



Near Death Experience (NDE): A Possible Solution and Negation of Existential Philosophy

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Abstract: Existential philosophy has its foundation on certain core principles/beliefs which are grounded on actual human realities. That is, existentialists' primary core beliefs begin with claims to fact of life such absurdity, meaninglessness, lack of human purpose and a firm belief of the non-existence of an afterlife and ending all up in nothingness. That life's events are all within the predominant reality of random chance. Thus existentialism advocates earthly materialistic values and have no reason for the affirmation of transcendental values since to them there is absolutely no consideration for a life after. Refutation of existential philosophy has centered mainly on certain logical inconsistencies wherein essentially are all theoretical and speculative in nature. That is, philosophers arguing against existentialism limit their disagreements on certain possible inconsistencies within the logic of existentialism. Such as whether the possibility of freedom does exist and therefore the reality of choice exist and thus fatalism and determinism is contradicted. Moreover, whether the theological/philosophical problem of the negation of God's existence thru His attribute of omniscience directly opposes the possibility of Sartre's "virgin future" and that man if God existed would have no freedom at all and human life is absolutely determined.

With the recent emergence from the medical field, the phenomenon called NDE (Near Death Experiences) there had been revealing testimonies from "experiencers" of their fantastic claims of experiencing something more right after they have been pronounced dead. To date according to the newly established international association of experiencers (IANDS) more 15 million people recorded of having claimed if not exactly the same, similar accounts of near death experiences. What is mind-boggling is that these claims clearly would contradict and negate all of the existentialist philosophical claims of life's absurdity. Recent studies by medical experts, surgeons, psychiatrist, psychologist etc... are all called to take seriously the phenomenon since there are greatly noticeable and undeniable changes that occur and greatly affect the experiencers themselves. What is most significant is that



majority if not all have claimed the same experience of not ending up in nothing after they have died. What is most interesting is majority of the claims are completely opposite of all the existentialist philosophical core principles. That primarily, life has purpose, meaning, and most of all an affirmation of God's (the Divine) existence. The NDE phenomenon could no longer be ignored because as researches have claimed that the evidences are so overwhelming as to its reality.

Thus the objective of this research is to present using the 16 core elements found in NDE that would provide directly counter arguments against Existentialism and all of its core principles/beliefs. By using the NDE claims of experiencers it is to be mentioned that this research will not be limited to theoretical and even speculative argumentations but will use the personal testimonies of people having actually undergone NDE. Philosophical analysis and hermeneutical interpretation would be the key methodology applied on this research. With philosophical analysis the fascinating discovery as a result of the NDE, using its 16 core elements appears to completely falsify the existentialist's core principles and possibly rendering existential philosophy completely negated. As an example of one of the 16 elements in NDE is the claim of the person of encountering a (Divine) Being (of light) and being asked or being given a choice if the person would want to stay in the afterlife or would want to go back to the earthly life. Moreover the experience is usually told of having to come back to earthly life since the assigned job/task is yet to be completed. This one aspect of NDE directly answers the existential claim of life's purposeless existence.

What finally is revealing from this research is that a true phenomenon has appeared that directly/actually can negate the Existential philosophy most if not all of its claims! Considering the reality of the NDE phenomenon, it could no longer be ignored that there exists the hard fact of the consistency of the experience that directly establish the opposite claim of existential philosophy. In conclusion, existential philosophy is completely mistaken in there assessment and judgment of the human condition.

