

The Future of NDE and Consciousness Research

Using the transcendent content of NDEs
to fathom the mysteries of reality

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Current state of NDE research



- NDE research has focused on the NDE elements, veridical content, aftereffects, explanatory models, cultural differences, childhood NDEs, patient care, etc. (Holden, Greyson, James, 2009)
- New perspectives have recently been introduced with shared death experiences (SDEs) (Moody & Perry, 2010)
- NDE researchers are only beginning to address the larger questions of consciousness, the afterlife, the nature of reality (e.g. van Lommel, 2010)
- Our conclusion: NDE research can make further progress only by examining the “transcendent” content of NDEs

How much of an NDE is “real”?

There are two distinct phases or realms in the NDE and SDE:

- The physical, earthly realm
 - The NDE usually starts from the person’s physical location
 - The surroundings are consistent with one’s ordinary experience of reality
- The “transcendent” realm
 - Usually after a transition from the earthly realm (tunnel, being transported into outer space or to an unearthly realm), or
 - Some transcendent elements (visions of deceased persons or spiritual beings) may occur within earthly surroundings



How “real” is the NDE to the NDEr?

Many, many NDErs state that their experience was hyper-real:

- A lucid experience, not dream-like, not hallucinatory, *more* real than the experience of this reality
- Jeffrey Long (2010, p. 56): 94% of NDErs say that they were more conscious and alert than normal or just as conscious and alert as normal in their NDE
- Eben Alexander: “A much richer consciousness exists when we are freed from the shackles of the physical human brain and mind.” (Alexander, Bioethics Forum interview, 2012)
- Howard Storm: the NDE realm is the *real* one; this reality is the dream

Veridical information in the NDE

There are four key anchor points during NDEs that convey veridical (verifiably accurate) information:

1. Perceptions of the earthly realm, later verified
2. Information from apparently deceased persons of events or individuals previously unknown to the NDEr.
3. Information revealed during the life review in a shared death experience (SDE) that was unknown to the SDEr (Moody & Perry, 2010).
4. Precognitive visions during the NDE that are later proven correct in every respect (a “life preview”).

Perceptions of the earthly realm: Maria's shoe



Maria ?



The shoe
as seen by
Maria



Kim Clark Sharp



Third story window at
Harborview Hospital



The shoe as seen by Kim

Perceptions of the earthly realm: Dentures case



Cardiac arrest –
unconscious



Dentures placed in
crash cart drawer



Resuscitation



Coma for a week



Patient correctly identifies the male nurse
who took out his dentures and placed
them in the drawer of the crash cart

van Lommel, et al. (2001); Smit (2008).

Perceptions of the earthly realm: Al Sullivan

Al Sullivan

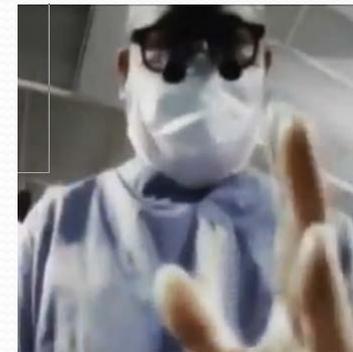


Eyes taped shut and behind surgical drape

Cook, Greyson & Stevenson (1998, p. 399-401).

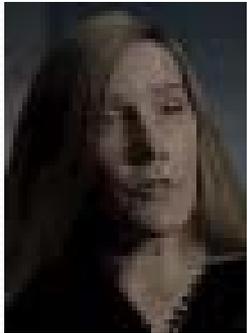


Dr. Hiroyoshi Takata, cardiovascular surgeon



Dr. Takata “flapping”
his arms

Perceptions of the earthly realm: Pam Reynolds



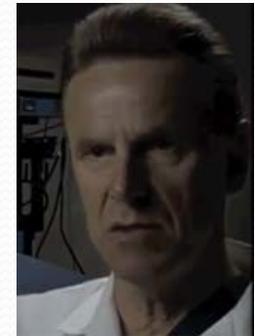
Pam Reynolds



Aneurysm



Anesthesia, eyes taped,
molded ear clickers taped in



Neurosurgeon
Robert Spetzler



Midas bone saw and attachments

“The saw thing looked like an electric toothbrush with interchangeable blades in a socket wrench case.”

