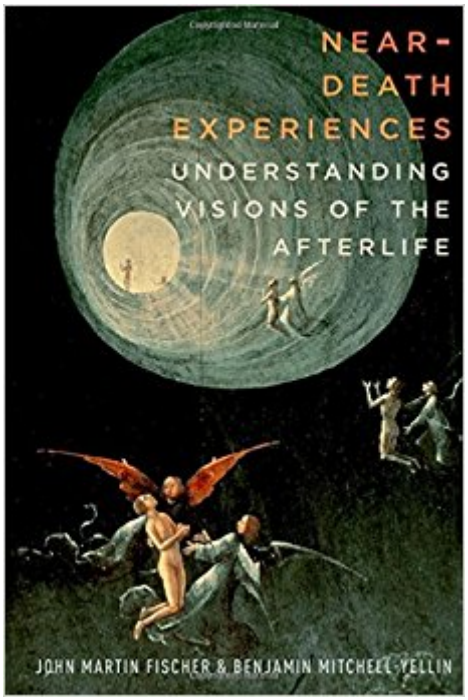
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Near-Death Experiences: Understanding Visions Of The Afterlife



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Synopsis

Near-death experiences offer a glimpse not only into the nature of death but also into the meaning of life. They are not only useful tools to aid in the human quest to understand death but are also deeply meaningful, transformative experiences for the people who have them. In a unique contribution to the growing and popular literature on the subject, philosophers John Martin Fischer and Benjamin Mitchell-Yellin examine prominent near-death experiences, such as those of Pam Reynolds, Eben Alexander and Colton Burpo. They combine their investigations with critiques of the narratives' analysis by those who take them to show that our minds are immaterial and heaven is for real. In contrast, the authors provide a blueprint for a science-based explanation. Focusing on the question of whether near-death experiences provide evidence that consciousness is separable from our brains and bodies, Fischer and Mitchell-Yellin give a naturalistic account of the profound meaning and transformative effects that these experiences engender in many. This book takes the reality of near-death experiences seriously. But it also shows that understanding them through the tools of science is completely compatible with acknowledging their profound meaning.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"John Martin Fischer and Benjamin Mitchell-Yellin's book is the gold standard for philosophical work aimed at a popular audience. Fischer and Mitchell-Yellin make nuanced, philosophically interesting arguments about a topic largely unexplored by academic philosophers and manage to do so in a way that is accessible to any intellectually curious reader." - The Philosophical Quarterly

"Near-Death Experiences represents a sadly neglected genre. Academic thinkers don’t often engage with popular discourses that intersect with their areas of expertise, especially when those discourses seem riddled with suspect reasoning or outright misinformation. Fischer and Mitchell-Yellin offer a powerful model of bridge-building between academic and popular writing in a way that does justice to each." - LA Review of Books

John Martin Fischer is Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the University of California, Riverside, where he has held a University of California President’s Chair (2006-10). He was President of the American Philosophical Association, Pacific Division (2013-4). He was Project Leader of The Immortality Project (2012-15), sponsored by The John Templeton Foundation. Benjamin Mitchell-Yellin is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Sam Houston State University. Previously, he was the Postdoctoral Fellow for the Immortality Project (2012-2015), sponsored by The John Templeton Foundation.

It was OK It just had a hard time keeping my interest

This is a great book for someone who wants to know the scientific point of view of Near Death Experiences.

A good book

If Fischer and Mitchell-Yellin (F&M-Y) are correct, NDEs can still have deep meaning for the people who have them, even if NDEs can be explained in scientific terms. Anyone who suggests that "Near Death Experiences: Understanding Visions of the Afterlife" have written a missalette for the "materialistic Church" -- see Julien Bourgault’s review -- simply hasn’t read this book carefully or doesn’t know how to read for understanding. F&M-Y’s book is nothing like, say, Susan Blackmore’sÃ Â Dying to Live, which attempted to explain away near-death experiences (NDEs) in purely material/physiological terms. Nowhere do F&M-Y make claims, or arguments for claims, like this. While F&M-Y accept physicalism and raise questions targeting the veracity of NDE accounts, their main point is not that all NDEs can in fact be explained in physiological terms. F&M-YÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s point is that much of the NDE literature, especially the recent popular literature on NDEs by authors such as Eben Alexander and Todd Burpo, lacks philosophical rigor, particularly with respect to its reasoning. In particular, F&M-Y argue that it is predicated on a false

dilemma: namely, that either science can explain everything about NDEs or it canÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢t. F&M-Y argue that the experiences that people have are compatible with what science says about them.

