity of Brahman exists but, outside of this self-sustained and unchanging Brahman, duality and multiplicity prevail. The result is that Brahman is now different from Atman, the Self, and cannot be assimilated into Brahman. The goal is still liberation that takes multiple lives to achieve, but this liberation is partially dependent on Brahman who grants it to the hard-working worshipper. Upon liberation, the person remains separate from Brahman for eternity.

Overall, Ramanuja's observation of the requirement of a persistent subject of consciousness highlights the difficulty in this philosophy. If there is no subject or self, there is nothing to be enlightened and liberated. However, if there is a persistent subject, the oneness of the world disappears and a gap between the ground of reality and the self is created. Still, the good news is that the explanation of near-death experiences remains fairly consistent. The goal can still remain enlightenment for the purpose of liberation through multiple rebirths and NDEs still remain a glimpse into this process. Yet, there is a lingering uneasiness about the status of the person now at the beginning and at the end of rebirths. How do this persistent subject and the world get created? What happens to the liberated being who does not get assimilated into Brahman at the end of liberation? Is the final goal some kind of heavenly state? How much power does the person have to liberate herself and how much power does Brahman have in order to liberate the person from rebirth? Does the life review during the dying process represent a self-reflection or does it represent a judgement by Brahman? In short, how should one think about the origin and the fate of individuals on the wheel of rebirth?

In this reformed philosophy, NDEs still represent a glimpse into the beyond, but the meaning of this experience changes with the metaphysical interpretation. It is important to remember that the gap created between the persistent subject and the ultimate ground of reality becomes one of the main issues for any theory which is to succeed in the idealist tradition. The same puzzle shows up in Plotinus' philosophy that has an even more complex structure of reality.

### Plotinus

Plotinus was a Neo-Platonist who lived around 500 years after his master, Plato, and was influenced mainly by Aristotelianism, Stoicism and Gnosticism. Plotinus often sounds like a dualist talking about a soul and a body, except for the fact that he defends the oneness of reality at the ultimate and highest level that he calls "The One". In fact, similar to the Advaita Vedanta, his philosophy is complicated by his understanding of The One as a ground of existence, which stands beyond all qualities and properties (Plotinus, 1966: III, 8, 9-10, Armstrong 393). This means that The One does not create or change; it is the origin that simply emanates or radiates the lower realms of the Intelligence<sup>26</sup> (Nous) and Soul respectively. Emanation or radiation indicates that although The One is self-sufficient, it is not separate from the other realms in any way. It represents a harmonious whole where the individual soul's journey ultimately leads back to The One.

The easiest way to understand the soul's journey is to start with Plotinus' understanding of matter. For Plotinus, matter has the lowest level of existence. In fact, matter is so low on the scale of existence that it is equivalent to non-being. It is disorganized and chaotic on its own. Plotinus describes it the following way:

Matter then is incorporeal, since body is posterior and a composite, and matter with something else produces body...It is not soul or intellect or life or form or rational formative principle or limit...but, falling outside all these, it could not properly receive the title of being but would appropriately be called not-being,...it is a ghostly image of a bulk, a tendency towards substantial existence; it is static

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<sup>26</sup> The word "nous" may also be translated as Intellect. A. H. Armstrong uses Intellect in his translation while Elmer O'Brian and Stephen MacKenna use Intelligence.



without being stable; it is invisible itself...a phantom which does not remain but cannot get away either...(Plotinus, 1966: III. 6. 7., Armstrong 241).

Plotinus has a negative portrayal of matter as the lowest level on the scale of existence and, thus, on the scale of reality. It cannot produce a body because it has no formative principle for such organization. For Plotinus, the formative principle is Intelligence or Intellect. Hence, he disagrees with the modern-day materialists who assign such formative principle to matter for the purpose of evolution. He understands matter as no better than a ghostly image or a phantom, which exists for the purpose of the principle of differentiation for existents; it is passive and receptive to the Platonic Forms—which originate from the level of the Intelligence—in order to imprint their differentiated sensible examples of themselves on it. Matter is a phantom that does not remain because it has no existence on its own, but it cannot cease to be present as long as the Forms are imprinting their images on it. This means that matter is Intelligence dependent. It has no existence on its own outside the use of the Intelligence. This argument already makes Plotinus an idealist because he makes matter dependent on the higher level of existence, on the Intelligence.

Although matter is not evil, it becomes the source of evil for a soul. The One emanates the Intelligence as the foundation for its existents. The Soul creates a location (topos) in reality through the individual physical forms it takes (IV. 3. 9, O'Brian 57). Matter is necessary for an individual soul to be present in physical form, but matter also has a negative effect. The Soul's relationship with matter causes the individual soul to perceive reality in separation from its source, the Soul, within the level of Intelligence. This separation corrupts the soul into a false idea about its status, understanding it as a separate, individual entity and a false idea about the world, understanding it as a collection of multiple objects. This lower part of the Soul struggles within the world while the higher part remains at the level of Intelligence. The work of a soul becomes the cleansing of itself from the body. Plotinus uses a simile to express the importance of the soul's effort to cleanse itself from the body:

Ugliness is due to the alien matter that encrusts him. If he would be attractive once more, he has to wash himself, get clean again, and make himself what he was before. Thus we would be right in saying that ugliness of soul comes from its

mingling with, fusion with, collapse into the bodily and material: the soul is ugly when it is not purely itself. It is the same as with gold that is mixed with earthly particles. If they are worked out, the gold is left and it is beautiful; separated from all that is foreign to it, it is gold alone (I. 6. 5, Armstrong 249).

Just like gold, the soul requires a cleansing to shine in its true self again. This is a spiritual cleansing that consists of turning away from the world of separation and multiplicity and turning back to the source of Intelligence. Intelligence on its own cannot include any act other than intellection itself. Basically, it contemplates itself. Therefore, to turn to the source simply means to contemplate this source, the Intelligence, that the Soul originates from. Since the source cannot be found outside, in the world of multiplicity, the source to be contemplated is inside, within the individual soul itself. Plotinus suggests a method of contemplation to achieve this goal of reaching the source inside:

Let him who can, follow and come within, and leave outside the sight of his eyes and not turn back to the bodily splendours which he saw before...Let all these things go and do not look. Shut your eyes, and change to and wake another way of seeing, which everyone has but few use (I. 6. 8, Armstrong 254-256).

This inner contemplation of the source of the soul leads back to the Intelligence; basically, it is a reunification with the higher part of the Soul. The reunification with the higher part is an ascent into this higher realm, which ends the descent into matter and its corrupt effect on the soul. This is a liberation from matter, which has allowed for individuation to happen in the first place. In short, matter is neither good nor bad, but a necessary realm for individuation, which needs to be eliminated for the purpose of the liberation of the soul.

The liberation of the soul into the Intelligence is not the end of the story for the soul. Since the Intelligence contemplates itself and holds the Platonic Forms in itself, it still exists in multiplicity. Multiplicity signals imperfection. For this reason, Plotinus argues for another higher level, The One, where complete unity is possible (III. 8. 9-10, Armstrong 393). Similar to Aristotle who has argued for the necessity of a first cause he called the Unmoved Mover (Aristotle, 1947: *Metaphysics*. XII. 7. 20-30, 284), Plotinus finds the absolute source of unity in

The One, which is responsible for the emanation of the Intelligence and the Soul. This is the ultimate source from which all things proceed and into which all things eventually must return. This means that the reality of The One as both unity and emanation allows for the soul to be in reach of its ultimate source. In short, through contemplation of its source, the soul can become one with its ultimate source of The One. Plotinus describes this unification as part of a mystical experience he himself has experienced several times in his life:

He ceases to be himself, retains nothing of himself. Absorbed in the beyond he is one with it, like a center coincident with another center. While the centers coincide, they are one...[the soul] has no disturbance, no anger, emotion, desire, reason or thought (Plotinus, VI. 9. 10-11, O'Brian 87).

The unification with The One is the ultimate goal of liberation. The soul is liberated into The One becoming completely one with it. Just like gold in its true shine, the Soul becomes its true existence without qualities or properties in The One.

From this perspective of unification, death is meaningless. Death needs a separate subject that is capable of perceiving death as threatening. However, in the experience of unity, there is no separate subject to speak of. This means that in the absence of a subject, nothing can die. In The One, a timeless and unchanging principle harmoniously rests. Since there is no change, there is no death. Even at the level of Intelligence, the Soul is beyond individuation. The Forms are beyond time and change; they forever exist in their perfections. Hence, death exists for the lower level of the Soul only. Once it raises itself to the higher levels, death becomes meaningless. It is the false understanding of the individuated soul and the world around the soul that causes the soul to see death as an event it has to go through and death as something threatening. The process of liberation eliminates this view.

Unfortunately, the experience of ascent into the higher realms does not last in Plotinus' mystical experiences. Plotinus is often puzzled by it: "But, there comes the descent, down from intellection to the discourse of reason. And it leaves me puzzled. Why the descent?" (IV. 8. 1, O'Brian 62). He answers by focusing on the soul's presence in the world. Individuation needs an organized form of the body in matter. As long as the soul is in any way tied to the body, the

body's needs have to be attended to. Hence, the ascent in the midst of a mystical experience is temporary until the soul's ties to the body are finally cut. Still, the memory of the ascent remains and the fear of death disappears. Death does not have power over the soul anymore.

What happens to those souls who never experience an ascent during their lifetime? Are they liberated after death? Metaphysically speaking, annihilation is not a possibility in Plotinus' system. The higher level of the Soul rests in the Intelligence, beyond time and change. This makes annihilation impossible for the soul. However, without an ascent before the time the body falls apart, the soul cannot become one with its higher Soul. The only choice left is to transmigrate into a new body and continue life until the soul is capable of ascending. Plotinus not only defends this idea, but also thinks that it is not even a tragic or a terrible event:

If, then, death is changing of body, like changing of clothes on stage, or, for some of us, a putting off of body, like in theater the final exit, in that performance, of an actor who will on a later occasion come in again to play, what would there be that is terrible in a change of this kind, of living beings into each other? (III. 2. 15, Armstrong 93)

Similar to a wardrobe change between scenes on a stage performance, the soul moves onto the next body to continue its existence. For Plotinus, this is not a dramatic event from the point of view of the higher Soul because the event is a simple change in order to continue a quest for liberation. It simply seems dramatic from the point of view of the lower soul who is ignorant and fearful of death. Without a memory of an ascent, the lower soul is terrified of death. Not knowing what is coming and fearing the worst, the soul may treat death as the enemy.

Once again, near-death experiences are a glimpse into the beyond in this philosophy. Just as in Śaṅkara's philosophy, the soul moves into a higher realm either to be born again or to be reunited with the absolute. As a follower of Plato, Plotinus sees the afterlife very similarly to Plato's story of Er. When the person dies, he usually comes back quickly to take up another body. In between lives, he also endures a judgment:

[F]or the faults committed here, the lesser penalty is to enter into body after body- and soon to return- by judgement according to desert, the word judgement

indicating a divine ordinance; but any outrageous form of ill-doing incurs a proportionately greater punishment administered under the surveillance of chastising daimons (IV, 8. 5, O'Brian 63-64).

As a defender of Plato, Plotinus uses the same motifs as his master when it comes to the process of rebirth. Just like in the story of Er where Lady Necessity pronounces judgment after a stay in heaven or the underworld, Plotinus understands this process to be delivered by chastising daemons. They survey the individual's activities, decide his fate and allocate a new body accordingly. Hence, in theory, anybody who has a near-death experience witnesses some of these events taking place after the body is dropped.

Naturally, if a person is liberated, he returns to the higher realms and reunites with The One after death. Just like in Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedanta, in the absence of a subject who would perceive himself as part of a subject-object dichotomy in the multiplicity of the world, the liberated does not need to return to this world. In fact, in the absence of subjectivity, the liberated cannot return. He experiences the oneness of the highest unity of The One, having lost his individuation. In near-death experiences, it may show up similar to Moorjani's moment of enlightenment of the oneness of reality. Since Plotinus is a mystic, he would probably not even make a difference between a near-death experience and a mystical experience. As far as Plotinus is concerned, there is only one path of liberation that souls take into the higher realms toward the ultimate goal of becoming one with The One. Plotinus would agree with Judith Cressy that the interconnectedness that people experience in NDEs is a reflection of a type of mystical state (Cressy, 1994). Once the soul is liberated in this state, the person does not return to this world.

Although near-death experiences are explained in this philosophy, once again, the problem of subjectivity returns. Just like Ramanuja noted in Śaṅkara's philosophy, if there is no persistent subject, there is nothing to be enlightened and liberated. However, if there is a persistent subject or soul, the oneness of the world disappears and a gap between the ground of reality and the soul is created. In fact, in Plotinus' philosophy, there is even a greater issue of introducing Intelligence between the Soul and The One in ascent. To Plotinus' defence, he advocates direct knowledge, which means contemplation, to achieve liberation. Indirectly, he also advocates the use of inspiration from nature by contemplating the source of beauty and love,

which leads to the qualities of purity, harmony and truth in order to bring about the experience of the oneness of all reality (Brehier, 1962). Hence, contemplation is always a direct technique to bring about the liberation of the soul.

Unfortunately, the introduction of the Intelligence does not lead philosophy in the right direction. Later on, during the Age of Reason, Intelligence becomes associated with the use of reason and it is strongly tied to the use of mental faculties. Intelligence used in this sense distorts the original idea of liberation into The One as a direct experience and, instead, shapes it into an intellectual effort.

Still, Śamkara and Plotinus seem to be going in the right direction. Absolute monism in some form is necessary in order to account for the oneness of reality and be able to explain human fate and the state of the world in this reality throughout life and at the moments of dying. Their efforts are not abandoned. Some philosophers embrace this type of philosophy in one form or another later on. One of these attempts can be seen in George Berkeley.

#### George Berkeley

George Berkeley is often times referred to as a subjective idealist who has argued that the existence of things in the world are mind dependent. He criticizes Cartesian dualism amongst other things for splitting the world into mind and matter and David Hume for being too sceptical about human knowledge. Overall, his aim is to dismiss materialism, which Berkeley thinks can easily lead to atheism and scepticism. He wishes to deny that matter exists at all. In his opinion, material things that are mind independent and can take place apart from the perception of the mind do not exist. According to Berkeley, "those things [we] immediately perceive are the real things" and "the things immediately perceived are ideas which exist only in the mind" (Berkeley, Works, 1957: II, 262). Thus, he embraces a type of idealism in which strictly minds and ideas exist in reality. In this reality, immortality is inevitable.

Berkeley's main target is the distinction between primary and secondary qualities advocated by philosophers such as Galileo, Descartes and perhaps most explicitly stated by Locke. As it was stated before, according to Locke, primary qualities such as figure, motion, solidity, extension etc... exist apart from the mind and are present even if there are no minds to

perceive them, while secondary qualities such as colour, sound, taste etc... are produced by the mind and do not exist without the mind (Locke, 1689/1979). Berkeley criticizes this arbitrary distinction between what exists inside and outside the mind. Basically, he cannot see this arbitrary distinction when looking at objects such as houses, mountains and rivers:

For what are the forementioned objects but the things we perceive by sense? and what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations? and is it not plainly repugnant that any one of these, or any combination of them, should exist unperceived? (Berkeley, Treatise, 1710/1990: 4, 152).

His main argument is that when we perceive ordinary objects we actually perceive ideas. Therefore, ordinary objects are simply ideas in the mind. This includes what Locke and others have called primary and secondary qualities; in fact, according to Berkeley only secondary qualities exist. Every quality is mind dependent because qualities are ideas in the mind.

Of course, if all objects are mind dependent, the material world does not exist. As it was mentioned before, Berkeley never denies the existence of physical objects; what people call physical objects such as houses, rivers and mountains do exist. Simply, physical objects are ideas in the mind and not independently existing material objects. Basically, he turns the material objects into mental ideas. The world becomes mental in nature in his philosophy.

