

Review of: "God's characteristics as reported by near-death experiencers"

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The article is worth reading. First, it attempts to tackle an enigmatic problem of what one means by saying that she has met God. It takes courage for a researcher to try to bridge the gap between the scientific and theological views on the issue at stake. Second, the article leaves the reader puzzled by having many methodological and epistemological gaps. Yet, even those shortcomings have a value in demonstrating different facets of the problem. Below I note some of the unclear moments in the research.

1. The interchangeable usage of terms "God" and "Jesus" is somewhat problematic. The authors quote and build arguments using not only Abrahamic religious texts but others as well where the figure of Jesus does not play any role. This may tell us about some implicit biases which are not a problem for a qualitative study per se as far as they are stated explicitly.

2. There are some minor issues with theological terminology in the text. For example, table1 with demographical description of the sample uses terms Catholics, Christian, Fundamentalists, etc. describing different layers of the sample. One may ask: are Catholics not Christian? Did the authors mean some specific denominations describing them as Christian?

3. The sample size is amendable. It may even allow a decent quantitative analysis, e.g. search for correlations.

The extractions for qualitative study are voluminous. Yet, the methodology of the qualitative analysis is not described in full. There are many well-developed methodological approaches in qualitative studies, e.g. ramifications of phenomenology. Therefore, one may stay on the solid ground conducting the analysis. The authors' attempts to constantly perform the frequency analysis are puzzling until the reader makes her own hypothesis that the frequency of the words was used by the authors with the purpose to explicate the meanings from the participants' extractions. It could work, yet frequency analysis is not the only and not even the best method to analyze qualitative data.

4. The main problem of the article seems to be theological. The authors quote the main descriptions/characteristics of theology of different religions using the Wikipedia. If the usage of the source is not conditioned by special agenda, then Wikipedia is a bad source to make sense of what, for example, protestants mean by referring to the term "God". Moreover, these particular quotes are simply misleading. Most Christian denominations use the concept of Trinity which in turn is closely related to, for example, "oneness". Same applies to the term "love" as the whole New Testament is dedicated to it.

With all the above notes, it would be commendable to proceed with the further studies of the topic bringing more methodological clarity and terminological/ theological refinement.