Key Words: NDE (near death experience); Absurdity; experiencer/s; hermeneutical interpretation; 15 core elements;

1. INTRODUCTION

Principles of Existentialism both theist and atheist are grounded on the factual human conditions/ realities. These human conditions depict absurdity, irrationality and the meaninglessness of

human existence. The Father of Existentialism Soren Kierkegaard (a theist existentialist) has eloquently expressed and professed the reality of affirming and accepting the paradox that dominates human



existence. And that Reason as the only human faculty that could possibly clarify the absurd condition is completely inadequate in any approach in solving the prevailing paradox much less even try to offer any meaningful explanation. Kierkegaard's philosophical cry is fully expressed in his saying "it is absurd that is why I believe." Another existentialist is the famous Friedrich Nietzsche who's resounding claim "God is Dead" captures the core principles of absurdity, irrationality and meaninglessness of the human condition. With Nietzsche, having established his whole philosophy on these core principles advocates that the human person is and will be the sole creator of human meaning together with his moral valuation. This implies that humanism will be the sole basis for all human existence with all of its existential concerns like, meaning, purpose, valuation etc. Entertaining any transcendental realities is certainly out of the question. Both theist and atheist existentialist are convinced that not only there are no transcendental realities or its possibility but that the idea itself entails an outright contradiction. Existential philosophers included within this category are Martin Heidegger, Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre.

The objective of this paper is to objectively reveal the possible mistakes committed by Existentialism by affirming its basic principles of the human conditions and that the phenomenon of NDE with its 16 core elements will show directly and at the same time negating those basic principles of existentialism (the absurdity of the human condition). The scope of this research is to solely focus on the philosophy of existentialism and examine the consistency of its basic principles where the whole philosophy grounds itself using the NDE phenomenon.

1.1 NDE (Near Death Experience)

The NDE (Near Death Experience) is a new field of study recently dating back to 1977 where formal studies of the phenomenon began. Leading pioneers are Dr. Raymond Moody, Maurice S. Rawlings, M.D., Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, Pim van Lommel, Dr. Sam Parnia, Dr. Bruce Greyson to name a few. Near Death Experience refers to the personal experiences of individuals who have undergone physical bodily death where they have been either pronounced dead by medical doctors, who fell into deep coma and unconsciousness either due to fatal

illness or accidents and even undergoing life threatening surgeries. Extreme cases are people who were already in the morgue (freezer) for days only to exhibit the Lazarus phenomena. By definition NDE is a profound psychological event that may occur to a person close to death or, if not near death, in a situation of physical or emotional crisis. Because it includes transcendental and mystical elements, an NDE is a powerful event of consciousness; it is not mental illness.ⁱ

The strength of the reality of NDE are the so called "Veridical" near death. Veridical near death experiences are NDEs in which people reportedly out-of-body have observed events or gathered information that was verified by others upon the experiencer's return to a conscious state.ⁱⁱ These are a few famous cases of anecdotal veridical evidence: Pam Reynolds, Anita Moorjani. To date there are now 15,000,000 reported and documented cases of NDE world wide and is still ever increasing. Though there are varying degrees of differences in the experience there have been some common core elements that have been sifted out from NDE. There are more or less 16 core elements that are now agreed upon by NDE researches that could represent a standard or basis for classifying of whether the death experience is authentically an NDE. Not necessarily all of the 16 core elements have to be present for the experience would pass for a true NDE but that at least majority of them have occurred and experienced by the experiencer.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research will basically use philosophical analysis by the application of general hermeneutics and analytic philosophy by which the presented 16 core elements of NDE will be viewed and interpreted as to be directly negating the core principles of Existentialism. In presenting the case against Existentialism, the 16 core elements of NDE will be presented and used at the same time forwarding the arguments implied with the phenomena.

The 16 core elements of NDE:

- 1) difficult to describe what had been seen
- 2) awareness of being dead,
- 3) out-of body experience