This theory is not without its critique. G. E. Moore has believed that idealists such as Berkeley fail to make a distinction between the act of perception and the object of perception. In Berkeley's language, he fails to understand the difference between *esse* [to be] and *percipi* [perceived]: "That wherever you can truly predicate *esse* you can truly predicate *percipi*" (Moore, 1903: 436). Moore believes that once the distinction is made, the case for idealism is automatically refuted and the material world is restored. However, Moore seems to miss Berkeley's real aim. Berkeley's criticism of primary qualities goes further than Moore gives him credit for. Primary qualities are so different in kind that it becomes a real question as to how they can cause secondary qualities (Dunham, Grant & Watson, 2011). As Dunham, Grant and Watson argue, "It is a problem of causation that inspires Berkeley's idealism, not a failure to conceive a difference between a subject and object" (204). If the sum of primary qualities is

what matter consists of, matter is completely different in kind from the mind that perceives it. This problem leads back to dualism. In addition, matter becomes a mystery since primary qualities are unknown, hidden behind secondary qualities to which people do not have any access. This split between the mind and matter is unintelligible for Berkeley. However, if all qualities are ideas in the mind, which the mind perceives, mind and ideas become the same kind--they are both mental in nature. This way, reality can be uniform. Therefore, reality has to be inherently mental at the bottom.

Nevertheless, with matter eliminated as the cause of ideas in the mind, Berkeley himself runs into the issue of causation. The question arises as to what exactly causes ideas. How do ideas come to be in the mind? Often times, philosophers like to hold on to some aspects of the material world in order to make certain that all people involved perceive the same object. For example, if a material object such as a table exists in the world, all people who perceive that table see the same table albeit from different perspectives. However, if a material table in the world does not exist, what makes people perceive the same physical table? What causes the perception of that table in people's minds? Ultimately, Berkeley argues that since ideas are passive and cannot cause other ideas and since a human mind cannot cause all ideas at will, there has to be another mind or spirit in reality that causes ideas (Berkeley, *Treatise*, 1710/1990). Berkeley concludes that this wise and benevolent Spirit must be God. Hence, he unites reality in God. People perceive the table in question because God causes them to perceive it in the form of an idea. Moreover, if no one is present in a room to perceive the table, God is still present to perceive it.

In this mental reality where strictly minds--including the mind of God--and ideas exist, the only problem left is to account for mistaken perceptions. How can people make mistakes if God causes them to perceive ideas? Surely, God cannot make mistakes. But, of course, people can make mistakes. Berkeley's response is that people make mistakes in their judgements. Firstly, he argues that God created the perceptible world according to the laws of nature:

Now the set rules or established methods wherein the mind we depend on excites in us the ideas of sense, are called the laws of nature; and these we learn by experience, which teaches us that such and such ideas are attended with such and



such other ideas, in the ordinary course of things (Berkeley, Treatise, 1710/1990: 30, 162).

The ideas are provided to minds according to the laws of nature, for which God is responsible. These laws are discovered through repeated experiences.

Secondly, he argues that, although the ideas that are perceived are not mistaken, people can make mistakes in judgments about them. A conversation between Berkeley's fictional characters, Hylas and Philonous, can demonstrate this problem. Hylas brings up the problem of illusion that an oar can cause in a person when the oar is immersed partially into water, to which Philonous responds the following way:

He is not mistaken with regard to the ideas he actually perceives; but in the inferences he makes from his present perceptions. Thus in the case of the oar, what he immediately perceives by sight is certainly crooked; and so far he is in the right. But if he thence concludes, that upon taking the oar out of the water he shall perceive the same crookedness, or that it would affect his touch as crooked things are wont to do, in that he is mistaken (Berkeley, Dialogues 1713/1990: 3, 281).

Philonous, Berkeley's mouthpiece in the conversation, defends the validity of the ideas and blames the problem of the so-called illusion on human judgement. Human beings make mistakes when anticipating certain events to happen based on previous experiences--anticipated events which may not work out in a particular circumstance. This means that people are disappointed to find out that the oar looks crooked but feels straight to the touch. Previous experiences would create the expectation of uniformity amongst the results of the senses. Yet, in this case, this uniformity is not present. The oar is crooked for the sense of sight and straight to the sense of touch. However, upon removal from the water, it is straight to both senses again. It is this previously built expectation and subsequent judgment based on this expectation that create the mistake about the oar. This means that God's created ideas perceived by the human mind do not fail, only human judgement does.

Consequently, ideas are to be trusted. Ideas imprinted on the sense are "real things" and distinguishable from the ideas of imagination, which are "less regular, vivid, and constant" (Berkeley, Treatise, 1710/1990: 33, 163). Naturally, dreams are even less real than ideas of the imagination. Hence, God creates different qualities of ideas for people to be able to distinguish amongst in terms of their realities. This means that whatever is perceived as more regular, vivid and constant is always more real compared to ideas that are less so. However, whatever quality of reality they enjoy, they are always ideas in the mind.

Berkeley also emphasizes that the mind he is talking about, which does the perceiving, can be referred to as the soul or spirit (Berkeley, Treatise, 1710/1990: 139, 208). In fact, he most often uses the word "Spirit" by capitalizing the word to talk about God who is responsible for the existence of these souls or spirits. He also emphasizes that the self-referential term "I" is what he means by the soul or spirit in human beings (139: 208). Altogether, the result is that the soul, which is an active perceiving being, is purely mental in nature and, therefore, by its nature, the soul cannot cease to be. Of course, in Berkeley's system the body is just an idea that God has provided through the law of nature. This argument about the active mind and the passive idea of the body allows Berkeley to make the following conclusion about immortality:

But it has been made evident that bodies of what frame or texture soever, are barely passive ideas in the mind, which is more distant and heterogeneous from them than light is from darkness. We have shewn that the soul is...incorruptible. Nothing can be plainer than that the motions, changes, decays, and dissolutions which we hourly see befall natural bodies (and which is what we mean by the course of nature) cannot possibly affect an active, simple, un compounded substance; such being therefore is indissoluble by the force of nature; that is to say, the soul of man is naturally immortal (Berkeley, Treatise, 1710/1990: 141, 209).

The soul is immortal because it is an active, simple and un compounded mental entity and by its very nature cannot be dissolved. Therefore, the soul in the form of the mind exists forever. Unlike ideas, such as the body, that come and go, minds remain intact. The fate of souls is sealed. Death becomes just an idea in the mind that God provides through the law of nature.

Although this argument for immortality may be happily received by the majority of people, the theory is not without problems. The first difficulty has to do with the origin of the minds existing outside the mind of God. If God is the original creator, God had to create all other minds at some point. However, if God can create minds, can God destroy them? And, will God destroy them at some point? The potential Christian response from Berkeley who is a Christian Anglican bishop is that God is omnibenevolent and, for this reason, would not destroy the created souls. This response may comfort the Christian souls, but it may leave other people who may not share the Christian enthusiasm about the omnibenevolent character of God uneasy about the potential destructibility of souls under the authority of God.

Another problem arises about the fate of souls after their perceived death. What happens to people after death? As a Christian, Berkeley would have to believe in resurrection. The Christian doctrine endorses the idea that people will be resurrected from death on the Last Day of Judgement (Choron, 1963). Although this belief is complex, in general, resurrection involves the body, which is believed to be restored for the faithful by God on the last day. This may seem like a good potential solution for immortality. However, this theory seems peculiar in the case of Berkeley. Since the body is an idea that people perceive in the mind, it seems pointless to be restored. After all, the existence of the mind is enough beyond the perception of death. So, it seems meaningless to speak of a resurrection that involves a body. If the body is simply an idea in the mind, which has already been discarded at the perception of death, the mind has already moved on. In this case, what is the point of trying to restore the idea of body in the mind?

Also, there is a difficulty with the time spent between death and resurrection. How and where do people exist in this in-between period? The Christian response would be that people exist in heaven or hell in a disembodied form (Choron, 1963). Dante Alighieri's narrative poem that represents the soul's journey through hell, purgatory, and heaven is a good example for the Christian motif of disembodied existence (Alighieri, 1320/1899). The main character travels through the afterlife learning about the characters and deeds that can land people at a variety of circles, terraces or spheres in the afterlife. It is a possibility that in Berkeley's system all these places could be understood as God created; God created the law of nature in such a way that after death a person may perceive ideas that are consistent with heaven, hell and a potential purgatory. Of course, this means that people have to be able to choose at least some of their ideas to be

responsible for their choices to place them to their appropriate destination, which Berkeley never denies. He says, "I find I can excite ideas in my mind at pleasure, and vary shift the scene as oft as I think fit" (Berkeley, Treatise, 1710/1990: 28, 161). The choice to have power over at least some of the ideas creates the characters and deeds that allow people to be properly judged as to where they would end up in the afterlife.

The theme of heaven, hell and a potential purgatory fits well into near-death experiences. People frequently talk about heavenly places, albeit hellish experiences seem to be rare (Rawlings 1978; Grey 1985; Fenwick & Fenwick 1997; Bush 2009). Fenwick and Fenwick explain that, according to a Gallup poll, 50% of the people who believe in an afterlife are convinced that hell exists; yet, most of these people also believe that their chance of ending up in hell is very small (Fenwick & Fenwick, 1997). If people are correct about their chance of hell, it could account for the small number of hellish experiences compared to the large number of heavenly journeys and still fit well into the Christian interpretation of Berkeley's theory of God's creation of ideas after death perception. However, this interpretation still does not offer any consolation for those who do not share this Christian view. Moreover, it clashes with those experiences in which people talk about previous lives or potential future lives. Thus, it does not necessarily speak to the overall human experience outside the Christian experience.

In addition, there is a serious philosophical problem with the inability for minds to assimilate into God. As it was previously seen, both Śaṅkara and Plotinus attempted to create a monistic reality of oneness where Atman becomes Brahman or the soul becomes one with The One. Their move unites reality and is able to account for a human conscious experience in absolute monism. It can also account for experiences, such as Anita Moorjani's, where people experience a form of this oneness during their NDEs. But, Berkeley's God cannot account for such an experience because of the impassable gulf that exists between God and the created minds. According to the Christian interpretation of God, the created minds and God can never be one in a metaphysical sense (Stace, 1960). St. John of the Cross has argued that a mystical union is between the will of the person and the will of God, while Jan van Reysbroeck has described this mystical union as a sunlight permeating the air where their union is achieved, but the air and the sunlight still manage to remain distinct. This means that even if a Christian mystic can speak of some kind of a union, this union still retains the duality that exists between

the mind of God and the created minds. The impassable gulf still remains and a true monism cannot be achieved. This problem leaves Berkeley's theory rather dualistic at the end, not necessarily idealistic in the metaphysically important way where reality can truly be one. His philosophy ends up being qualitatively monistic, since reality is purely mental in nature, but quantitatively still dualistic with an inability to fully unify it. Ultimately, the most superior system of idealism is both qualitatively and quantitatively idealistic.

Despite Berkeley's metaphysical shortcoming, his theory of minds and ideas is remarkable in that it is capable of explaining the potential perceptual mistakes that happen during NDEs. Just as in the case of the oar, any perceptual mistakes can be attributed to human judgement. People perceive the world according to the rules of nature that God created for ideas to be perceived in the mind. This means that perceptions are always correct. However, human judgement can fail and people can make mistakes when they judge their perceptions. This is important to explain mistakes made during near-death experiences. For example, Margot Grey interviewed a person who had an experience that she described as hell:

I found myself in a place surrounded by mist. I felt I was in Hell. There was a big pit with vapour coming out and there were arms and hands coming out trying to grab mine...I was terrified that these hands were going to claw hold of me and pull me into the pit with them (Grey, 1985: 56).

In this case, Berkeley's argument would be that, although the perception of the mist, arms and hands were correct, the interpretation that this place represents hell and that the arms are vicious beings trying to do harm could have been a mistaken judgement. Ideas are correct because God is responsible for them, but the judgments about them are human and human minds make mistakes.

Are mistakes always due to judgment though? What about made up images and dreams? Can they be blamed for these types of mistakes? Although it could be argued that Berkeley admits to some of the ideas being chosen at will by the human mind, he also states that perceptual experiences are more regular, vivid and constant than made up images and dreams. This means that if the experience has the appropriate regularity, vivacity and constancy, it is the

work of God's mind. The content of the experience is not human made. However, the experience can still be mistakenly identified due to faulty human judgement. In short, the framework of mental reality is legitimately from God, but the misinterpretation of any content that shows up in this framework is still possible. Thus, this system can neatly explain any potential mistakes made by people about the content of near-death experiences without denying their perceptual origin.

In the end, Berkeley manages to work out an idealist theory that is capable of explain the nature of reality, and the human condition and fate with an appropriate thesis on existence before and after death. His philosophy can support a properly idealistic interpretation of near-death experiences, including the potential perceptual mistakes made during NDEs. Although his philosophy is leaning in the direction of absolute idealistic monism, he falls short of completely unifying reality within his idealism. His philosophy remains quantitatively dualistic within his qualitatively monistic system of idealism. Basically, the gulf between the creator and the created forever remains. It can be argued that perhaps this is enough and the impassable gulf is not an issue as long as reality is monistic enough in the qualitatively idealistic sense. Still, it would be better if the theory could be simplified even to a higher degree. After all, a type of idealistic monism where the system is idealistically monistic in both aspects of quality and quantity seems more simple and harmonious than a system where only one of these two aspects of idealistic monism is satisfied. John McTaggart Ellis McTaggart faces the same philosophical issue later on in history.

#### John McTaggart Ellis McTaggart

John McTaggart Ellis McTaggart has built a similar qualitatively monistic idealist system in the early 20th century. He classifies himself as a personal idealist to distinguish himself from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, an absolute idealist, who, in McTaggart's opinion, does not emphasize the importance of individuality (McTaggart, 1901). According to McTaggart, the absolute is made up of finite selves, although it is timeless and perfect. This characterization of the absolute makes selves immortal. Basically, no self can ever perish in the system. McTaggart thinks of himself as religious and an atheist at the same time based on his philosophy (McTaggart, 1906). As a religious person he takes religion to be a state of mind, which allows

for a harmonious state between the selves and the absolute in the larger sense. However, since he defines God as "a being that is personal, supreme and good" (186), he denies that such a being actually exists, making him an atheist. Moreover, he defends the idea of multiple succession of lives lived and that these lives are guided by the interest of the selves or spirits which McTaggart believes is love. Thus, McTaggart develops a philosophical system created of spirits only, making him a qualitative idealist, but since he denies any assimilation or unification of these spirits he is not a quantitative idealist. The eternal separateness of spirits distinguishes him from absolute idealists of his time, such as for example Francis Herbert Bradley, who envisions the Absolute as a spiritual unity without parts.

McTaggart believes that the progress of idealistic philosophy follows a certain pattern (McTaggart, 1893/1934). First, the idealist proves that reality is not exclusively matter. Second, he proves that reality is exclusively spiritual or made of spirits. Finally, he offers a description of the nature of the spirit. McTaggart achieves this aim through his argument about the nature of reality in his work, *The Nature of Existence* (1921 & 1927). He establishes his first point that reality is not exclusively material by first arguing that qualities and relations must exist. He uses an argument from perception to meet his goal. Basically, any perception can show that the statement that something does not exist is false. The statement is self-refuting. This ascertains existence. In addition, any perception can also show that a whole can be differentiated into parts. This means that perceived things have qualities. This ascertains the presence of qualities. Consequently, anything perceived both has to exist and has to have qualities.

Then, McTaggart shows that relations must also exist. He argues that even in a solipsistic universe it is not possible for a person to love or hate himself without a relation to the self. Unlike qualities though, these relations exist not inside substances but in between qualities. The result is that two substances cannot possess exactly the same characteristics. Substances can have the same qualities but not the same relations. On his focus on relations, McTaggart is capable of arguing for the type of description and correspondence necessary for a certain kind of substance to be real.

