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Near-death experiences in cardiac arrest survivors

Christopher C. French

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Abstract

Near-death experiences (NDEs) have become the focus of much interest in the last 30 years or so. Such experiences can occur both when individuals are objectively near to death and also when they simply believe themselves to be. The experience typically involves a number of different components including a feeling of peace and well-being, out-of-body experiences (OBEs), entering a region of darkness, seeing a brilliant light, and entering another realm. NDEs are known to have long-lasting transformational effects upon those who experience them. An overview is presented of the various theoretical approaches that have been adopted in attempts to account for the NDE. Spiritual theories assume that consciousness can become detached from the neural substrate of the brain and that the NDE may provide a glimpse of an afterlife. Psychological theories include the proposal that the NDE is a dissociative defense mechanism that occurs in times of extreme danger or, less plausibly, that the NDE reflects memories of being born. Finally, a wide range of organic theories of the NDE has been put forward including those based upon cerebral hypoxia, anoxia, and

has been put forward including those based upon cerebral hypoxia, anoxia, and hypercarbia; endorphins and other neurotransmitters; and abnormal activity in the temporal lobes. Finally, the results of studies of NDEs in cardiac arrest survivors are reviewed and the implications of these results for our understanding of mind–brain relationships are discussed.



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