(OBE), 4) sound upon OBE, 5) absence of pain, 6) passage towards a bright light, 7) observation of an other worldly, beautiful landscape, 8) 'hellish' experience, 9) encounter with deceased people, often including relatives or friends, 10) encounter with a being of light or a guide, 11) life review, 12) flash forward, 13) experience a boundary, 14) forced to return, 15) conscious return to the body, 16) changed lifestyle (after the NDE). It is to be stated that not all of the 16 elements do in fact falsify the basic principles of existentialism. To be exact only number 1), 2), 3), 4), 5), 6), 7), 8), 9), 10), 11), 13), 14), 16). This is not to say that the others which are not included has no relation to the case being forwarded. They have been excluded for the purpose of succinctness. Upon examination of the different core elements, like number 11) Life Review, here the "experiencer" talks of having his/her whole life reviewed by being shown significant events that the individual has chosen to have done while alive. What is revealing is clearly the purpose brought about of number 11) core element is that the individual is supposed to realize the wrong acts that he has chosen in his life time. What is more amazing is that not only does the individual see/witness the moral actions he/she has done but that the individual will be made to feel exactly the pain that the individual have caused to others. The Life Review core element of NDE clearly gives us the meaning that a human life is not a chance phenomenon that has whimsically existed and completely devoid of an meaning much less empty of moral content. The Life Review core element can directly be seen that human life has definitely a set moral purpose.

Another core element of NDE is number 10) were experiencers claim an encounter with a being of light. This could clearly be viewed that human existence together with consciousness does not cease up bodily death but that consciousness proceeds to another worldly dimension and encounters a being of light that personally communicates with them. This core elements as can be viewed directly contradicts the existential claim of human life is devoid of any capacity for realizing a transcendent reality. Thus the concepts and terms of "after life", soul, transcendent reality may after all be meaningful contrary to what analytical philosophy contends that such terms and ideas are completely empty of any meaning and therefore must be discarded within the use of language.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on some of the core elements of NDE, what can easily be seen is that these elements run contradictory to the basic principle of existential philosophy. Most if not all, reflect a curious coincidence that appear to clearly answer the supposed errors of existential philosophy. As for example, number 11) life review, this clearly shows that a human life is definitely with a specific purpose and more so, with an inherent moral content as to how a human life was spent. This NDE core element depicts clearly that the human has an inherent purpose and goal, a job that is expected to be accomplished and with the consideration of core element number 14) the human being is forced to return having not completed the supposed assigned task on the earthly realm. Existential claim of the ontological status of human existence being devoid of meaning clearly is contradicted by the said core element of NDE. What is amazing here is why are these core elements have appeared specifically and directly negating those basic principles of existentialism? A nagging question is raised such as Why was there a phenomenon such as NDE that clearly and directly present a real human experience with presenting a clear view that human existence is totally regulated and therefore with meaning and purpose? Further more in consonance with number 14) core element, this further depicts that human life is to deliberately and consciously be lived with set of moral standard of good specifically that of reflecting and giving out the Christian value of love. From all the "major" core elements of NDE, it could clearly be seen that Existentialism with its basic principle of human condition that is ontologically devoid of meaning and purpose clearly goes head on collision with the 16 core elements of NDE. In short, the reality of NDE clearly reveals the existential errors about the truth of the human condition.

4. CONCLUSIONS

It can now be forwarded that in view of the 16 core elements of NDE, the basic existential principles upon which the philosophy of existentialism is based upon could actually have been mistaken in their judgment of the human condition. That, human existence itself, is after all



very purposive, regulated and inherently meaningful, and that a transcendental reality will now have to be considered and can no longer be ignored! That human existence can no longer be viewed as ontologically vacuous and devoid of any meaning much more of not having a transcendental meaning. The conclusion of this research proves that Existential was clearly mistaken in their judgment of the human condition though probably not thru their own fault. That is, NDE studies had only been a recent development in the academic field and in the existential era from the early 19th hundred there was no formal research that had been done to offer another possible view of the real human condition. It was only existential philosophy coming from the hard realities of human history as in the tragic phenomena of World War II, that it simply reinforced the meaninglessness of human existence. Many existentialist could not help but appeal to the horrendous events of the Holocaust where millions have died in a the most absurd way.

Other potential areas for further research is the effects/changes upon the experiencers themselves. Some of these major effects that occur on the experiencers are quite phenomenal, their watches stop, electronic gadgets within there reach usually get affected like computers shut down on their own. Other significant effects there is undeniably life style changes. The individual clearly, upon coming back renounces the old ways of life and now exhibit a more genuine optimistic, positive attitude towards people and the world.

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ⁱ Greyson, B. (2000)

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