Given the divergent relations, every property has to have two types of description: an exclusive description and a sufficient description. An exclusive description differentiates one

substance from another substance by calling attention to their differing qualities. For example, to argue that the father of Henry VIII is Henry VII is to show that they are different substances, which in this case means different people. On the other hand, a sufficient description does not introduce another substance into the description. In the previous example, a sufficient description would be to say that he [Henry VII] is the father of a monarch. McTaggart argues that all substances must refer to a sufficient description because an exclusive description would lead to a vicious regress where the infinite regress could never be completed, one substance always referring to another substance. To have a sufficient description becomes an ontological condition for any substance.

Using the argument for the necessity of sufficient description, McTaggart proves that there can only be one universe or that "all that exists" is one substance (McTaggart, 1921: 172). Two universes would have identical content, which would make it impossible for them to provide a sufficient description. Simply, one would always have to refer to the other for any description. Therefore, there is only one universe. This universe offers the unity that is essential to all parts in it. All parts are related through an extrinsic determination; they are all related through the unity of the universe as a whole. Because all parts are bound together in the unity of the universe, it is not possible for simple substances to exist. A simple substance, which does not have any parts, would not have any content and a substance without content would not have properties or relations. Thus, all substances have parts, which all have other parts ad infinitum. However, there is a starting point in the process that prevents it from falling into a vicious regress. The starting point is the primary substance, the primary whole, that has its initial parts, which determines the rest of the universe through the correspondence of the whole and its parts. This explanation allows McTaggart to claim that such a universe as just outlined can have a sufficient description.

McTaggart denies that matter fulfills the requirement for a universe with a sufficient description. Matter must fulfill the demand of a universe that has a primary whole with its initial parts to have a universe functioning through their correspondence. However, matter fails to fulfill this demand because in the case of material objects the sufficient description of the parts determines the whole. This means that the parts themselves need to be described in terms of their parts first. This material system ends in "an infinite series of terms, in which the



subsequent terms imply the precedent" (McTaggart, 1927: 36). Basically, the system ends up in a bottomless pit. In modern terms, the atom can be described as made of protons, neutrons and electrons that further break down to smaller particles such as quarks and gluons and so on without an end of the system in sight at the very bottom. This infinite series can never provide a sufficient description of the whole. Without a sufficient description of the whole and its initial parts, it is not possible to determine the rest of the universe through proper correspondence. Hence, matter lacks both a sufficient description and a proper correspondence to satisfy the demand of the system. As an idealist, McTaggart completes his first step to prove that reality is not made of matter.

He proceeds to his second step to prove that reality is spiritual or made of spirits. He argues that spiritual substances meet the requirement for the nature of reality. Very similar to Berkeley's vision, McTaggart concludes that the primary parts of the whole are the selves and their secondary parts are their perceptions (McTaggart, 1927). Also, very similar to the philosophy of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz who believes that each fundamentally existing unit of reality, a monad, is a spirit that, although self-sufficient, nevertheless reflects every other monad in the universe (Leibniz, 1714/1998), McTaggart's self has a unique perception but is also capable of perceiving another self's perceptions. These unique perceptions are differentiated to infinity. If the universe is spiritual in nature, the selves and their perceptions are capable of providing a sufficient description required through their correspondence to account for reality. The spirit can do what matter cannot do. McTaggart picks the spirit to be the ideal substance through a process of elimination. Matter cannot work in his system and, simply, there is nothing else to be found in the known reality that can work better than the spirit.

Naturally, in McTaggart's system a spiritual self cannot cease to exist because it is part of the primary whole. This position in the system ensures immortality because the spirit is fundamental. Moreover, since these spiritual selves are not only self-reflective but also reflect each other's perceptions, they have complete knowledge of each other. According to McTaggart, this knowledge, unlike in Berkeley's idealism, is not mental but emotional and the emotion that binds the selves together is love. As McTaggart states, "To know another person thoroughly, to know that he conforms to my highest standards, to feel through him the end of my own life is realized--is this anything but love? (McTaggart, 1901: 260).

The self's journey is guided by love. The interest of the spiritual self is to express the love that binds all selves together. Luckily, this journey is a long one for this love to be expressed because, as selves are indestructible, they continue to exit through a "plurality of lives" (McTaggart, 1906: 116). As the self moves through this succession of lives, it becomes increasingly connected with certain individuals. For example, this connection is often expressed as "love at first sight", which is a recognition of a loved one from a previous life or lives (134-135). This connectedness through love is important in order to reach a future state where a harmony of selves can be achieved through the goodness of this love. In this system, death is downplayed as "the least of all importance" in the journey of the self through lives with the end goal of a united community in the goodness of love (299).

In the final stage of reaching the end goal, there is a recognition of a C-series of time, McTaggart (1927) advocates. As it was previously described, McTaggart (1908) argues for the unreality of time. McTaggart distinguishes an A-series that consists of past, present and future, and a B-series that consists of earlier and later. He shows that the A-series is an impossibility, which also makes the B-series fail. This means that time does not exist in a real sense. What appears as time is a real series, he calls the C-series that contains all the reality that selves observe in their lives without a temporal succession. The error people make happens due to the position in the C-series and the misunderstanding of the C-series. However, at the last stage of their perceived time people will free themselves from all errors because, in the last stage of reaching the end goal, all selves will clearly see other selves and, for this reason, the universe as a whole (McTaggart 1927). This is a point where the infinite is reached and the infinite state of goodness is expressed as a community existing in the infinite goodness of love.

McTaggart's philosophy seems to be a mixture of all the theories discussed so far. Just like Śaṅkara and Plotinus, he argues for the return of the selves into multiple lives lived in the system. This is a surprising revelation from a Western thinker. The usual Christian motif of heaven and hell is missing. The system recycles the selves. However, unlike Śaṅkara and Plotinus, McTaggart does not allow for the reflective or contemplative self to assimilate into the ultimate, the whole. There is no liberation from the cycle of rebirth until the end of humanity's journey. Rather, he sides with Berkeley on this issue, keeping the selves separate from the whole for eternity at the end of this journey.

Of course, it seems like a requirement in McTaggart's system to retain the parts in the whole as primary in order for any correspondence to happen. Still, he could have built his system in such a way where the parts just seem to be separate from the whole for the visible universe to exist; but he did not do it. It is possible that McTaggart is, as most Western philosophers are, under the influence of Christianity where the parts, the selves, can never be truly one with the infinite whole. The selves retain their identities as parts of the whole similar to a pie where all the slices add up to the whole. This relationship between the whole and the parts leaves people to wonder, though, in what way the entire system can come to be. Who cut up the whole pie into slices? Without a God, there is nobody or nothing to do the cutting. Or, without the parts being identical with the whole, there is no mistaken perception of the ultimate or emanation from it. In short, how does reality come to be in the first place in McTaggart's system? This mixture of a system, although very interesting, leaves some seriously unanswered questions.

Interestingly, there is a peculiar and predominantly Christian element, though, that sneaks into McTaggart's system--love--that is also an important element that shows up in near-death experiences. Similarly to Christian ideology, McTaggart emphasizes and unites humanity in love. To rely on the emotional component of love to cement the philosophical system is peculiar in a philosophical age when philosophers are strongly emphasizing and encouraging the use of reason. Yet, ironically, this element of love fits well into near-death experiences. As near-death researcher Atwater argues, "I have always been impressed that, once you peel away the research data and everyone's opinion about the stories, what remains is all about love" (Atwater, 2007: 415).

Although there is plenty to say about NDEs, the theme of love seems to be universally present in people's accounts. It seems to be part of both the experience and the lesson people learn. The experience itself is described by many in terms of love. For example, Sartori has a few good examples of this account of love in her work. One man says, "It was a very nice feeling. Everything was full of love..." (Sartori, 2008: 181). Another person describes it a heaven full of love: "I felt like I could have been in heaven. Everything that is stereotypically associated with heaven was there--it was full of love. Everything you loved was there..." (202). The lesson people learn also continues in the life lived afterward:

Typically, near-death experiencers come to love and accept others without the usual attachment and preconditions society has come to expect. They see themselves as being equally loving and fully accepting of each person they meet. Their desire to be a conduit of love to others is more akin to the universal type of love historically referred to as agape than to popular notions of a sexual attraction between people or possessiveness (100-101).

People both experience love and learn its importance trying to continue this tendency to love after the experience. They are moving in the direction of love the same way as McTaggart argues people would at the final stage of reaching their existence in an infinite goodness of love. They connect to others with love to come to be in harmony with others. Basically, people who have had NDEs seem to be unfolding McTaggart's predicted final stage of existence. They seem to be the initial members of his final stage. This means that this predominantly Christian version of love in some capacity plays an important role in the nature of reality. Whatever idealist system people exist in incorporates love at the end.

The C-series is also an important element to take note of in relation to near-death experiences. The life review has a certain quality to it. It seems that just like in the C-series, a person can look at a particular slide of events from the past, present or even future during some near-death experiences (Ring & Valarino, 1998). A person can pick a slide just like a movie editor can pick a digital slide from a movie and focus on it, examine it and study it. It seems that it is possible to zero in on any slide and release it when the person is done and is ready to jump to another frame. This explanation from near-death experiences is what McTaggart had in mind for the C-series. All digital slides of events are present to be examined. This is the reason time is unreal. The movement is an illusion that happens as human beings jump from slide to slide during their lifetime just like in a movie. The only difference between the account of near-death experiences and McTaggart's theory is that, according to McTaggart, the C-series will be available to be properly understood and reviewed at the end of the historical time when humans reach humanity's end goal while in near-death experiences the C-series is available at the end of each human life. The problem of time in relation to the conscious human being will be picked up by some post-materialist theories.

In the late 20th century and early 21st century, idealism seems to make a comeback in one form or another picking up previous themes such as consciousness, time, love, wisdom and reincarnation to name the most important ones. It seems that a post-materialist era is searching for alternative visions. Some ideas involve a revision and defence of old systems. For example, John Foster returns to Berkeley's philosophy to defend Berkeley's vision of idealism.

### John Foster

John Foster defends Berkeley's core philosophy while adding more detailed explanations to justify his defence of an idealist theory of philosophy. Foster shows that strong direct realism he calls the fundamentalist view fails to capture the true nature of reality and that broad representative theory he calls the decompositional view can work only if the object of perception becomes sense data without a material object being present behind that sense data. Basically, he defends a version of phenomenistic idealism he refers to as canonical idealism. According to canonical idealism the major ingredients for the nature of reality in order to create the physical world are the following: 1) an appropriate sensory organization; 2) the relevant endowment of the mind; and, 3) the ordaining role of God (Foster, 2008: 243). Given these ingredients, the idealist is capable of defeating both the realist's view and the nihilist's view of reality. Moreover, embracing the Judeo-Christian God, which is required for canonical idealism to work, may allow for an afterlife; although, Foster refuses to elaborate on the subject.

Foster rejects the fundamentalist view based on the fact that it does not allow for any deviation in perception. The fundamentalists follow the common sense idea that the physical world is ontologically significant, having an independent existence outside the mind, and that people are directly aware of these independently existing objects that readily present themselves as they are in the outside world. Foster objects to this view by stating that this theory "excludes the possibility of the sensible appearance of [an] item being at variance with its true character" (19). Basically, the theory cannot account for any deviation in perception. For example, similar to Berkeley, Foster uses a stick partially immersed in water to show that the fundamentalist cannot account for the disagreement between the sense of sight and the sense of touch. According to him, an item cannot be both bent and straight. This means that the direct realist is

wrong in claiming that a person perceives the world exactly the way it is because there are deviations that prove otherwise.

Having rejected direct realism, it would be natural to move onto a representative theory that allows for both primary and secondary qualities to exist where the secondary qualities can account for deviations. For example, the variance of the true character of the stick is due to the secondary qualities that are present in perception. But, Foster rejects this theory as well. He agrees with Berkeley that primary qualities would become unintelligible since all human beings are ever aware of, in this scenario, is the perception available through secondary qualities. He spends time unpacking Locke's idea of solidity as a primary quality, arguing that the way Locke defines solidity does not offer any explanation of the intrinsic quality of an object. In essence, "the property he has in mind is one which we experientially encounter whenever we feel the resistance of other material objects to some form of tactual pressure that our own bodies exert on them" (59). In short, solidity is the way an object feels to a person when it resists the body's pressure. It is not a quality that exists apart from mental perception, the way it is by itself.

In fact, Foster argues that it is not possible to find any intrinsic properties of an object. Spatiotemporal properties describe an experience a person has from a particular viewpoint and functional properties describe secondary qualities. Even science cannot provide a proper description of the composition of an object. Similarly to McTaggart's opinion, Foster argues that scientists are continuously looking for lower levels of subatomic particles they can describe without an end in sight. However, even if they stop at a level, "the only transparent knowledge available of the nature of the types of physical particle that we are then left with--the type that are physically fundamental or that science has provisionally to treat as such--will exclusively concern their spatial and dispositional properties: their properties of intrinsic content will remain concealed" (63). This means that any description provided is a description of how something appears to a person from a specific observational perspective, not how it is by itself. Hence, primary qualities are at least unknown or at most unintelligible; a fact, which leaves the possibilities wide open for alternative ontological descriptions of reality.

Once he rejects primary qualities, Foster offers a positive argument for the reason that physical reality cannot be equated with any kind of independently existing material reality. He

creates a thought experiment where two geographical regions of the world, Oxford and Cambridge, are switched in such a way that the region of Oxford exists in Cambridgeshire and the region of Cambridge exists in Oxfordshire (129). Yet, even though they are spatially switched out, people experience Oxford in Oxfordshire and Cambridge in Cambridgeshire. At the boundaries, a motion--for example, a car moving from Oxford to the greater Oxfordshire--is instantaneously and smoothly transformed from one region to another. Thus, a person experiences a uniform nature of these physical regions without being aware of their actual geographical dislocations. Foster argues that in this imaginary scenario people identify the physical topology with the empirical topology and not with the hidden topology that exists outside of any experience in an external world. Basically, the physically relevant world is the empirically relevant world that exists for people to experience. As Foster put it, "The physical world, to qualify as *the* physical world (as the world that forms the target of our ordinary beliefs) has to be *our* world, and it can only be our world in the relevant sense, if it is ours *empirically*--if it is a world that is, as we might put it, *empirically imminent*"(138)<sup>27</sup>. This means that even if the world has zero deviance--the geographically switched places do not exist in the current world--the identification of the relevant physical world is the empirically experienced world that is made available by the internal mental organization and the resultant experience of the world. The external world that the realists are arguing for is not relevant for identification. Therefore, the theory of realism is not possible and is false. Identification happens with the empirical world and not with any kind of independently existing material reality.

Foster argues that to achieve the required empirical imminence, a person has to embrace phenomenalist idealism. This idealism "takes the physical world to be something whose existence is ultimately constituted by facts about human sensory experience, or by some richer complex of non-physical facts in which such experiential facts centrally feature" (164). Foster defends a specific version of phenomenalist idealism he calls canonical idealism (165). According to canonical idealism, the world that is created is the result of proper sensory organization. Because the world is based on sensory organization, canonical idealism does not deny that there is a physical world in a sense that human beings are aware of a world around

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<sup>27</sup> The words in italics are originally found in the text.

them that they call physical. Simply, canonical idealism argues for the ontological status of this world being mentally related and dependent. This means that a canonical idealist is not a nihilist. The nihilist takes the physical world to be a useful fiction while the canonical idealist affirms the existence of the physical world albeit its non-material nature. The result is that the canonical idealist defends the existence of a physical world that is sensory organized and non-material in nature.