Sabom (1998).



Cardiovascular surgeon

“Someone – a female voice – said something about my veins and arteries being very small.”

Veridical information in the NDE

The four key anchor points during NDEs that convey veridical information:

1. Perceptions of the earthly realm, later verified
 - Maria's shoe, dentures case, Al Sullivan case, Pam Reynolds case
 - Accurate descriptions by NDErs of the resuscitation procedures compared with non-NDErs (Sabom, 1982; Sartori, 2008)
 - Of 93 veridical perception cases in literature, 92% completely accurate, 6% accurate with some errors (Holden, 2009)

Veridical information in the NDE ...

2. Information from apparently deceased persons of events or individuals previously unknown to the NDEr.

Examples:

- A man saw and interacted with apparently deceased person later found out to be his biological father who had died in the holocaust (van Lommel, 2010, pp. 32-33)
- A young boy in the hospital met his apparently deceased older sister – who was later found out to have died in an auto accident that same night
- A young woman met an apparently deceased uncle (Frank) who referred to long-held family secrets – that her aunt had been previously married and lost a child when she learned that Frank had been killed in the war

Veridical information in the NDE...

3. Information revealed during the life review that was unknown to the SDEr. Examples during SDE (Moody & Perry, 2010):
 - Wife witnessed episodes in her husband's life review of girls he knew before they had met; she found their pictures in his high school year book
 - Mother recognized friends and places she later visited that she saw in her adult son's life review.

Veridical information in the NDE...

4. Precognitive visions during the NDE that are later proven correct in every respect (a “life preview”). Examples:
 - A young man had a vision of family life, a scene in living room with a wife and children. 28 years later it happened just as he had seen it.
 - Jenny Somers (2009, p. 27), just after her NDE, predicted her mother’s death in an accident two years later, but that her sister would survive the accident
 - A man saw a large part of his future, created a list of all the things he had seen, then ticked them off: e.g. wife on her deathbed, wrapped in a white shawl that had just been given to her by a friend (van Lommel, 2010, p. 38)

Veridical information in the NDE...

- The veridical character of the information from the four anchor points – in the earthly realm and the transcendent –
 - We can verify each incident – either as direct apparent perceptions or information that was not previously known
 - Those parts of the NDE are “real” in some sense
- Could the information have been accessed otherwise?
 - From earthly realm: NDEr might have received information from hearing, sensations, or after the NDE (Blackmore, 1993) – these arguments are generally discredited
 - From deceased relatives: “super-psi” hypothesis (e.g. Braude, 1992): the NDEr acquired the information through some other psychic means than by what appeared to happen (e.g. a living person)
 - From life review: super-psi: the SDEr received the information from a living person (e.g., the person who is dying ?)
 - From precognitive visions/life preview: ???

Veridical information in the NDE...

- Alternative possible hypotheses like super-psi are a dead end
 - Are unfalsifiable – they merely cast doubt on the naïve interpretation
 - Do not provide any more explanatory power, actually less
 - Do not take into account or explain the other aspects of the phenomenon – e.g. the deceased relatives look like younger versions of their earthly selves, behave similarly, etc.
 - Do not take into account the phenomenon as a whole – or the similarity with other phenomena like mediumship
- There is difficulty in accepting a phenomenon even when you have the evidence of it in front of you:
 - Why don't we simply accept that what appears to happen – what the phenomenon purports – is what actually happened?
 - NDE researchers also have this difficulty (Melvin Morse Skeptiko interview, June 2012)

How much of the NDE is “real”...