The author demonstrates how rigorous philosophical thinking can be employed successfully to resolve a seemingly intractable problem; i.e. how to extract what's true out of the very popular and seductive stories we hear about what happens after death. Along the way, we get some very useful ways to recognize and understand common fallacies, like confirmation bias, that distort our understanding of the world.

This topic fascinates me, but the book is a slow and ponderous read. It was written by philosophers, so the discussion uses philosophical jargon. I had hoped for more examples of NDEs, but the same few are rehashed. There were times I wanted to say, "BUT . . . what about . . . " as I read due to the frustrating arguments offered. I suppose the analysis is fair and scientific, thus the three stars.

Today the slim volume entitled ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Near-Death Experiences: Understanding Visions of the AfterlifeÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• by John Fischer and Benjamin Mitchell-Yellin landed on my doormat. The contents of this book, written by two philosophers were a surprise. These men are philosopher, and not physicians. Even so their analysis of NDEs is very even-handed and respectful, coming from a viewpoint whereby they repeatedly state that these are genuine and wondrous experiences, but nonetheless experiences explicable in terms of current knowledge, finally stating on page 179:ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The purpose of this book has not been to discredit those who share their near-death experiences with the rest of us. Rather, it has been to critically examine the purported implications of these profound experiences. Whereas others have precipitously embraced supernatural interpretations of near-death experiences, we have argued that there is good reason to try and fit our understanding of them into the worldview supported by the physical sciences. And we have made the case that this approach can be sensitive to the transformational nature and meaningful character of these experiences.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•This even-handed approach throughout this book is in stark contrast to that of some of the comments published here, and even more in contrast to that stated by Alex Tsakiris in edition 326 of the ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“pro-supernaturalÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• website that:ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“ItÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s hard to be surprised by the lengths some academics will go to trash near-death experience research, but the recent non-research-research of

todayÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s guest surprised even me. But the real story may be that Dr. John Martin Fischer and Dr. Ben Mitchell-Yellin managed to wrangle more than $4 million dollars from the very ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“spiritual friendlyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• John Templeton Foundation to promote this ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“secularÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• hit piece of a book titled Near-Death Experiences: Understanding Visions of the Afterlife:ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•The fact that the conclusions of Fischer and Mitchell-Yellin differ from those of believers in the supernatural is not a reason for vituperation or ad-hominem arguments, but warrants careful investigation and thought. And actually despite the fact they are not medical persons capable of explaining the finesses of how diseases and other medical conditions can alter consciousness, perceptions, they do a very good job of providing alternative explanations of specific NDEs, even though medical explanations have been exhaustively detailed for the denture-man case and that of Pam Reynolds on the website www.neardth.comI particularly enjoyed their even-handed discussion of NDEs in the blind. One particularly striking part of the discussion on page 56 stated:ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Again, just as with visual hallucinations in the blind, no one thinks that the auditory hallucinations in the deaf are anything other than hallucinations that are in principle explainable in physical termsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•The analysis in this book reveals alternative explanations for all aspects of the NDE, raising serious questions as to the supernatural nature of this experience. Their study of explanations goes further than most where they state on page 92:ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Sincere testimony grabs our attention. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â¦. Sincerity is not itself evidence of the truth of what one is saying.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•This is as true for NDE experiencers as for all other aspects of life. In the subsequent discussion in the same Chapter 9, they come to the very reasonable conclusion that NDEs are better explained by individual multifactorial explanations, than a single ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“one size fits allÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• explanation. This is very similar to the multifactorial explanation of NDEs published in Chapter 17 of the book ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Illusory SoulsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• written by myself (2013).I do find it a pity that they did not turn their attention to the matter of memory. They ignored the profound implications of NDE memories throughout the book, only superficially referring to it on their discussion of some aspects of the Pam Reynolds case on pages 12-13.All in all, a good book which merits a 4 out of 5 points. Why only four when I consider this book a good even-handed discussion? The answer is that they ignored an extensive study of memory.Recommended for the serious student of these fascinating experiences.

This book offers nothing new, except that the authors try at all cost to avoid a non-fysicalist explanation of NDE’s and thus offer conclusions that are more absurd than the phenomenon itself.

No real research results whatsoever because they have not done research, only ploughed through the literature cherry picking what was to their liking. A true waste of the five million dollar grant given by the John Templeton Foundation.

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