To distinguish the ordinary physical world a human being comes upon and its ontologically significant idealist creation, Foster discriminates between the mundane framework and the transcendental framework. The mundane framework is an understanding without reference to the ontological status of reality. It includes all the ordinary and scientific understanding of the world. For example, the law of logic demands that a proposition be either true or false. However, on the transcendental level, the basis of this viewpoint is abandoned. Whether something is true or false depends on the kind of idealistically created transcendental framework that is developed using sensory organization. Basically, the transcendental framework determines what becomes true or false in the developed physical system.

Foster worries that the transcendental system is not objective enough as he describes it. The mundane reality's objectivity is assured by the ordinary and scientific understanding human beings develop. At the transcendental level though, this objectivity is not present. Foster complains that reality just does not seem real enough. He says that "with so much weight resting on how things are disposed to appear to us through the medium of our sensory experiences, the most that could idealistically result would be a virtual reality--the experiential simulation of the world" (211). This seems unsatisfactory to Foster. To remedy this situation, he looks for an external agency that is capable of ensuring proper objectivity. Just like Berkeley, he turns to God to fulfill this role.

Foster determines that God needs to be a Judeo-Christian God because it is necessary for the world to have a normative status. The human empirical viewpoint is the result of God's decision as to how the world should be like. How things stand at this viewpoint is "not just how, as divinely controlled, they are made to stand, but also how, as divinely authorized, they objectively ought to stand" (226-227). Very similarly to Descartes, Foster argues that this divine



authorization would not allow for the world to be virtual, less than real, because God is not a deceiver as the Judeo-Christian understanding of his nature ensures it. God provides the best possible world, which includes the most real world. This assurance creates the objectivity required at the transcendental level. Ultimately, God creates the best possible, most real world, and as Berkeley also argues, God creates it with all its ordinary and scientific rules to be dominated at the mundane level at the human empirical viewpoint.

Foster dismisses all potential objections to his endorsement of a Judeo-Christian God. He understands that theism may be untenable to some people. He is especially sensitive to the fact that God's qualities often understood as omniscient, omnipotent and omnibenevolent may be problematic. However, he thinks that an idealist does not have to address any such problems for the following reason:

But the point remains that the existence of the physical world is not something that the idealist needs to call in question in the process of trying to show that his position can be developed in a satisfactory way. The crucial consequence of this is that, so long as there is nothing that positively excludes Judeo-Christian theism--and I am working on the assumption that there is not--and so long as canonical idealism is not flawed in some other way, the very fact that the idealist can only solve the problem of objectivity by adopting the theistic approach gives him all the justification that he needs in his adoption of that approach (239-240).

In essence, the canonical idealist does not have to worry about the details of the theistic theory of a Judeo-Christian God; the canonical idealist just has to show that this type of God is needed for his theory to work. Whatever issues arise from the adoption of such a God can be left for others to sort out. The only relevant point is that a Judeo-Christian God is necessary for his ordaining role for the transcendental level of the idealist world to guarantee the best possible and most real world for human beings to share at the empirical viewpoint.

Just like Berkeley, Foster emphasizes that this world is shared and an intersubjective harmony exists. This intersubjective harmony allows the formation of a community but, unlike in McTaggart's philosophy, this community characterizes the human situation strictly at the

mundane level within the context of the created world. Still, given this communal life, it is possible to envision a more metaphysically fundamental bond that surpasses the mundane level. At the end, Foster argues that, "if, as many believe, there is a form of life beyond death, perhaps, in that new context, this aspiration will be achieved" (245). He also admits that "this is the expectation of Christian theism" (245). However, he warns his audience that this line of argumentation falls "outside the scope of [his] philosophical enquiry" (245).

Although Foster's entire system supports Berkeley's conception of the afterlife in his idealistic theory that relies on the Judeo-Christian God, his last words at the end of his book sound rather reminiscent of the words of one of the near-death researchers about the afterlife. Michael Sabom's argument stands close to Foster's distinction between the mundane level and the transcendental level where the aspiration for a greater community in the afterlife is simply an expectation of theism (Sabom, 1998). Sabom thinks that the visual observation during near-death experiences that yields accurate results adds to the scientific evidence for its occurrence but not to the spiritual origin of the experience. He states that the "accuracy of these out-of-body visualizations adds scientific weight to the possibility that extra-bodily sight somehow occurred, but from a spiritual standpoint, accuracy itself is not a complete diagnostic of godly origin" (Sabom, 1998: 222). This means that just like Foster, Sabom believes that the validity of the experience is at the mundane level, not at any transcendental level. In fact, he warns that this type of experience could be dangerous: "An uncritical acceptance of the identity of godlike figures in an NDE can readily lead to attributing falsehood to God" (222). If one wants to receive the eternal life God provides, Sabom professes, it can only be done by "holding on fast to the Head that supplies all that is needed for our growth in God's love and truth" (223). In other words, eternal life at the transcendental level is a gift a person can hope for that originates from God only and it is not guaranteed by any vision at the empirically ordered experience. The Christians expect an afterlife, but this is just an expectation until God is actually willing to provide it.

Unfortunately, this rather pessimistic approach undercuts the argument for an afterlife. It seems that the transcendental framework itself cannot ensure the continuation of life beyond bodily perception. It is true that, just like in Berkeley's system, the ontological status of the world is mentally dependent, but human minds are created by God. This means that the

continuation of the human minds beyond death is at the mercy of God. It also seems that the mundane level of experience at the empirical viewpoint cannot ensure the continuation of life beyond bodily death either. A vision can be deceptive and lead to falsehood, away from God. It seems that in this system near-death experiences do not gain validity and the afterlife becomes a gift that depends on the goodness of God. The only saving grace in this instance is Foster's argument, which he borrows from Descartes, very similarly to Berkeley, that God is not a deceiver. If God is not a deceiver and if God promised to save the worthy individuals on the Last Day of Judgment, God will keep his word.

This argument seems a little thin for most people. In addition to the fact that an afterlife is not entirely ensured either by the transcendental level or by the mundane level, there are other worries. Firstly, unlike Berkeley who defends an idealist version of reality where only minds and ideas exist, Foster defends a version where sensory organization is mind related and dependent. This deviation from Berkeley yields a different result in the nature of minds and reality itself. It is true that Foster argues against the existence of a material world, but his definition of canonical idealism does not specify either the nature of the human mind or the nature of this mind in relation to God. Unlike in Berkeley's reality where both the human mind and the mind of God are mental in nature interpreted in the strongest possible way, Foster simply offers the human mind an ability to organize the sensory world which is non-material in nature, and defines God as an all-powerful, all-knowing and perfectly benevolent being. Neither of these descriptions actually says that the world is strictly mental in nature where extinction of minds is not possible. In this system, it is possible that both God and minds are simply other than material in nature, which does not necessarily mean strictly mental. It is also possible that these non-material minds are created by God with an expiration date. Even if God promises to save the worthy on the Last Day of Judgment, nothing guarantees that God will not rescind the created creatures and the entire created reality at some point in the future after this date. Hence, Foster's version of reality is much weaker than Berkeley's version, creating a lot of questions about a possible afterlife and human existence.

Secondly, Foster's argument for a Judeo-Christian God is set up very suspiciously, dismissing all other possibilities. Normally, a variety of encounters near death would conclude that none of the specific religious views can be clearly supported (Moody 1975; Ring 1980;

Masumian, 2009; Long & Perry 2010; Engmann 2014). Near-death experiences happen all over the world and the experiences may include a variety of religious motifs. Thus, normally, the experience itself could be used to make conclusions about religiosity. However, in Foster's system, experiential views at the mundane level are automatically dismissed because they are not proof of anything happening at the transcendental level. At the transcendental level, though, the system philosophically requires a Judeo-Christian God, automatically dismissing all other possibilities, even though Foster admits that there are problems with the nature of such a god. It seems that there is not any opportunity to counter the necessity of a Judeo-Christian God, despite its metaphysical problems and despite the fact that experiences are not clearly supporting the existence of such a god. Basically, it is a very sneaky way of forcing people to adopt a Judeo-Christian God. This solution, however sneaky it may be, is not convincing. After all, Foster himself argues that people identify most with the empirically imminent world, making its content very convincing. Moreover, it is not enough to claim that a canonical idealist needs a Judeo-Christian God to make his theory work; therefore, the canonical idealist cannot just overlook the weaknesses of such a god's existence. All in all, the argument for a Judeo-Christian God is rather weak and not entirely convincing. This means that at the end, compared to Berkeley, to whom his book is dedicated, Foster's system is much weaker; it can be concluded that Foster's system is seriously lacking.

Foster's philosophy is also not necessarily desirable in the 21st century. His canonical idealism may have been better suited for an earlier age when a Judeo-Christian God would have been more acceptable as part of the idealist solution for the nature of reality. The philosophy seems retrograde, not suited for a post-materialist audience who are looking to find a non-materialist solution in the current age. Of course, there are valuable lessons to be learned from Foster. His attempt to find an idealist solution in the post-materialist era offers hope for those who want to dismiss materialism, but do not see a solution in dualism. His nostalgic but passé philosophy adds to the discussion of idealism even in the present age. But, it takes a much more modern approach to find a more suitable idealistic solution.

## Imants Barušs

A more suitable idealistic solution can be found in the post-materialist theory presented by Imants Barušs. His theory is developed based on three vital elements: 1) deep time; 2) flicker-filter theory; and, 3) meaning fields. He develops ideas about deep time and the flicker filter theory together with Julia Mossbridge in their collaborated work (Barušs & Mossbridge, 2017). He later advances these ideas by adding meaning fields into an evolving picture of his post-materialist theory (Barušs, 2018, 2019).

According to this philosophical vision, deep time is part of a theory of temporality. Deep consciousness is a pre-physical substrate that structures consciousness and physical manifestation of experienced events in small segments that are called "nows" (Barušs & Mossbridge, 2017). Each experienced "now" is associated with a very specific past and future. So far, this theory sounds deterministic, but it is not. The key to its non-determinism is a flicker system that functions similar to flickering lights with "off" and "on" positions. In the "off" position, in the deep time of deep consciousness, it is possible to make changes, so that a different "now" can emerge out of deep time than its previously anticipated sequence, together with a new past and future, which is in accordance with this new "now". The change is connected to meaning fields in manifested reality as a result of the activity of deep consciousness. Meaning fields are related to knowledge and intelligence that do not necessarily originate from human minds, but from nature and reality itself (Barušs, 2018). These universally present meaning fields arise out of deep time where the self can choose either to follow a particular sequence of meaning field by remaining tuned into it or change to a different sequence by retuning itself (Barušs, 2018 & 2021). If the self chooses to retune itself, a new sequence of "now" emerges with its own past and future in order to participate in this new meaning field that essentially represents a new reality (Barušs, 2019). Hence, this post-materialist system is a consciousness-created world that continuously recreates the physical manifestation around itself.

The initial idea to advance this type of post-materialism arises out of Barušs' great commitment to empirical science and the adoption of a theory that is based on the principle of goodness-of-fit of relevant data in science (Barušs, 2017, 2007, 2003, 1996). Experiences in certain altered states of consciousness, such as in, for example, near-death experiences,

telekinesis and remote viewing studies indicate that the boundary between individuals, and the boundary between an individual and an object seem to break down (Barušs & Mossbridge, 2017; Barušs, 2021). The problem that the absence of a physical boundary creates necessitates a reconsideration of the metaphysical structure of the world. Thus, empirical evidence requires that a new theory be developed that best fits the available scientific data.

This reconsideration includes a proper understanding of time. According to Barušs and Mossbridge, time can be understood from a more objective view and from a more subjective view. They argue that

For a physicist interested in "objective events" that are "out there" somewhere, all experience, including the experience of time, is incidental, illusory, and uninteresting. For a philosopher or psychologist interested in subjective events, experience is a critical feature of reality, and experience includes temporal features that should not be dismissed in a cavalier manner (56).

While the physicists who are not interested in the subjective side of the experience of time may tie the understanding of time to objective events, others may find this subjective experience of time very important. The physicists may be convinced that experience of time is incidental, illusory and uninteresting, as stated above, which is created by consciousness; nevertheless, subjective time has its own validity for reasons that will be clear below.

This observation leads Barušs and Mossbridge to distinguish between four definitions of time, two on the subjective side and two on the objective side of interpretation. On the objective side, objective apparent time is defined as "time as it is measured by the clock" and objective deep time as "whatever it is that structures succession of objective events to which objective apparent time does not pertain" (58-59). On the subjective side, subjective apparent time is defined as "time as it is usually experienced in the ordinary waking state" and subjective deep time as "whatever it is that structures successions of subjective events to which subjective apparent time does not pertain" (58-59). Although all these definitions of time are important, definitions on the subjective side come into focus because human observation in certain quantum

experiments and in precognitive experiences can only be understood through the subjective participation in time.

These subjective undertakings show that non-conscious and conscious processes do not progress in the same manner. Non-conscious processes may be outside the regular flow of time where they may pass information not just about the past but about the future as well to the conscious mind. For example, Barušs and Mossbridge examine the life review during near-death experiences where "an experience of a life review can not only reach backward in time but forward as well" (73). The suggestion is that these backward and forward reviews can be explained, from the viewpoint of individual waking consciousness, a non-conscious process that happens in subjective deep time. This means that time is a construction where these processes in deep time, which are non-local in nature, order the sequences of events that surface in subjective apparent time for a person to experience. Thus, deep consciousness in subjective deep time orders the experienced events that take place for the conscious mind, making the subjective participation of events crucial to the understanding of time and reality.

The mechanism that allows for the proper function of subjective deep time and subjective apparent time is explained by the flicker-filter theory. The filter part of the theory comes from the argument that despite what the materialists propose about the nature of consciousness as a by-product of the brain, the truth may be the opposite of it. Barušs and Mossbridge ask, "What if consciousness of some sort is the fundamental substance of the universe and everything else is made out of consciousness?" (179). It simply appears that in deep time the mind is unconstrained not having to follow any particular sequence because deep time is where the sequences are ordered by deep consciousness. However, the conscious mind that participates in subjective apparent time follows the ordered sequence. The relationship between the unconstrained mind and the conscious mind reveals that only a particular content filters through from the unconstrained mind in deep time to the conscious mind in subjective apparent time. The filtering device is the brain that takes a particular form or pattern of consciousness to be able to carry out the function of filtering. Hence, based on this argument, it can be concluded that since the fundamental substance of the universe is consciousness and since everything else is made out of consciousness, consciousness is responsible for the creation and the structure of the brain that is used as a filtering device by consciousness.

This explains certain anomalous phenomena. Barušs and Mossbridge theorize that "according to the filter model, experiences of anomalous information transfer and anomalous remote influencing could occur to the extent that there is information from the unconstrained or shared mental levels that is sent though the filter, resulting in brain-based experiences" (178). Furthermore, near death, "the mind could directly manipulate the body without the mediation of the brain" (179). Simply, the brain is a tool for consciousness to express itself for the purpose of participation in what people call the physical realm and it withdraws from this process when it does not need the brain anymore.

The flicker part of the theory is added to explain the dynamic movement of the system. Similar to light switches, the system has an "on" position and an "off" position. In the "on" position, the conscious mind is following a sequence in subjective apparent time. In the "off" position, it exists in its unconstrained form in deep time, as deep consciousness, ordering and reordering the sequence that will surface as a "now" in the "on" position. This system is dynamic where the "physical manifestation comes into existence and disappears, over and over again, producing the appearance of a continuous stream of consciousness from a series of discrete 'nows'" (181). The dynamism is controlled by deep consciousness that has the power to make changes and to reorder sequences. According to Barušs and Mossbridge, the choice deep consciousness makes is connected to the conscious mind's "intentions" (183). Once a person's intention changes, deep consciousness reorders the sequence to have an experience in subjective apparent time that reflects the new intention. The new "now" that surfaces brings with it its corresponding past and future for the person to experience. This means that in the reordered sequence, essentially, a new reality has emerged for the person to experience.