- What about the other elements of the transcendent realm?
 - Spiritual beings, heavenly regions, crystal cities, libraries of knowledge, realms of confusion and despair, etc.
 - If some parts are not real, where do we draw the line? Where does the real stop and then where does it start again?
 - How could veridical information be obtained from the transcendent aspects if the transcendent aspects are totally unreal?
- What about the experience of the hyper-reality of the NDE?
- Our position is: the phenomena are what they appear to be
 - Unless there are other aspects of the phenomena that are contradictory
 - The essence of the phenomenological method
 - The NDE is a veridical experience *throughout*
 - The phenomena will give indications as to the true nature of reality

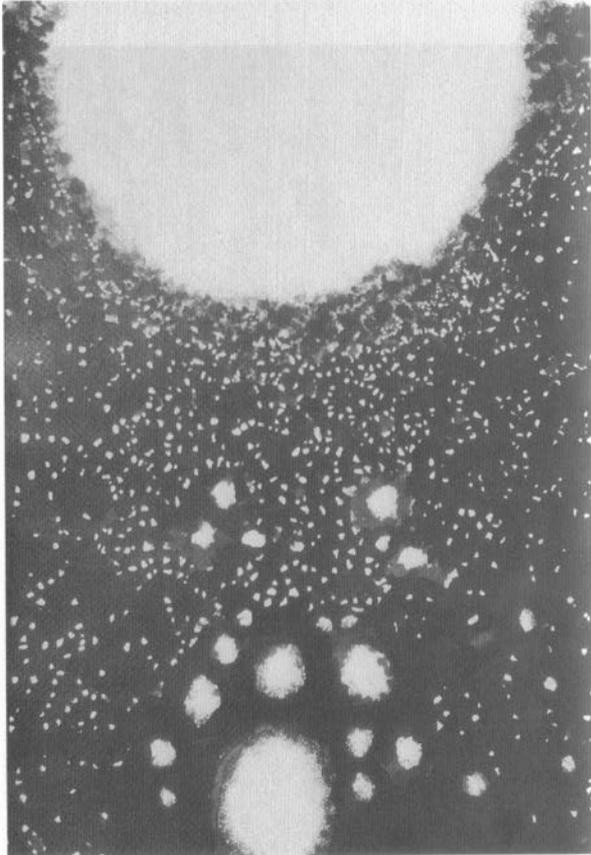
Approach

- A systematic investigation of the transcendent content of NDEs should be a fruitful research direction
 - Phenomenological analysis
 - Transcendent reality is a different reality in many respects from ordinary physical reality
 - Other elements: spiritual beings of light, deceased relatives and friends, beautiful landscapes and gardens, tours of the spiritual realms, cities of light, libraries, research labs, realms of distressed beings, realms beyond the earth and in the center of the universe, and so on.

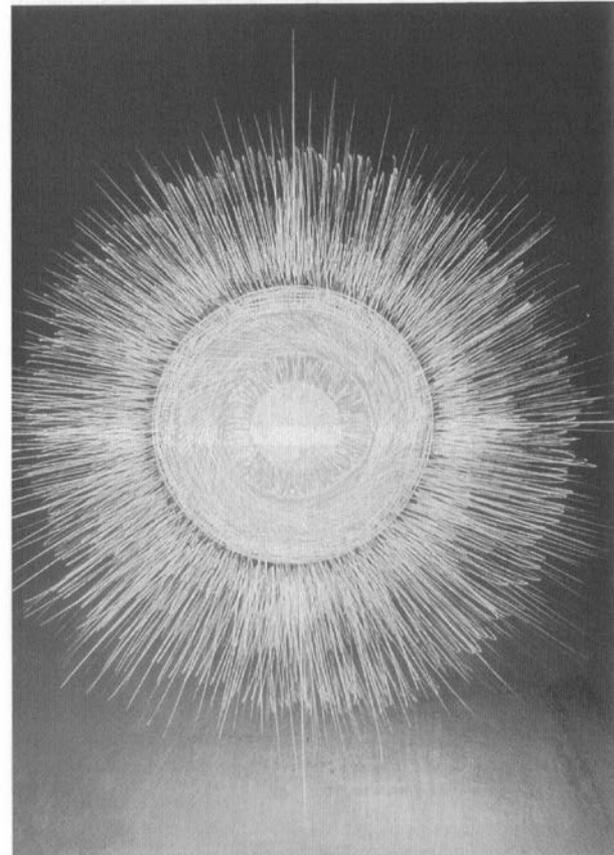
Approach ...

