

Response to Editorial “Should IANDS Endorse a Post-Physicalist Worldview?”

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ABSTRACT: In this brief invited response, I express my support for the proposition that the International Association for Near-Death Studies endorse a post-physicalist worldview.

KEYWORDS: paradigm shift, post-physicalism, non-local consciousness

I wholeheartedly concur with what Jan Holden (2023) has written concerning the new and latest insights in science, with a post-physical worldview that is based on research of near-death experiences (NDEs) and other forms of enhanced consciousness such as end-of-life experiences, shared-death experiences, terminal lucidity, and after-death communication, as well as aspects of nonlocal information exchange such as telepathy, precognition, and remote viewing. All these aspects of nonlocal consciousness are well accepted by most members of the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS).

Why would it be important that IANDS officially accept and support the post-physical position in science?

Materialist or physicalist science starts principally from a reality that is based solely on physical, observable data. This so-called material reality should be provable, measurable, and reproducible, which is impossible for subjective experiences in human consciousness. Researchers can measure only the neural correlates of consciousness, and these measurements do not explain anything about either the produc-

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tion or the content of consciousness. Extensive research has been done to localize consciousness and memories inside the brain, so far without success. And how should 'unconscious' matter such as our brain 'produce' consciousness, considering that the brain is composed solely of atoms and molecules in cells with a lot of chemical and electrical processes? Direct evidence of how neurons or neuronal networks could possibly produce the subjective essence of the mind and thoughts is currently lacking. It seems fair to conclude that current science does not permit us to reduce consciousness only to activities and processes in the brain: The explanatory gap between the brain and consciousness has never been bridged because a certain neuronal state is not the same as a certain state of consciousness. A purely materialist or physicalist analysis of a living being, which focuses only on the structure and the function of the physical brain, will never reveal the content nor the origin of consciousness. During a 'Mind and Life' Conference in 2014, the Dalai Lama said: "In our brain it is only matter that we can measure. Our consciousness is different. I am convinced that there is no materialist method to analyze consciousness" (Thompson, 2014). Indeed, there is no direct proof about how neuronal networks should be able to produce the subjective essence of our consciousness. Consequently, one cannot objectify or scientifically prove the content of NDEs or of other experiences of enhanced consciousness. There is no proof whatsoever that the brain produces consciousness, nor that consciousness is confined to the brain.

Since the publication of several prospective studies on NDE in survivors of cardiac arrest, with strikingly similar results and conclusions, the phenomenon of NDEs can no longer be scientifically ignored. They are authentic experiences that cannot be simply reduced to imagination, fear of death, hallucination, psychosis, the use of drugs, or oxygen deficiency, and people appear to be permanently changed by an NDE during a cardiac arrest of only some minutes duration. According to these studies, the current materialistic view of the relationship between the brain and consciousness held by most physicians, philosophers, and psychologists is too restricted for a proper understanding of this phenomenon. Making a scientific case for consciousness as a nonlocal and thus ubiquitous phenomenon can contribute to new ideas about the relationship between consciousness and the brain. Indeed, based on the scientific research about NDE in survivors of cardiac arrest, with the uniform conclusions about the continuity and the nonlocality of consciousness, and based on conclusions from recent consciousness research, more and more cognitive scientists are today coming to the

inevitable conclusion that it is extremely unlikely that consciousness is a product of brain function, and that consciousness must be primary and fundamental.

By making a scientific case for nonlocal consciousness we must question a purely physicalist paradigm in science, and it seems to be important for our scientific ideas about the mind-brain and mind-body relationship. NDEs seem to involve a personal re-discovery of wisdom and insight that is ages and ages old and has been well known in many cultures and in all times but nowadays seem to have been forgotten. To quote Plato (1892), who wrote more than 2,000 years ago: "The temporary material body is the temporary carrier of our immortal soul. Time does not exist in the immaterial world." Based on scientific research on NDEs, I cannot avoid the conclusion that endless consciousness has been and always will exist independently from the body. There is no beginning nor will there ever come an end to our consciousness. Our enhanced consciousness resides not in our brain and is not limited to our brain, because our consciousness is nonlocal, and our brain has a facilitating function rather than a producing function to experience consciousness. This is not a new idea at all, because even in 1898 William James wrote that the brain's role in the experience of consciousness is not a productive but, rather, a permissive or transmissive role; that is, it admits or transmits information. So, in his view consciousness does not originate in this physical world, but exists already in another, transcendental sphere. William James (1898) also spoke of the continuity of consciousness, and he was convinced that human consciousness lends us an aspect of immortality.

In the past a lot has been written about life and death—and also about special states of enhanced or nonlocal consciousness. But surprisingly, many people nowadays still have never heard about NDEs or after-death communications, and this is why they still believe that death is the end of our existence and the end of our consciousness. People are afraid that with death everything comes to an end. But based on the results and conclusions of recent NDE research, my current view is that there are good reasons to assume that our consciousness does not always coincide with the functioning of our brain: Enhanced consciousness can sometimes be experienced separately from the body. So death is the end of our physical aspects, but it is not the end of our consciousness, because there is a continuity of consciousness after the death of our body.

We professionals in the field of near-death studies do, indeed, need to expand science towards a post-physicalist science to be able to include

the conclusions and implications of empirical research about subjective experiences such as NDEs and other forms of enhanced or nonlocal consciousness. We need a new ‘post-materialist’ or ‘post-physicalist’ approach in science to accept these new concepts. IANDS could play an important role in spreading this rather new and important insight. This is why it is important that IANDS officially accept and support a post-physical paradigm in science.

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