How do people share a common reality? Barušs argues that sharing does not happen through spatial allocation (2018). One of the examples he uses to demonstrates the problem is the hydrogen atom that can recognize another hydrogen atom without being physically close to the other atom. Since physical proximity is not required for even a hydrogen atom to recognize another, it is obvious that spatial allocation is not responsible for sharing a common reality. Barušs thinks that there is some kind of a knowledge recognition that happens in sharing. He proposes "the notion of meaning fields that carry the necessary knowledge and intelligently structured events in physical manifestation" (Barušs, 2018: 9). The meaning he proposes is an



inherent intelligence that is not necessarily tied to humans; instead, it is tied to the larger concepts of nature, the universe and reality. Basically, he defines nature as "reality as it occurs in the *nows*, including both subjective events and physical manifestation" (Barušs, 2021: 38). He also thinks of these fields "in the technical sense that they are defined at each point in space and time and potentially apply to whatever is found in that space at that time" (Barušs, 2018: 9). Sharing happens because human beings and other beings can tune into certain meaning fields together. They can also modify meaning fields from their position in deep consciousness (Barušs, 2019). They can re-emerge in a changed, new "now" that has a different meaning field attached to it with its corresponding past and future. They can also create completely new meaning fields. For example, Barušs believes that many physicists "unwittingly create meaning fields that give rise to phenomena that are interpreted as the presence of particles whose existence physicists have predicted, not because they are actually there in the first place, but because enough physicists predicted their existence with sufficient intensity" (Barušs, 2018: 11). Thus, reality is shared through meaning fields and many times created anew through the efforts of people and nature itself.

Meaning fields are able to express several different types of meanings: denotative meaning, connotative meaning, inherent meaning and existential meaning (Barušs, 2018 & 2021). In denotative meaning the meaning fields are able "to distinguish between specific events on the basis of the meanings of those events" while in connotative meaning they are able to hold "rich sets of associations to denotative meanings" (Barušs, 2021: 44). Since the pre-physical substrate already carries implicate meaning, it is possible that "the explication of implicate meanings as meaning fields could suffuse meaning fields with inherent significance" (44). In addition, it is also possible that "meaning fields embody existential qualia and existential meaning" (44). All these types of meaning can parse events within physical manifestation. Since meaning fields do not have any sense organs, knowledge of these meanings can be likened to the type of transcendental awareness that happens during near-death experiences. Barušs explains that just like Kenneth Ring and Sharon Cooper have pointed out in their work, the blind cannot possibly see the same way as sighted people do during their near-death experiences simply because they do not have either physically developed or available to be used visual organs; but, instead, their experiences are what can be referred to as transcendental awareness,

which is a combination of both seeing and knowing; and, meaning fields have "at least the same capabilities for transcendental awareness as a blind person" (40). In short, the different types of meaning fields express themselves in physical manifestation to parse events using a type of transcendental awareness that is similar to what the blind can use during near-death experiences.

This post-materialist theory is complex; yet, it is also sophisticated. It has the ability to create a deep structure that can create and organize the past, present and future of apparent reality. It has a stable structure but also accommodates changes in its dynamic movement. The theory is based on the idea that consciousness is ontologically basic and it expresses itself through meaning fields that are universally available through nature and not just through humans. These meaning fields are used to create and recreate reality according to the intentions focused into them and these fields keep track of all events using transcendental awareness. Thus, this theory resembles a complex chess board where all the pieces are continuously moving, but a sophisticated system keeps track of them all and assures a harmoniously played game unfolding in a regulated manner.

Barušs' theory is similar in some aspects to the theories discussed so far. First, the reality of deep consciousness and deep time bear similarity both to Brahman of the Advaita Vedanta and to The One in Plotinus' philosophy. In all these theories, there is a structure underneath the apparent world that is responsible for the unfolding of physical manifestation that conscious beings experience. Second, except for McTaggart, all philosophies treat this world as an apparent world manifested by either a deeper structure or a power located outside the manifestation. This idea reduces the reality of the manifested world in a sense that something more ultimate is hiding behind it. Third, Barušs' time structure not only resembles the timeless and eternal elements in the Advaita Vedanta, Plotinus, Berkeley and Foster, but also strongly comparable to McTaggart's conception of the C-series of time that contains all the reality that selves observe in their lives without a temporal succession. Although McTaggart envisions a C-series that can only be viewed at the teleological end of the human journey, the structure is similar to Barušs' theory in that time can be viewed in segments, for example, during near-death experiences, with all the past, present and future segments available to be examined at once. Finally, death as the end of existence does not make sense in this system, just like it does not make sense in other previous systems examined, because given the fact that consciousness is

ontologically basic, consciousness cannot cease to exist. This makes near-death experiences a form of transformation into another state of consciousness where physical manifestation is not present anymore.

Of course, as with every other system, some questions remain. First, there is a structural problem with identity. There are two ways of looking at deep time and deep consciousness. The first way is to assume that each conscious being possesses an individual deep time and deep consciousness. Basically, as many conscious beings there are in reality as many deep times and deep consciousnesses exist. If this is the case, identity of an individual is not a question since the system is closed for each conscious being. However, under this interpretation, the problem is to figure out the relationship between these closed systems. In essence, how do these conscious beings relate to each other? How do they participate in the overall reality? And, how can the overall reality be described? However, looking at Baruš's theory closely, he does not appear to suggest that the system is individualized and closed in any way. It is more likely that he has one deep consciousness and one deep time in mind. In this second way of looking at his theory, though, the question of identity arises. In this one deep time and deep consciousness, how does one person's *nows* not get mixed up with other people's *nows*? How does one self get differentiated from other selves in deep time and consciousness? In short, how is the "I" or the self retained in this system? In the flicker-filter system, each emerging *now* can carry a different sequence of past and future *nows*. It appears that there is not anything in particular that can identify these *nows* as belonging to the same self or differentiate between selves in general.

Second, *now* has to be defined because without a definition certain issues arise. Baruš and Mossbridge borrow Julian Barbour's theory of *nows* to develop their own post-materialist explanation (Baruš & Mossbridge, 2017). Unfortunately, Barbour himself is not particularly forthcoming about the meaning of *now*. He takes his inspiration from Leibniz to think about the *now* "in terms of more fundamental entities that fuse space and matter into a single notion of a possible arrangement, or configuration of the entire universe" (Barbour, 2000: 16). This infinite number of configurations makes up the instances of time. He calls these instances "nows". But, whether one calls them instances or *nows* does not clarify their status. Speaking of "fundamental entities that fuse space and matter into a single notion" fails to clarify the extent of a *now*. How long is a "now"? How long does a configuration last? Is an "instance" or a "now" a blink of an

eye? Is it longer or shorter? This problem also extends to the flicker-filter theory. Since the "on" position of the flicker is already in question, the "off" position also follows this fate. How long is the "off" position? Basically, how long is the interval between the "on" positions?

Barušs tries to measure the "on" position in Planck time (Barušs, 2008). Planck time is tied to the distance a photon can travel at the speed of light. It is measured to be roughly  $10^{-44}$  seconds. This is the smallest measurable segment of time known to humanity. Barušs' point is that since it is not possible to discriminate a temporal interval within one Planck time, this is where the flickering starts happening. Once the time becomes less than one Planck time, since this time does not exist in the physical realm, it becomes nothing. This nothing represents the "off" position. Although this explanation is a noble attempt to account for the "on" and "off" positions, attaching the length of the "on" position to physical theory is dangerous. Hempel has already pointed out its dangers (1963). If an explanation is given in terms of current knowledge in physics, it may be false because physics is constantly changing. With advancement in physics, the time of roughly  $10^{-44}$  seconds for the smallest segment of measurable time may change in the future. If an explanation is given in terms of potential future knowledge of physics, the future of Planck time is unknown; hence, the answer in terms of Planck time becomes trivial. Basically, Planck time may become whatever is the smallest segment of time one day physicists can measure. But, again, how long is that time? Is there even a limit to such time segment or can such a time segment turn out to be infinitely small? So, how long is the "on" position? Can an "on" position be infinitely small? But, what does infinitely small mean in Barušs' theory and how does it affect this theory?

The question about the length of time is important to determine the content of each "now". Depending on the length of time, each configuration can hold a different quantity of content unless the claim is made that each *now* is a frozen picture with no change in it. So, at the end, the question is whether the content itself of a *now* is static or dynamic. How does one understand this mysterious *now*? Whatever the answers are to these questions, a more thorough definition and understanding is required to make the theory properly work; otherwise, the theory seems to be incomplete.

Beyond the general problems with the theory, there is a question about the afterlife as well. Deep time in deep consciousness generates a content in each particular sequence of *nows* and this is considered to be the physical manifestation that each individual experiences. So, what happens when people die? It is obvious that some kind of manifestation remains. For example, Fenwick and Fenwick (1997) site visions of paradise in some of which people, for instance, find themselves in beautiful gardens during their near-death experiences. Here is a perfect example from their work: "Inside was the most beautiful garden, no lawn, path or anything else, but flowers of every kind. Those that attracted me most were Madonna lilies, delphiniums and roses, but there were many, many more..." (Fenwick & Fenwick, 1997: 77). Manifestations of places in an afterlife, which are reminiscent of places of this life such as gardens with flowers, mean that deep consciousness in deep time does not stop generating sequences of *nows* upon death. So, what is the explanation? Obviously, the generation is not physical in nature because the dead do not participate in physical manifestation anymore. This means that the generation has to be a non-physical kind. Non-physical kind does not mean that deep consciousness produces a different quality of manifestation; but, rather, the conscious manifestation has a different platform for it to surface. This explanation solves the technical issue of manifestation, but it brings more questions with it. How many different platforms are there? Do all people join the same platform when they die? Why do these platforms exist? Why isn't there just one? Do people come back to join the physical platform several times or just one time?

Barušs talks about a radical self-transformation which benefits human beings by transforming them into a more awakened state of being (Barušs, 2021). It is not explicitly stated but suggested that this awakened state is a form of awareness about the origin of human beings as deep consciousness. If this is true, the theory can be interpreted as possessing a teleological end of returning to the original state of deep consciousness. However, if this is the goal, the path toward this goal needs to be explained with regard to the event of death. If most people's manifestations continue beyond death as near-death experiences indicate, it obviously takes more than one lifetime to return to a state beyond manifestation. So, how many lifetimes does it take to stop manifesting on any platform? How is it achieved? Is it the case, as Śāṅkara argues in his theory, that progress can only be made by some kind of radical transformation in physical manifestation? Or, can progress be made in different platforms of manifestation beyond death?

So, what can the dying hope for? There are a lot of questions and not enough answers to tease the details of a dying and death theory out of this post-materialist vision yet. But, with a more thorough explanation, this idealist theory of reality can offer a brand new vision of existence before and after death.

A somewhat similar post-materialist system with a different tone and emphasis can perhaps help to make sense of the changes required for progress in the afterlife. Wicca is a spiritual practice that can perhaps fill in the blank that Barušs left open.

### Wicca

Wicca is a modern day pagan spiritual practice. Its practitioners often refer to themselves as Witches. Wicca is technically not a philosophy. Amber K and Azrael Aryn K state that "Witches could probably argue endlessly about theology and values, but mostly we don't bother. In many ways, we are united by what we do--our practices--rather than by our beliefs" (K & K, 2013: 35). Despite the lack of enthusiasm for an official philosophical theory, Wicca, if properly analyzed, carries a post-materialist view of an arguably idealistic kind. Wicca centers around the celebration of the cyclicity of nature similar to the conception of the ancient Greeks who saw nature in terms of cycles where human life cuts through these cycles with its seemingly rectilinear movement (Arendt, 1998). According to this theory, this cyclical nature is metaphysically conceived of as one at the bottom, hence, providing an argument for monism. Although this monism appears pantheistic at first sight, the Wiccan practice and explanation for the use of magick<sup>28</sup> turns the theory into an idealistic philosophy. The ultimate, often referred to as the All-There-Is, has a divine expression offering itself in the duality of the Goddess and the God, further to be denoted by and reached through individual gods (K & K, 2013) through practices such as formal rituals and magick. The goal is "to live in harmony with nature and to become more like the Goddess and the God--that is, to grow in wisdom, love, and power through life after life, resting between lives in the Summerland" (28). The ultimate goal of reincarnation

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<sup>28</sup> The letter "k" is added to the word "magic" in order to emphasize its relationship to real life magick that can be thought of in terms of psychic powers, such as telekinesis, rather than in terms of illusion used by stage magicians in magic shows.

is unknown. All in all, life is sacred, nature is celebrated, wisdom is pursued and human existence is cycled back again into nature through reincarnation.

What does Wicca mean exactly? First, it has to be noted that there is a debate about the use of the designation of the word "Wicca" as opposed to "Witchcraft". Although the boundary between the two is not certain, generally, the practice of the skills is referred to as Witchcraft while the religion part of it is referred to as Wicca. Simply put, Wicca is a revived pagan faith that is based on "the ancient, nature-loving religions and folkways of Europe" ( 2). This modern, neo-pagan faith is thought to have been started with Gerald Gardner in Great Britain who brought Witchcraft out into the open in the early 1940s; although, it has to be mentioned that the details are sketchy. Eileen Holland points out, for example, that even the basic issue of the age of this spiritual path is often in question: "Debate currently rages over whether Wicca is a new religion or the oldest of all religions" (Holland, 2008, p. 5). Its pagan roots are old from the pre-Christian times often heavily relying on ancient Greek philosophy. Yet, its existence in its current form is definitely post-Christian. As Amber Laine Fisher argues, "We do not wish to completely annex the beliefs and practices of our ancient forbears, but we do hope to honor and respect those traditions within our own as we borrow from them what is fitting to us and leave those things behind that we no longer need" (Fisher, 2002: 19). Whether the spiritual practice is old or new and whether it is called Witchcraft or Wicca, what is important is that it follows an ancient, pre-Christian faith and practice that can be adapted into a post-modern lifestyle.

Although not all Witches may uniformly agree, they generally endorse a metaphysical view that all that exists is essentially one. In short, the metaphysical position they embrace is monism. The belief is in a world that is both imminent and transcendent in nature where "God is not pure Spirit but Spirit is embodied and expressed through matter" (K & K, 2013: 25). This Spirit is "a single source of energy or force that runs the universe" (Wolf, 2013: 29), which is divided into a female and a male divine expressions. Ronald Hutton argues that these divine expressions may be understood a number of ways:

Among Witches I have found people who think of their goddess and god as archetypes of the natural world or of human experience, others who regard them as projections of human need and emotion which have taken on a life of their

own, others who see them merely as convenient symbols, and yet others who have a belief in them as independent beings with whom relationships can be made (Hutton, 1999: 16).

All gods and goddesses of all religions are thought to be part of these divine expressions (K. & K, 2013). Basically, the gods are aspects of the divine expressions and possess certain characteristics. Yet, whatever way they are conceived of, every god and goddess is basically an energy source of the All-There-Is. This means that reality is one that expresses itself in physical manifestation in a number of ways. So far, this type of monism could be interpreted using a variety of theories. Hence, it could be understood as possibly a version of either substance monism, standing closer to the interpretation of Baruch Spinoza, or mental monism of Śaṅkara's Advaita Vedanta of Hinduism, or even a version of what Foster previously referred to as attribute monism of the idealist kind, he called mentalistic realism, where the logical and ontological status of the physical world is accepted but its intrinsic nature is claimed to be mental.