- Commonalities among the accounts – themes – imply there is a common landscape
 - How to deal with inconsistencies in NDE transcendent content: the nature of transcendent “reality” appears to be changeable – is a “true” representation possible?
 - Mellen-Thomas Benedict: “Your beliefs shape the kind of feedback you are getting before the Light.” What is presented to the NDEr is what the NDEr is expecting, but there is a true representation of the transcendent realm
 - Howard Storm: “We [angels] can appear to you in human form if you wish, or in any form you want so you will be comfortable with us.” “No, you’re more beautiful than anything I’ve ever seen.” (Storm, 2000, p. 34) (See drawings.)

Howard Storm's visions of angels



'Talk with angels' by Howard Storm

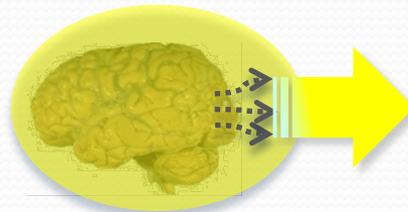
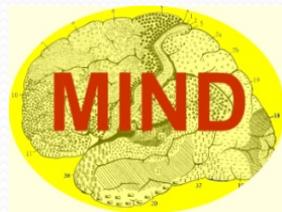


'An angel' by Howard Storm

The angels had a bright opalescent glow
-- from Storm (2000, following p. 88)

What is the nature of “mind”?

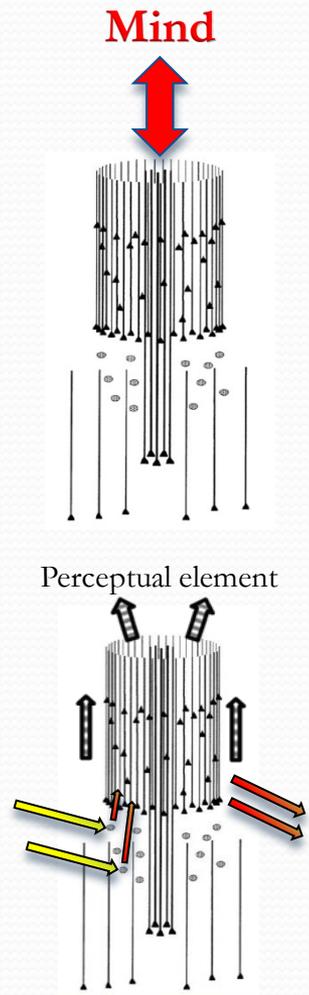
- “Hard problem of consciousness”: explain how neural brain activity can produce subjective phenomenal experience, such as the experience of the quality of red
 - Generally felt to be intractable (e.g., Bruce Greyson, 2011)
- Evidence from the NDE: the “mind” is an autonomous, non-material energetic entity (Mays & Mays, 2008)
 - Ordinarily united with the brain but separates from it in the NDE
 - Interacts with the brain
 - Has a specific locus in space and visual perspective, independent of the body
 - The being of a person is the locus of the person’s subjective consciousness
- Because the “mind” is the seat of consciousness and interacts with the brain, the “hard problem” can be solved.



Phenomenal
experience

What is the nature of “mind”...

- The biggest challenge for this research area is to explain how the non-material mind interacts with the brain.
 - Progress is being made in this area –
 - Arnette (1995, 1999) Theory of Essence
 - Mays and Mays (2011) “A Theory of Mind and Brain that Solves the ‘Hard Problem’ of Consciousness”.
- Research directions
 - Experimental work with energetic physical interactions with
 - NDErs who have experienced strong aftereffects
 - Phantom limb subjects
 - Energetic healers, others
 - Interaction with another person’s brain, with objects (PK – psychokinesis), with phosphorescent materials to emit light



What is the nature of “Reality”?

- A related problem to the “hard problem” is more fundamental – what is the ultimate nature of reality?
- Again, the NDE and NDErs can provide a direction for the “harder problem of reality”
 - NDErs experience two worlds or realms – ordinary physical and transcendent (appears more real)
 - What is the relationship between these two worlds?

What is the nature of “Reality”...

