

Review of: "The Near-Death Experience and the Question of Immortality: A Philosophical Approach"

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Reading this was a lot of fun!! I have truly enjoyed this paper. The manuscript constitutes a nice epistemic discussion of the claims of NDErs and the degree to which those purported experiences provide evidence for life after death. While the paper is enlightening as far as this epistemic angle is concerned, there is an ontological dimension to the problem lacking in the discussion. For example, at a certain point, the author says: The plain fact, which can be stated in plain language, is that no-one can know what, if anything, happens after death. The very word, however, implies the cessation of consciousness, and in that regard, 'life after death' is a contradiction in terms. Although we may experience the process of dying, we cannot experience being dead. In effect, we suffer death on a nightly basis when we are in a state of dreamless sleep. Thus, it can be established that a death-like state exists. Beyond that, we can only speculate." I agree with the author that life after death is a contradiction in terms, but then it is not clear to me what the reasons for the subsequent skepticism about "what happens after death" may be. Taking things at face value, there is little doubt about what happens after the death of an organism at a biochemical level, and it follows from the reasoning that the author takes on in this paragraph that there is no further room to "speculate."

On a not unconnected note, the author says in the following paragraph: "The only alternative to this prospect, it seems, is to conceptualise an eternal, self-sustaining being capable of maintaining the universe indefinitely. Physicists can, of course, offer some rationale, if not a complete explanation, for the former view, while transcendentalists are restricted to speculation. It remains possible, of course, that at some time in the future the two ways may intersect, but the solution to how this would occur is far beyond our ken." It is evident that there are myriads of thermodynamically principled reasons why such an eternal and self-sustaining being is an impossibility. Here again, I find that the author does not go far enough ontologically.