There is an actual reason to believe that Witchcraft is in fact leaning in the direction of the idealistic form of monism because of its belief in and description of magick. Amber K explains that "magick involves using forces to affect willed change in our own perceptions or consciousness" (Amber K, 2015: 3). She also states there is no difference between matter and energy, and that "We know we can manipulate energy, and we do it all the time in rituals. And if even solid things are really (or sometimes) energy waves, then they are not as rigid and static as they seem, but susceptible to change by the power of imagination, will, and directed energy" (37). Offering an interpretation of energy that is reminiscent of quantum physics, Amber K defends the mental ability to influence and thereby reshape the physical manifestation of reality. Although ritualistic tools may be used, the power is definitely inside the person: "But the power, the magick, is not in the tool you hold. It is in you" (K & K, 2016: 1). In short, everything is made of this one "energy" reality that the conscious mind is capable of directing to bring about changes in and reshaping physical manifestation. Thus, it seems that Witchcraft, through the explanation and description of magick, is aligning itself with some form of philosophical idealism where the world is mind-created and mind-dependent.



According to the model of Witchcraft, the universe is made of spirit, earth, air, fire and water, a belief which comes close to that of the ancient Greeks. From an objective viewpoint, these elements represent the spirit, solid matter, gases, energy and liquids; while from a subjective viewpoint, they represent the spiritual, physical, mental, energetic and emotional aspects of conscious beings respectively (K & K, 2013). Using tools that correspond to these aspects, Witches perform magick often during rituals that draw these aspects together in a sacredly designated place in order to make changes and reshape reality. They mentally focus, emotionally tune in to use energy, generated by their true will, from the Spirit to make physical changes in the manifestation of reality. The energy used is often associated with fire, which according to the philosophy of the Stoics, for example, is the designing element that creates the physical world (Long & Sedley, 1987). Thus, a specific pattern of reality that agrees with all aspects of a conscious being continues unless deliberate changes are made to alter this reality. Of course, since the power is inside the individual, this ritualistic magick can be learned to be performed mentally without any physical tools. In short, reality is easily amenable by deliberate mental effort as this reality is brought about from the Spirit, the All-There-Is, using the designing element funnelled through all aspects of a subjective conscious being.

The point is to learn and to experience life in order to grow in wisdom, love and power. This learning and experiencing continues through several lives. Raymond Buckland uses a simile of grades in school to explain it (2016):

You enter school in a low grade and learn the basics. When you have mastered these you graduate, take a short vacation, then come back into a higher grade to learn and experience more things. So it is in life. In each life you have a certain amount to learn and experience. When you have done that, you graduate (e.g. you die). To come back into a higher grade you are reborn in a new body (26).

Death is treated as a vacation in between periods of learning and experiencing in physical manifestation. This period of vacation that can also be thought of as a rest or a pause is spent in what Witches call the Summerland. The time spent in Summerland is to review the person's life, to assess lessons learned and to grow strong again (Wolf, 2013). Although time in the objective sense does not exist, the length of subjectively experienced time may vary depending on the

assessment of lessons learned from the most previous life, the integration of these lessons into previously existed lives and the amount of preparations needed for the next life (Buckland, 2016). Some departed souls may even assist spirit guides in Summerland by watching over the lives of earth-bound spirits with them. The overall point is always to progress.

In reality, everything is connected. Amber K uses the metaphor of Indra's Web to explain this connection (2015). In complete darkness, silver threads are running in all directions similar to a spider's web except that the web is extended in a three dimensional way. In this web, at each intersection of the threads, a crystal sphere is placed and every crystal sphere glows. The crystal spheres combined illuminate reality. Each sphere reflects all other spheres in it. This way the web is fully linked and the spheres share each other's brilliance. This interconnection happens "on a level deeper than the conscious mind can go" (42). The fact that everything affects everything else is often captured by the phrase "As above, so below" (42). This interconnectedness allows for psychic powers to be present and used by people. For example, when a person dies, she may get in touch with her living relatives after some rest in Summerland (Wolf, 2013). However, her ability to create the connection depends on the relatives' emotional state and belief in life after death. If a relative is successfully reached, he may telepathically receive dreams about the person who passed onto the other side or he may become telekinetically influenced by smelling the person's favourite perfume or scented candle.

These psychic connections and abilities are also available to Witches in this side of life who deliberately practise these skills. Amber K and Azreal Arynn K list magick, ritual, healing and divination as the major skills of Witches where divination is defined as "a method of gaining information and understanding that is not normally available at the conscious level of the mind" (K & K, 2013: 185). Basically, Witches deliberately enter into an altered state of consciousness to develop skills that empower them psychically, offer them greater powers in existence and help them make greater progress in life. Sensitivity to these powers increases with greater exposure to these states of consciousness, which explains the sensitivity and the resulting psychic skills of those who have had near-death experiences. However, it is often argued that some may already have some sensitivity to begin with perhaps from exposure to these skills in previous lives.

Through their skills, Witches can become connected with a number of planes of existence in reality. Although there are variations in the different traditions, the overall reality is portrayed as larger than the physical plane and the Summerland. It is possible to also connect with a shamanic Lower World where animal spirits and other discarnate beings exist, with the Astral Plane where thought is reality, and with the realms of gods where the divine creative energy resides (K & K, 2013). Thus, acquiring an altered state of consciousness, which includes dying, planes from the physical plane other than the Summerland can be reached. This portrayal of reality theoretically allows for entry to and existence in higher planes after certain number of repeated deaths.

The Wiccan theory explains many aspects of near-death experiences. The out-of-body experience is the moment the conscious being withdraws from physical manifestation in favour of joining the Summerland. The Summerland exists for between-periods of lives lived in the physical plane. The projection of the conscious being's usual pattern continues in Summerland although, as argued before, the pattern can be changed with effort. Since the immediate preoccupation is to assess the most recent existence, a review of this life is carried out, which is not difficult in light of the fact that objective time is absent. Spirit guides or recently deceased relatives may help the person through the process of review and entry to Summerland for a longer time if the person's life is over and she is not returning to that particular physical manifestation. Some of the dying can reach higher realms if they are psychically developed enough to experience thought as reality, or divine powers, or even the source of all interconnectedness and existence. If the person does not die and returns to physical manifestation, she will only get a glimpse into this world. However, once she returns into physical manifestation to continue her life, her sensitivity to psychic powers may be enhanced and insight into higher planes can expand her mind to the point where this person feels tuned into this physical manifestation very differently than before having had an NDE. Hence, Wicca can neatly explain a great number of the details of near-death experiences.

Still, some questions remain. First, if reality can be changed at will, what makes people experience roughly the same world? It is obvious that people share some kind of a common world but Wicca never really explains how this common world comes to be common. Since the world is one, it can be led back to the source, the All-There-Is. All existence unfolds from it.

However, at what level is the common structure of physical manifestation arranged? Is it at the level of gods? Is it at the level of the Astral Plane? Or, is it at the level of the source itself? Second, toward what exactly do conscious beings progress? The emphasis is on progress, but the ultimate goal is unknown. Without an ultimate end, it is difficult to determine what the aim toward wisdom, love and power means. The argument is that a human being should be more like the Goddess and the God. But, what is that like exactly? What are the Goddess and the God like? Basically, it is difficult to know what any human being should emulate without a clear end goal in mind because the meaning of wisdom, love and power depends on the end goal. Third, are the gods necessary in this philosophical system at all? It is possible to argue that some kind of divine expression of the All-There-Is is necessary because most human beings cannot directly access the All-There-Is. However, are the individual aspects of gods necessary? If magick is a power that exists in the individual, could the person simply focus on a desired end and reach that end without any gods? It seems that these individual gods do not play a necessary or major role in shifting reality around. Finally, who determines what lessons have to be learned and how long a life a person has to live in this physical manifestation? This is an important question because people are able to come back to talk about near-death experiences for the very reason that it was not their time to die yet. So, who decides that it is the right time or not? Who decides how many lessons have to be learned in a particular lifetime and whether these lessons have been completed at the moment of dying? It seems that this post-materialist idealist system falls short of some of the finer details.

If the post-materialist systems are to succeed, they need to be worked out in greater details. They need greater details on the source of reality, explanation of conscious participation, the goal of this participation and both the stability and flexibility in the system. Furthermore, to understand dying, death and afterlife, the systems need to provide an account of a smooth transition between platforms of existence and also an explanation of the end goal of this journey. It is not that these post-materialist systems are necessarily wrong; instead, they simply lack the necessary details for them to be sufficiently successful at the moment.

## Toward an Ideal Theory

This lengthy exposition has provided some ideas that can satisfy the demand for an idealistic theory that can fit near-death experiences into it. All idealistic theories examined have fairly well-developed visions and can fit many elements of near-death experiences into them. Of course, some have philosophical problems with their structures, some have problems with their theories on dying and death, some have problems fitting in certain elements of near-death experiences and some have the combination of all these problems. It seems that all can use some help. However, if one wishes, with the proper dedication, each can be fixed in order to properly accommodate near-death experiences.

The Advaita Vedanta that Śaṅkara develops and Plotinus' theory suffer from a structural weakness that has an effect on the fate of individuals beyond death. Ramanuja points out in relation to Śaṅkara's theory that consciousness needs a persistent subject, otherwise change is not possible. Something has to be persistently present in order to be enlightened and liberated. If this is the case, the persistent subject can never be assimilated into Brahman, which questions the ultimate goal of reincarnation and state of existence for the liberated after death. The same objection applies to Plotinus' idea about the soul in relation to The One. The soul needs to be persistent in order to change but this change prevents it from returning into The One. This structural weakness can be remedied though. It can be argued that the persistent subject exists until liberation only. In fact, the act of liberation into Brahman or into The One frees the subject from persistent existence and from its very state of subjectivity. This way, the persistent subject is present to change, but upon changing, its subjectivity ceases. Thus, the ultimate goal of reincarnation can remain the assimilation into Brahman or returning into The One, and experiences of enlightenment such as that of Anita Moorjani's can be defended as part of the liberation process.

In Plotinus' philosophy, the challenge is also to properly understand the level of Intelligence. After the Age of Reason, Intelligence is linked to a mental faculty. The use of intelligence becomes strongly associated with the use of reason. However, Plotinus does not have this rather modern understanding of intelligence. In his philosophy, the level of Intelligence can be acquired through direct experience and not by an intellectual effort. It is a

shift in consciousness or being through contemplation that results in liberation into the higher realms. Hence, it is a particular state of being rather than a state of reasoning that leads to the Intelligence. This transformative power needs to be kept in mind when reading Plotinus in order to get a clear picture of his idealist philosophy and the fate of human beings beyond death. Intelligence transforms the person into a level of existence where annihilation is not possible and where either reincarnation or liberation awaits.

Berkeley creates an idealistic theory according to which only minds and ideas exist. In this theory, God's mind creates the law of nature, which is responsible for the framework of reality, but where the content of the mind can be mistaken due to human judgement. This theory successfully explains mistakes about the content that occur even during near-death experiences, but the philosophy itself suffers from structural problems. First, even though the philosophy is qualitatively idealistic, since everything is mental in nature, the theory is not quantitatively idealistic. The impassable gulf between God' mind and the human mind remains. It is possible to solve this issue by simply declaring that the qualitative idealism it carries is enough. Those who follow a Western religion may actually be satisfied by this suggestion. After all, ending up in heaven for eternity is satisfactory to most Westerners and assimilation or return into the original source is not even desirable. Second, Berkeley's theory of dying and death may be very limited in that it speaks to the Christian interpretation only. This point can be remedied though by expanding on the type of afterlife states people can exist in. Perhaps, the view can incorporate separate states for followers of different faiths. Or, perhaps, an argument can be made that the Christian vision is not accurate and a more general vision can be developed that encompasses a universal view of human fate. In fact, the experiences of people near death can guide the creation of such a universal view. In short, Berkeley's challenges may be great, but they can be met if enough work is put into the refinement of his philosophy.

McTaggart's idealistic system has an even greater challenge than Berkeley's. In McTaggart's system, the whole of reality is made of primary parts, the selves or spirits, and the secondary parts, the perceptions of these selves. Although the metaphysical vision appears logically sound, information is lacking. McTaggart never provides a story about the manner in which these spirits originally came to be. Without a god that Berkeley argues for, the origin and, hence, the existence of these spirits become rather mysterious. Furthermore, the origin of their

teleological end they are supposed to be working toward through history also becomes a question. How did the system come into being in a progressive mode? It seems that it would be better to have an ultimate such as Brahman or The One to create a more extensive story about the fate of the universe and the fate of human beings. Besides the structural issues, it is also rather strange that love seems to cement the system, which is described as an emotion. If reality is made of selves and their perceptions, it is strange that their emotional bond rather than their mental effort is emphasized. Certainly love is an important component for the dying and description of the afterlife state, but love on its own seems to fall short of a thorough explanation for holding the system together and driving it toward an idealistic end. It would be more preferable to create a cementing component that includes both mental and emotional aspects. Finally, McTaggart's system could also use help with a proper explanation of what happens in-between reincarnation and at the end of history. How do people exist while not being in this physically perceived world? Where will they eventually end up at the end of this journey? Certainly, a story about non-physical existence needs to be worked out. As it was mentioned, the challenges are even greater than for Berkeley, but not impossible to overcome with some serious effort.

Foster defends Berkeley, but his philosophy is non-materialistic rather than mentalistic in nature. This means that existence beyond death is not directly ensured. Foster is relying on the mercy of a Judeo-Christian God for an afterlife. This problem can be remedied in a number of ways. First, the sensory organization that his canonical idealism depends on could be tied to a type of mind that exists outside the constraints of physical time, which would allow for the mind to exist without an expiration date. Or, the sensory organization Foster argues for could be turned into ideas similar to Berkeley's reasoning in order to tie them to a mental reality. This move would create a pure mental reality and the physical world could be declared the product of the mind, which would ensure the existence of minds beyond death. Another way of fixing the problem is to remove the requirement for a Judeo-Christian God and replace it with an ultimate ground of reality that stands closer to Śāṅkara's Brahman or Plotinus' The One where assimilation into this ultimate is possible. Finally, experiences at the empirical viewpoint on the mundane level can be defended as a proof of an afterlife. In this instance, near-death experiences can be used as scientific evidence for the law of nature, which allows conscious beings to

continue to exist. Basically, Foster's philosophy is structurally too weak to defend an afterlife because it is a non-materialist rather than a truly idealist theory. In some way, it requires to be turned into a more idealist version.

Barušs' theory has a well-developed structure that is both stable and capable of accounting for changes in it. This theory has two major weaknesses. First, it suffers from an identity problem where all the changes occurring in it can be traced back to the same self and where the selves can be distinguished. This problem can be remedied by introducing an intermediate level between deep consciousness and apparent consciousness similar to Plotinus' Intelligence level. At this intermediate level, the difference between deep consciousness and this level is that selves are distinguished from each other and their identities are retained throughout their experiences. Their identities can eventually be dissolved in deep consciousness where an individually existing apparent consciousness is no longer present. Second, Barušs' theory needs to further develop the possibilities for existence outside physical manifestation. Since consciousness is ontologically basic and everything is made of consciousness, further explanation is needed about consciousness after death. A description has to be worked out about the states or platforms consciousness can enter to continue manifestation using the flicker-filter system and the meaning field. For example, it can be claimed that the state or platform a self uses after death is dependent on the meaning field the self chooses. If the person's intention is to find herself in heaven, she enters the state where this meaning field is available. This solution could potentially explain the varying content people present about the experiences they have had near death.

Wicca is a modern-day practice with ancient roots. Although it is predominantly a practice not a philosophy, a theory can be carved out of it. Unfortunately, this theory suffers from a basic structural problem. It accounts for manifested change in the physical world that is achieved by mental effort, but Wicca never explains what makes the world common to be shared by all conscious beings. This structural issue can be rectified by tying the commonality and coherence of the world to a deeper level of existence such as to the level of the All-There-Is or to the level of gods. These levels can be made responsible for the law of nature and rules of manifestation. Beyond the structural problem, Wicca also needs to have a goal of existence. This goal could be the desire to be like the Goddess and the God in order to assimilate into the



All-There-Is. This would fit into the focus on cyclicity where conscious beings are on a journey from the All-There-Is and back to the All-There-Is. This way, the lessons learned and judgments made about these lessons in each lifetime can be guided by this final goal. Also, on this journey, the individual manifestation of gods can be psychological and spiritual inspirations in order to reach the goal by achieving an increased power that is developed through magick and other means in altered states of consciousness. These finer details would help the dying to make sense of their experiences.