- What remains of the physical reality when the NDEr has crossed to the transcendent realm?
 - Can sometimes retain a link back to the physical world and look back on it; usually this link is lost after a while (e.g., Storm, 2000, p. 18)
- What remains of the transcendent realm here in the physical world?
 - NDErs feel they live in both worlds simultaneously; according to our theory, one’s mind is the transcendent aspect of one’s being
 - NDEr aftereffects: psychic abilities, precognitive dreams, anomalous energy effects
 - Other paranormal phenomena: telepathy, PK, energetic healing, presentiment/precognition, teleportation, ADC, apparitions, transcendent visions, etc.

Which realm is more basic?

- From the viewpoint of the NDE:



- I was in the Void. I was in pre-creation, before the Big Bang. I had crossed over the beginning of time/the First Word/the First vibration. I was in the Eye of Creation. I felt as if I was touching the Face of God. (Mellen-Thomas Benedict, in Bailey & Yates, 1996, p. 44)
- God revealed to me that I had been created as a spiritual being at the beginning of the creation of the universe. ... It was also part of God's plan to create a physical world as a place of learning and growth. (Ned Dougherty, in Gibson, 2006, p. 336)

Which realm is more basic? ...

- From the viewpoint of the transcendent phenomena:
 - The transcendent realm transcends the physical; it is *independent of* matter, space, time and physical energy (light, heat, etc.)
 - The physical realm *is* matter, space, time and physical energy
 - The transcendent realm “leaks” into the physical world *but not vice versa*
 - It is more conceivable that the physical can be derived from the transcendent than vice versa
 - Physical anomalies (e.g., precognition, PK, teleportation) can more readily be explained by transcendent properties than physical
- Our position is: the transcendent is more basic; the physical derives from the it; the transcendent is the “Source”

How to determine the nature of “Reality”

- Paranormal phenomena that occur during NDEs or as aftereffects in NDErs are worth studying:
 - Mind connection – operates beyond space: where one directs one’s thought, is where one’s consciousness goes, instantly; remote viewing, absent healing
 - Precognition – connection beyond time: visions, dreams of future events
 - Psychokinesis – energetic, non-material interaction: altering or moving physical objects without use of normal physical forces
 - Teleportation – revealing the transcendent aspect of matter: a person or object can disappear from one place and reappear somewhere else
- Four archetypal phenomena dealing with space, time, energy and matter
 - The transcendent aspect underlies these four aspects of physical reality

How to determine the nature of “Reality”...

- Using physical phenomena to explain consciousness and transcendent phenomena is backwards and will not work
 - For example, quantum non-locality
 - Pim van Lommel (2010, p. 278): Consciousness cannot be localized in any particular place, not even the brain. It is non-local (i.e., everywhere) in the form of probability waves.
 - Stuart Hameroff: “[At death], the quantum information which constitutes consciousness could shift to deeper planes and continue to exist purely in space-time geometry, outside the brain, distributed nonlocally, a [“quantum soul”] apart from the body.” (Hameroff & Chopra, 2011).
 - These models do not fit the phenomenology of the NDE.

Preliminary observations from NDEs

Use the phenomena themselves to begin to understand them

- Transcendent beings
 - The foremost feature of the transcendent realm
 - God, the Being of Light, angels, deceased people, the NDEr
- Love and knowledge
 - The transcendent atmosphere is pervaded by love
 - Knowledge is the goal
- One's inner state becomes one's outer surroundings
 - What one believes or expects, one's mind state, is one's experience
 - Compare with the physical: one changes the outer environment by one's active striving

Preliminary observations from NDEs...

- Locality versus non-locality
 - Within one's transcendent environment, events still seem to go in a sequence
 - There are localized beings and localized perspectives
 - Yet aspects of time (simultaneity), space (perceptions are omnidirectional – “mindsight”) work very differently from the physical realm
- The transcendent realm is “incalculable”
 - Compare to the “calculable” physical realm with measureable properties

Research directions

- The tentative model of reality is two realms of existence:
 - The transcendent or spiritual and the physical
 - The physical is supervenient (dependent) on the transcendent
- This model should have explanatory power and resolve known anomalies
- More study of the archetypal phenomena based on NDE accounts and NDEr aftereffects
 - Mind connection – space
 - Precognition – time
 - Psychokinesis – energy
 - Teleportation – matter

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