Ultimately, all these theories can use help, but each can be remedied by a dedicated philosopher. Perhaps the structural problems need greater insight into philosophy and greater attention to be worked out while missing details can be more easily added. At the end, though, any of these philosophies can fit near-death experiences into their idealistic theories properly. It takes dedication and hard work, but it can be done. Each of these philosophies that is worked out using this dedication and hard work represents a hope for near-death research that an explanation does not have to be a choice between dualism and materialism.

There is also an opportunity to synthesize these philosophies and come up with an ideal version of these theories that can offer the greatest hope for a proper philosophy of death. What is this ideal version? First, it has to be structurally sound. Arguments have shown that idealism is a better solution than materialism or dualism. Therefore, a perfected idealist theory has to have enough backbones to fill in the details and sound convincing. This means that since idealism is a type of monism, a theory first has to show that it fulfills the monist requirement. This monist requirement can be fulfilled by qualitative monism or quantitative monism. In its more perfected form, the theory is both qualitatively and quantitatively monistic. As it was shown, the philosophies of Berkeley, McTaggart and Foster are not sufficient in this regard because even though they are qualitatively monistic arguing for a mental reality, they are not quantitatively monistic. Conscious minds never become one with the absolute, leaving the system with multiplicity of conscious minds potentially for eternity. Therefore, it is much better to embrace Śaṅkara's, Plotinus' or Baruš's philosophy where there is an underlying unity that offers a oneness at the very bottom. Hence, a more perfected system will be both qualitatively and quantitatively monistic.

A system that is both qualitatively and quantitatively monistic requires the presence of an ultimate ground or absolute level of existence into which everything can assimilate or with which everything can become one. Since the theory is idealism, this ultimate ground or absolute level needs to be at least pure consciousness or mind, or, better yet, it has to be ineffable, beyond all qualities or properties. The reason that an ineffable ultimate ground is preferable because, if consciousness is the ground, it still has a logical opposition of non-consciousness that can be interpreted as a void or annihilation. This system violates the inclusion of all, a system which would include both consciousness and its opposite. Gadjin N. Nagao quotes the Buddhist logician, Nagarjuna, who argues this point in relation to the Buddhist *sūnyatā*, the Absolute:

[The Absolute] should not be described as

He is void, he is non-void;

Neither should he be termed

Void or non-void simultaneously,

Nor not void and not non-void simultaneously.

But he is spoken of just for the sake of designation (Nagao, 1991: 43).

Since human language is often dualistic, representing the possibility of an affirmation and its negation, it is difficult to avoid the description of an idealist system that relies on an ultimate ground that goes beyond such propositional thinking. However, it is necessary to avoid binary thinking in the ultimate ground that is designed to be all inclusive. Therefore, it is better to have an ultimate ground that goes beyond the description of pure consciousness and, instead, describes the ultimate ground of existence or reality in ineffable terms that is beyond all qualities and properties.

Still, if it is an idealistic theory one is talking about, the first principle that originates from the ultimate ground in some form or shape has to be mental. It has to be consciousness or the mind. This means that some form of Plotinus' Intelligence level is necessary. This is the level where consciousness or the mind can be broken into multiple forms of itself and individuation can happen in order to avoid the pitfall that Barušs has fallen into when failing to provide an explanation for the identity of the self and discrimination between selves beyond physical manifestation.

This intermediary level can be the mental realm that comes prior to physical manifestation and where the laws of nature can be determined for all manifestations either in the form of Ideas that Plotinus' has argued for or in the form of meaning fields that Barušs has presented. If the laws of nature are determined at this level, the framework for manifestation for what people call the physical world is set, so that selves can enter into this physical manifestation that is stable enough to share a common world, but flexible enough to make changes in it using mental effort. Of course, mental effort should be understood as a direct experience that Plotinus advocates rather than a type of rational thinking that becomes predominant after the Age of Reason. Also, stability should not be confused with rigidity. This system can be changed even at the most basic level if enough mental effort is put into it by enough minds; but, in general, it is stable enough to be shared because minds that are entering this manifestation do adapt to the existing laws that are upheld by most of its participants. To put it into Barušs' language, conscious beings have the choice to switch together to an entirely different meaning field in deep consciousness, so that when they emerge in the next "on" set in the flicker-filter system, they arrive in a brand new reality. This is a system where conscious minds can share a common world, but where each participant can also make alterations in order to personalize the participant's manifestation termed as the physical world. Basically, they share the basic laws of the system that they have created and uphold together while being able to personalize it to have a unique participation in this physical world.

The key to this participation is the freedom each conscious being has in each moment to make changes using mental effort. Wicca has presented a theory according to which psychic skills are a natural part of the human self and can be developed in order to function at a more efficient level in this mentally amenable reality. Freedom to work at an efficient level is important because it allows for greater changes made in the system. The presence of freedom itself to be utilized at any level also makes people responsible for the creation of their own reality, for both experiences and circumstances, and it can give them a chance to make desired changes. This way, they do not become victims of their circumstances; although, they do have to contend with the presence of others who also participate in this reality together with them.

For the entire system to make sense, there has to be a reason for participation in it. Although, as the Wiccans argue, the true extent of this reason can never be understood, returning

to the ultimate ground of reality makes sense. This is what Śaṅkara and Plotinus have emphasized. Also, mystical experiences in general support this idea where some mystics seem to be able to be absorbed into the ultimate ground of reality. If this is the goal, advancement toward this goal has to be made using the freedom available. The responsibility toward this goal rests on each participant to meet this goal. In short, it seems that this is a journey back to the source.

In this system, conscious beings should be able to move around in a sense of switching from one state to another. For this to happen, a variety of platforms or states should be available below the intermediate level from the point of individuation. For example, Wicca lists a variety of states such as the shamanic Lower World where animal spirits and other discarnate beings exist, the Astral Plane where thought is reality, and the realms of gods where the divine creative energy resides. Whatever these states are called and however they are described, the important point is that, in order to make changes, less mental effort is required as one gets, metaphysically speaking, closer to the intermediate level and more mental effort is required as one gets, metaphysically speaking, further away from it. This means that, for example, dreams are closer to the intermediate level than the physical world because time and place can be more easily changed with mental effort in a dream.

On the other hand, it is possible to imagine a state that exists further away and below physical manifestation, in which changes are even more difficult to make than in the physical world. For example, the Greek underworld Hades is portrayed in this manner. The mythological character, Sisyphus, receives an eternal punishment from the main god, Zeus, to forever roll a boulder uphill in the depth of Hades, the underworld. Sisyphus has little choice but to endlessly repeat his action without deviation. He does not have an ability to change his fate. Odysseus' journey to Hades portrays a similar situation when Achilles, the Greek hero, laments, "O shining Odysseus, never try to console me for dying. I would rather follow the plow as thrall to another, one with no land allotted him and not much to live on, than be a king over all the perished dead" (Odyssey, Latimer, Book XI, Lines 488-491). Achilles laments his inability to possess even the lowest form of human existence where any action is possible that makes a difference in the world. It seems that mortal living that is full of possibilities for action is much more preferred to the shadowy existence of everlasting inaction in the underworld. Thus, the Greeks have dreaded the inability of change and this dread signals the form of even a lower level

of existence than that of physical manifestation--changeless existence. If there are lower worlds, similar to Hades, change is either extremely difficult to bring about or nearly impossible to achieve by mental effort. This idea should give something for materialist-minded scientists to think about who are positively desiring and looking for a reality that is fully determined by the law of nature: believe it and it shall come!

According to this ideal version, in this ideal system, near-death experiences make perfect sense. At the end of life in physical manifestation, the conscious person, as a conscious centre, withdraws from the manifestation. Since this is a manifestation, even the fear of death or closeness of death without a perceived injury can trigger the withdrawal. The perspective of the conscious person changes from inside the body to a point away from it. It is possible that the withdrawal is gradual, so the conscious person can still view the manifestation that is upheld by the law of nature created in the intermediate level and shared by all participants in this manifestation. The darkness can be understood as the momentary pause where consciousness is searching for and undergoing a major shift into another state. Once the light appears, the target state is located and the conscious person moves toward it. The target state is the one that stands closest to the understanding and beliefs of the person. Of course, the movement is more metaphorical than physical but may appear to be physical because of the person's understanding of reality having been affected by that person's most recent existence in the physical world. Recently deceased relatives and spirit guides related to this state of existence can aid the person. Naturally, the states closer to the intermediary level are more amenable to mental changes and match the expectations of the person. On the other hand, in the states further from the intermediary level and below the physical manifestation are more difficult for a person to make changes where one may feel more of a victim than a participant.

If the person believes that she has not done all that she was going to do during the designated lifetime, she may return to the manifested body again, provided that it is in a suitable condition. The condition of the body is a manifestation, as Berkeley suggested, an idea in the mind, but it is strongly influenced by all the participants in the physical world who share its currently manifested law of nature. The choice of return is aided by the life review. The life review works based on what McTaggart calls the C-series of time, which Barušs also alludes to, where segments of time can be studied similar to digital segments of a movie. A person can

pause a segment, study it, release it and move to another segment to study. As Wicca suggests, the purpose of the life review is to assess the lessons learned and progress made. The lessons probably include McTaggart's notion of love and Wicca's notion of wisdom and power. Those people who do not return to the physical body, continue their journey by preparing for a new incarnation into the physical state or to other states until they reach the intermediary level where individuation ends and assimilation into the ultimate ground of reality becomes possible. Those people who do return to the physical body, remember and share their experiences known as near-death experiences. NDEs change people's lives because they are now aware of a greater reality beyond the physical manifestation and they are more sensitive to their psychic powers that allow them to make effective mental changes in physical manifestation. They are more enlightened about the essence of their true beings than other average conscious beings.

This perfected vision of the idealist theory works better than any materialist or dualist theory to explain near-death experiences. It is capable of fitting the elements of near-death experiences into it. What about veridicality? Given this idealist theory, in what sense can one say that near-death experiences are veridical?

### Veridicality of Near-Death Experiences

In a materialist or even in a dualist system, it is possible to talk about a correspondence theory of truth. This theory of truth depends on a world that can be accurately described. The accurate description refers to the mental content one is experiencing in comparison to an objectively experienced world. As Holden points out in her definition of veridicality, sometimes the accuracy can be an agreed-upon shared experience, or it can be the result of some philosophical or scientific mechanism to find this accuracy. However, once materialism and dualism disappear from the horizon and a mentally created and mentally dependent world takes its place, such accurately existing and mentally independent world ceases to exist. So, what is the meaning of veridicality in an idealist system?

Veridicality as a truth-telling exercise refers to the truth of the system conscious beings find themselves in, as conscious centres, rather than the mental content they experience. It is the philosophical framework, not the content of experience to which veridicality refers. It is worth

following Foster's differentiation of the transcendental level and the mundane level in this logic. The transcendental level provides the philosophical framework that can offer the explanation for the way the idealist system works. In Foster's case, this includes the Judeo-Christian God and God's law of nature that provide proper organization at the human empirical viewpoint. In the perfected idealist system, somewhat similarly, this includes the ultimate ground of reality, the intermediary level where individuation happens and where the law of nature is designed for the purpose of manifestation that is shared and upheld by the participants in the manifestation of a particular state or platform. For Foster, the mundane level is where the law of nature can be discovered by scientists because the result of the sensory organization can be studied at the human empirical viewpoint. In the perfected idealist system, similarly, the mundane level is the manifestation of the law of nature that allows for certain content to take place. Since the content can be changed with mental effort, veridicality cannot be tied to the accuracy of the manifested world. Simply, there is no independent world of which one can speak in this scenario. Also, there is no accuracy to which one can point. Every experience can be individualized with varying mental effort and possibly even the entire law of nature can be changed with a group effort. Therefore, veridicality can be referred to the larger philosophical framework only at the transcendental level.

What about mistakes made at the mundane level? There are two possible explanations. First, as Berkeley explains, human judgement is the culprit often times. In the so-called illusory experiences, the result of the senses collide with human expectation according to which the senses should agree with one another. This collision forces the person to try to fix the situation by coming up with a rational explanation. Often, the rational explanation faults the human senses. Hence, it is human judgment that is to be blamed in the desire for an explanation that coheres with a person's vision of the world. This means that people create philosophical visions and judge their experiences accordingly. The presence and the explanation of mistakes are due to these visions. However, instead of judging them as a mistake, illusion, for example, could be looked at as an anomalous phenomenon that is a hidden sign for the invitation to investigate the nature of reality. Any anomaly is a hidden treasure waiting to be discovered.

Second, mistakes are sometimes the result of deviation from the commonly upheld current law of nature. For example, a traumatized driver who has previously hit a person on the

road thinks that he has just driven over a human body. He gets out of the car and still sees a body on the road. Relatives get out of the car and come to his rescue, repeating it over and over that it was just a piece of wood. Finally he sees that it is a piece of wood. What happened? Basically, in what is often called a hallucination, due to his trauma, the person has simply mentally deviated from the current law of nature that puts a piece of wood on the road. Others correct him and bring him back to the current law of nature that is mentally upheld by conscious participants in the physically manifested world according to which a piece of wood is on the road. Of course, this is helpful in the case of traumatized people. It is more questionable in a situation where a person is helped by the deviation. For example, a person can see an angel in a room whom nobody else can see and this angel is revealing information about an upcoming event. In this case, the person is capable of using her psychic powers to better guide her life. If others in the room try to talk her into dismissing the angel sighting, they might do disservice to the individual in question. This means that mistakes that are due either to human judgment or to deviation from the norm from the currently existing law of nature, actually exist as mistakes on the mundane level only.

Near-death experiences are veridical in a sense that they reveal more about the transcendental level of existence and reality. They reveal more about the framework of such existence and reality. The reoccurring elements of darkness, light, autoscopy, sense of wellbeing, life review and so on are tied to the transcendental level. They are suggestive of the metaphysical structure that speaks of the current law of nature. They are indicative of the shift in consciousness to another state of existence. The variation in content is the result of the personalized aspect of consciousness that is tied to the person's developed beliefs in the physical world and the continuation of these manifestations in other upcoming states. Therefore, near-death experiences are veridical in their transcendental features, not in their mundane contents they hold.

Are near-death experiences veridical? In a transcendental sense, they are. They are capable of telling the truth about their transcendental features. But, they are not veridical if veridicality is referred to the content using the correspondence theory of truth simply because, according to idealism, an objectively understood world apart from the mind does not exist. This means that any mental content in the form of a fact, a statement or in any other form has nothing



independently existing to which it can correspond; they are all to a smaller or larger extent communally agreed upon. The created content is mentally amenable in its smaller or larger aspects any time. Hence, the mental nature of the world makes all content, including the content in the waking state, inherently non-veridical if it is understood in the usual, more traditional sense of the word. It is simply the case that veridicality loses its meaning beyond the simplistic matching of personal content to the communal content. In this sense, veridicality is meaningless.

## CONCLUSION: THE PROJECT OF VERIDICALITY AND BEYOND

The purpose of this project has been a philosophical investigation into near-death experiences with the aim of answering the question whether near-death experiences are veridical. The ultimate aim of my work was to defend the veridicality of these experiences within the framework of idealism. This defence was preceded by a preliminary investigation into the traditional way of assessing veridicality; investigation into the prevailing material bias when it comes to the assessment of near-death experiences; and, investigation into near-death experiences without any metaphysical assumptions. The preliminary investigation led to the defence of idealism as the best framework to use for the explanation of near-death experiences. Several theories of idealism were considered and a synthesized version of the best imaginable theory was presented in order to answer the question of veridicality.

In Chapter 1, I focused on the historical analysis of the veridicality of near-death experiences, which is largely based on empirical research. In this analysis, the focus has always been about the evaluation of the possibility of the continuation of consciousness after the death of the brain in order to defend either the Afterlife Hypothesis or the Dying Brain Hypothesis. An investigation into this approach has shown that this analysis is a non-starter. Due to the sensory modality used, the uncertainty of the exact aim of experiments, the loose or non-existent definitions of life, death, dying, afterlife and consciousness, it was determined that it is difficult to find out at what point the possibility arises for continuation of consciousness apart from the brain. Basically, it is difficult to calculate at what point of the dying process near-death experiences occur, whether they happen at a point where the brain can still support consciousness or whether they happen afterward. It is simply the case that the threshold for an independent existence of consciousness cannot be established using empirical evidence because the defenders of the Dying Brain Hypothesis can offer some kind of an explanation for all evidence. The explanation may seem taxing and unreasonable to some people, hypothetically even involving the use of psychic powers in order to defend their theory; but, nevertheless, their explanation is capable of defeating the Afterlife Hypothesis every time, leaving the evidence weak at best for a successful defence of the Afterlife Hypothesis.

The problem with the evaluation is that the evaluation of evidence unfairly favours the Dying Brain Hypothesis. The entire system of evaluation is set up in such a way that as long as a physically provided alternative explanation to the Afterlife Hypothesis is available, the Afterlife Hypothesis is automatically deemed to be less valuable no matter how speculative or improbable the physically provided explanation is. Simply, the material explanation is taken as a default position against which a case has to be made for survival of consciousness after death, and the burden of the proof is placed on the defenders of the Afterlife Hypothesis to prove the Afterlife Hypothesis superior to the Dying Brain Hypothesis. This is an unfair bias toward one type of theory at the expense of the other type unless, of course, this bias can be justified by showing that the materialist worldview is superior to any other alternative worldview.

In Chapter 2, the materialist worldview was examined to see if the materialist theory is indeed superior to any other alternative theory. The task of the proponents of the Dying Brain Hypothesis was to positively demonstrate that their proposed material brain and the material world are clearly ontologically significant and more significant than consciousness or the mind in general. After all, the burden of proof could only be shifted to the proponents of the Afterlife Hypothesis if the proponents of the Dying Brain Hypothesis could demonstrate that matter was clearly proven to be ontologically significant and enjoyed a more secure status than consciousness and the mind. The attempt to prove matter ontologically significant has failed. It was shown that matter does not enjoy a special status. The materialists are incapable of showing that their proposed world is ontologically more significant than consciousness and the mind for several reasons. First, the materialists often treat the rise of materialism in history as an ahistorical fact, which is not the case. Second, they often rely on scientific facts to make the case for materialism, but ignore the difference between science and materialism when making this case. Third, they overlook the relationship between the evidence and the evaluator of the evidence. Finally, they stay silent about the bias epistemic peers show when handling the evidence. All in all, it was demonstrated that the materialist-minded examiners of evidence in the case of near-death experiences cannot show that matter is ontologically more significant than the alternative of consciousness or the mind, and, therefore, they do not have the right to shift the burden of proof onto the proponents of the Afterlife Hypothesis. For this reason, the traditional assessment of near-death experiences has to be given up that is built on the idea of wanting to

satisfy the sceptics of the Afterlife Hypothesis. The playing field has to be levelled where all theories need to be considered equally legitimate with an equal chance of success unless positively proved otherwise.

In Chapter 3, I levelled the playing field by examining the evidence without any metaphysical assumptions to see where this examination can lead. First, it was determined that the experts cannot help in the discovery of veridicality because they are clearly biased in their definitions of veridicality. Next, it was established that a pure description of near-death experiences and suspension of judgement are not beneficial in the determination of veridicality. Instead, it was shown that it is more beneficial to follow the examination of the lay person's epistemic evaluation of veridicality of these experiences. This epistemic evaluation, which does not involve a sophisticated and academically developed metaphysical theory, can reveal both the lay person's phenomenological approach to the examination of veridicality and expose the lay person's bias in this evaluation. This discussion ended in a collapse into relativism because the lay person's natural sense of veridicality allows the person to rely on a subjective epistemic framework where the person can choose to take a variety of factors into consideration allowing each person to make a subjectively created conclusion about veridicality in general and veridicality of near-death experiences in particular. The conclusion was that a metaphysical theory to guide the inquiry is necessary to avoid relativism.

In Chapter 4, idealism was defended as the most desirable metaphysical theory. It was defended based on the idea of simplicity in the form of the principle of parsimony. Simplicity, in the form of the principle of parsimony, requires that either the number of ontological posits be eliminated or the ontological posits that do not play a genuine explanatory role in a theory be eliminated. Of course, dualism has one too many substances to be the simplest theory. The simplest theory has only one substance; therefore, the solution has to be monism. Although materialism could be a candidate, materialism has difficulties properly fitting the mental into the physical either through a reductionist or an emergentist theory. It appears that simplicity in materialism cannot be achieved because redundancy is always present. The materialists always have something extra they need to account for. They run into two issues. If they accept that there are conscious human experiences then, at least in some hydrocephalic cases and in near-death cases, the brain becomes by and large unnecessary for the explanation. If they accept the

brain explanation in some form, the conscious human experiences become unnecessary for the explanation. They simply cannot solve the mind-brain issue. Therefore, materialism fails to make its case and it is not the ideal type of monism that can be adopted as the simplest theory.

The ideal type of monism is idealism. The theory of idealism entails that everything is mind-created or at least mind-dependent. This is a mental reality where there is no redundancy. In a mental reality, since the mind or consciousness is ontologically basic, both the mind and the brain are mental in some form. Of course, in an idealist theory where the mind or consciousness is ontologically basic, the mind or consciousness can never perish. This means that nothing can stop it from continuing on even when the body disappears from the horizon. Hence, in an idealist theory, the afterlife scenario is the most likely outcome after death.

In an idealist theory, consciousness can be imagined as a kaleidoscope where consciousness can switch into states of consciousness and apply state specific knowledge in each state. A conscious person understood as a conscious centre can offer an overall evaluation of the different states in such a way that certain states are ranked higher on the reality scale than other states. Near-death experiences are ranked usually high in this overall picture, closely aligned with mystical states. However, certain types of knowledge and background influences can cause variance in the resulting rankings. Therefore, individuals may disagree in their understanding of what they deemed to be veridical in this ranking. This means that, understanding the issue of veridicality strictly from a first person point of view, it is best to describe a veridical experience, in a reality which is mental in nature, as an experience that offers a meaningful understanding of and participation in reality when the person sorts out and integrates all states of consciousness through mental observation and creation, using filters of available experiences, knowledge and background influences. However, this definition of veridicality is still captured relative to the person who participates within the metaphysical system. Therefore, it was necessary to continue the discussion of veridicality to capture its meaning in reference to idealism as a metaphysical system.

In Chapter 5, veridicality was considered from a more structural point of view. There were important questions to be answered from this point of view. What precisely is the nature of reality, given the fact that a number of theses can be presented within the theory of idealism?

What roles do people, as conscious centres, play within this reality? What happens when the permanent switch occurs from this waking state to an afterlife state? And, how does one account for mistakes in perception, which could potentially occur during near-death experiences? A number of theories of idealism were considered in an attempt to answer these questions: Advaita Vedanta of Hinduism, Plotinus, George Berkeley, John McTaggart Ellis McTaggart, John Foster, Imants Barušs and Wicca (modern day Witchcraft). The lengthy exposition of these theories has provided some ideas that can satisfy the demand for an idealistic theory that can potentially fit near-death experiences into it. All idealistic theories examined have fairly well-developed visions that can offer potential responses to the desired structural questions and can fit many elements of near-death experiences into them. Of course, some of these theories have philosophical problems with their structures, some have problems with their theories on dying and death, some have problems fitting in certain elements of near-death experiences and some have the combination of all these problems. It seems that all can use some help. However, if one wishes, with the proper dedication, each can be fixed in order to properly accommodate near-death experiences. In addition, a synthesized version of these theories was considered that could offer a more idealized system that can better account for the structural demand of the idealist theory and can better fit and explain near-death experiences overall.

It was concluded that, from a structural point of view, near-death experiences are veridical in a sense that they reveal more about the transcendental level of existence and about reality. They reveal more about the framework of such existence and reality. The reoccurring elements of darkness, light, autoscopy, sense of wellbeing, life review and so on are tied to the transcendental level. They are suggestive of the metaphysical structure that speaks to what human beings identify as the current law of nature. They are indicative of the shift in consciousness to another state of existence. However, near-death experiences are not veridical if veridicality is referred to the content using the correspondence theory of truth simply because, according to idealism, an objectively understood world apart from the mind does not exist. This means that any mental content in the form of a fact, a statement or in any other form has nothing independently existing to which it can correspond. The created content is mentally amenable in its smaller or larger aspects at any time. Ultimately, it is simply the case that veridicality loses

its meaning beyond the simplistic matching of personal content to the communal content. In this sense of simplistic matching, veridicality is meaningless in a mental reality.

It was mentioned at the beginning of this work that veridicality means truth telling. "Veridical" comes from the Latin words *verus* and *dicere*, which mean "truth" and "to tell" respectively. Given the fact that simplistic matching of personal content to the communal content is meaningless in a mental reality, truth telling is not necessarily limited to either the physical or any other consensus of reality. Truth telling in this limited manner can only be applied in a world where the correspondence theory is possible. However, correspondence matters only if there is a mental content the sources of which can be traced back to a fixed world that exists independently of the mind or consciousness. Thus, the correspondence theory presupposes an independently existing fixed physical world. This type of physical world can only exist either in a dualist or a materialist theory of reality where these qualities of independence and fixity become possible. The dualist theory has seemingly insurmountable philosophical problems, and it is unlikely to ever become a successful theory. Materialism has never been proven to be a successful theory to begin with, and it suffers from a redundancy issue in its portrayal of the relationship between consciousness and the brain. This means that, in the absence of dualism and materialism and in light of the potential success of idealism, the correspondence theory is useless, and it is time for researchers and the general public to give it up. At the end, this means that it would be advisable for both near-death researchers and the public to refrain from asking the question of veridicality in relation to the correspondence theory of truth.

However, once truth telling is given up in terms of the correspondence theory of reality, truth telling needs to be understood in a larger sense. In this instance, veridicality simply means that it has a close relationship with the truth. Something is veridical when it speaks or expresses the truth. I warned my audience at the beginning that even though this definition seems loose and vague, a narrower definition cannot be provided until the matter of veridicality is clarified. Once the theories of dualism and materialism are rejected and the theory of idealism is adopted, the reason for it becomes clear. In the theory of idealism, an independently existing fixed physical world is not present. The content of consciousness is either mind-created or mind-dependent, or both, depending on the framework of a particular theory of idealism. From a first

person point of view, a veridical experience offers a meaningful understanding of and participation in reality at the time that the person sorts out and integrates all states of consciousness through mental observation and creation, using filters of available experiences, knowledge and background influences. From a structural point of view, something can be veridical in a sense that it is capable of revealing more about the transcendental level of existence and about reality in general. However, either of these types of understanding of veridicality falls beyond the simplistic matching of personal content to the communal content and the understanding of veridicality simply exists in a form where this simplistic effort of matching is meaningless.

As a final word, I have to confess that there are other potential possibilities beyond the idealist solution. It is true that I defended the idealist solution in this work as the best metaphysical system in which near-death experiences can be best explained, and I stand by my defence of idealism. However, I would like to emphasize the importance of modesty. Given the fact that human knowledge is both metaphysically and historically limited, it is important to recognize that there are other metaphysical possibilities that can be worked out in the place of philosophical idealism. For example, neutral monism is a possible solution that could be worked out where consciousness, which exists courtesy of a neutral substance in this theory, may survive death in some form. Hence, I welcome the challenge from any philosophically-minded individual who is willing to work out an alternative theory of veridicality of near-death experiences. This means that, at the end of this work, a reminder of modesty is absolutely necessary when making epistemic and epistemological claims about the condition and fate of the world and humanity within this world. Reality is mysterious and I humbly acknowledge this fact.

I wish to part from my audience with an inspirational poem that captures the insight into this mysterious reality with all the pains, wishes and hopes of a reflective thinker about existence in this world and beyond this world. Blessed Be!

How Many Times?

How many times have I



looked at her face in another life?  
How Many times have I  
been born to see her beautiful eyes?

How many times has she  
seen me ache, hurt, and cry?  
How many times has she  
tried to comfort me with her godly eyes?

How many times have we  
said to each other our goodbyes?  
How many times have we  
glanced into each other's hopeful eyes?

How many times will I  
look at her in the dark night sky?  
How many times will I  
search for meaning in her old eyes?

How many times will she  
encourage me to be strong and wise?  
How many times will she  
bless me with her divinely lit eyes?

How many times will we  
meet marry, only to smile and part?  
How many times will we  
encounter the divine in each other's eyes

before I become enlightened and free of earthly life?

--M. J. Mandoki (2017, p. 131)

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Mandoki, M. J. (2017). How Many Times? in McCallum R. (ed.). *Let's Fly Away: A New Collection of Canadian Poetry*. Maple Ridge: Polar Expressions Publishing

Mandoki, M. J. (2018). Deconstruction: No Pun Intended? In McCallum R. (ed.). *The Way Through: A Collection of Canadian Short Stories*. Maple Ridge: Polar Expressions Publishing

Mandoki, M. J. (2018). Godly Light, in McCallum R. (ed.). *Lean In: A Collection of Canadian Poetry*. Maple Ridge: Polar Expressions Publishing

Mandoki, M. J. (2019). The Dungeon, in McCallum R. (ed.). *Our Town: A Collection of Canadian Short Stories*. Maple Ridge: Polar Expressions Publishing (short story)

Mandoki, M. J. (2019). The Mystical Light of the Silver Light, in McCallum R. (ed.). *Patterns: A Collection of Canadian Poetry*. Maple Ridge: Polar Expressions Publishing

Mandoki, M. J. (2020). V.I.P., in McCallum R. (ed.). *Still: A Collection of Canadian Short Stories*. Maple Ridge: Polar Expressions.

### **Conference Presentations:**

Respondent to "Gadamer: the text and Temporality," Science, Spirituality and Time Conference, Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, 2003

Respondent to "Plato's Understanding of Pleasure in the Philebus." 75th Cogress of the Humanities and Social Sciences, Canadian Philsophical Association, York University, Toronto, Ontario, 2006

Indian Influence of Plotinus, Graduate Students' Conference, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, 2008

Aesthetics in Plotinus' Theory, 18th International Congress of Aesthetics, Beijing, China, 2010

Struggle Against Philosophical Materialism, Society for Consciousness Studies, San Francisco, 2014

Explaining Near-Death Experiences Using Plotinus' Philosophy, Consciousness Conference, King's University College, Western University, London, Ontario, 2018

### **Invited Talks:**

"The Prince and the Fear of Death," presented at the Department of Philosophy, Brock University, St. Catharines. Ontario, 2004

"Alternative Interpretation of the Work 'We'" presented at the Department of Philosophy, Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario, 2004

Invited Speaking Engagement, "The Dance of the Fairies" (short story), Annual Lifting the Silence Memorial Walk, London Middlesex Suicide Prevention Centre, London, Ontario, 2018

Invited Speaking Engagement, "The Melody of The Purple Finch" (short story), Annual Lifting the Silence Memorial Walk, London Middlesex Suicide Prevention Centre, London, Ontario, 2019