

A panpsychist view of the end-of-life process

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Summary When the human body fails at the end of life, the associated awareness continues to function in another context. This is suggested by reports that follow near-death and out-of-body experiences. The transition to this new context is discussed in terms of a cosmology which assumes that all things arise from consciousness - a universal, creative life force that has a dimension of vibration. Like all objects, the human body is a holographic-like configuration of consciousness encoded at a particular vibration. The familiar form of the body is perceived when a perceptual process tuned to that vibration transforms the information to irreducible potentials in consciousness. These potentials are the felt sensations we normally associate with physical objects. In the end-of-life process, the consciousness moves to a similar body that is encoded with a higher vibration. The associated perceptual process is tuned to the higher vibration, and so the body is still experienced as physical. However, the higher-vibration body cannot be decoded by the lower-vibration perceptual process, and so cannot be sensed by the people still in the lower vibration.

Introduction

A consensus is growing in scientific discussions that life continues after the failure of the physical body. For example, many people have reported near-death experiences (NDEs) when the body fails temporarily after a heart attack or other potentially life-ending events (e.g., Van Lommel, 2010; Long, 2010; Alexander, 2012). The associated consciousness separates from the body, finds itself in another body, travels to another location, meets deceased acquaintances, and returns to the injured body to tell others about the experience. Other reports describe an equally dramatic experience in which a consciousness separates from an uninjured body. This is most likely to occur in an altered state of consciousness when there is no awareness of the body. The consciousness finds itself in a similar body in another place which can seem more real than the familiar waking experience. Such an event is known as an out-of-body experience (OBE) (e.g., Buhlman, 1996; Ziewe, 2008, 2015; Peterson, 2013; De Foe, 2016). This article analyzes a phenomenon common to NDEs and OBEs - the appearance of a similar second body. The second body is experienced as the vehicle which transports the individual's consciousness.

The phenomenologies of NDEs and OBEs have been comprehensively described, but are hard to explain using scientific theories that depend on the assumption of materialism. A more successful approach is to assume that all existence is a mental construct. This idea is gaining respectability in the search to explain otherwise inexplicable phenomena (e.g., Close, 2000; Mathews, 2011; Lanza, 2016; Kastrup, 2017). For example, Radin et al. (2012) successfully measured a postulated observer effect in the double-slit physics experiment. In this experiment, light behaves as a particle or a wave depending on whether or not the path it follows in the apparatus can be known.

Treurniet (2017) proposed a theoretical framework based on panpsychism in which physical reality is a manifestation of consciousness. The framework accounts for the body we normally experience, as well as the one experienced during NDEs and OBEs.

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Summary of a panpsychic cosmology

Panpsychism is the philosophical concept that all things exist as configurations of an all-pervasive consciousness - a universal, creative life force. The framework of a cosmology based on this concept is described in Treurniet (2017). It works because the energy of consciousness has some basic properties which include the following.

- Consciousness has a dimension of vibration and every object or entity is located somewhere on this dimension. Every entity behaves like a low-pass filter in that it has a *highest possible vibration*. It can be aware of phenomena with vibrational states the same as or lower than its own highest state, but is not normally aware of phenomena having higher vibrational states.
- The energy of consciousness has irreducible potentials that are our sensory experiences. For example, the experience of a smell is the activation of a particular potential in a being's consciousness.
- Intrinsic to consciousness is the ability to create. The energy of a being's *highest possible vibration* is modulated by its thoughts when it has an intention to do so. The result is an interference pattern representing the thought that is placed in a substrate of consciousness. This creation process is analogous to the making of a simple hologram.
- The created representation is decoded by a perceptual process which is also intrinsic to consciousness. Any being with the same or higher vibration may experience the created thought when the representation is "illuminated" by the unmodulated vibration involved in its creation.

The framework proposes that every entity in our universe is a configuration of consciousness analogous to a hologram. The holographic-like patterns containing encoded information exist in the etheric realm, a particular range of vibrations in consciousness. A being experiences the patterns as discrete entities when they are acted upon by the being's perceptual process. The perceptual process transforms the etheric patterns to consciousness potentials. These are experienced as sensations such as vision, hearing and touch. The sensations are usually interpreted in our materialistic culture as attributes of matter objects that are independent of the perceiver. Such independence is an illusion since all processes involved in the perception of matter take place in consciousness.

The nature of the human body

We propose that the human body, like all objects of matter, exists in the etheric realm at a particular vibrational state of consciousness known as the physical vibration. The primary function of the body is to mediate between a being's consciousness and its physical experience. The etheric body is a holographic-like configuration of consciousness that is transformed by a being's perceptual process. The transformation is experienced as a discrete physical body analogous to the virtual image of a hologram. The body can be perceived only by beings with perceptual processes tuned to the physical vibration.

The etheric representation of the body is dynamic in that it encodes the varying interactions among the biological subsystems of the body. For example, the sensory organs and associated components of the nervous system are encoded in the etheric body. The sensory systems gather information about a physical object by sampling from a spectrum of etheric potentials that represent the object. The selected samples are transformed to higher-vibration consciousness potentials by the perceptual process to give the experience of felt sensations. A conglomeration of such potentials in consciousness is experienced as an object of matter.

Although the body often heals itself, there inevitably comes a time when healing does not occur. An injury to the body may be too great or an illness may be too severe, and so the body ceases to function. Clearly, the etheric body with its physical vibration persists, else onlookers could not continue to be aware of the lifeless body. The experience of the body of matter by the onlookers can continue for a time until the body deteriorates and becomes unrecognizable.

The shift to a higher vibration of consciousness

There is ample evidence from accounts of NDEs that the consciousness of the body continues on, even though it is no longer supported by a functioning etheric body. When the consciousness recognizes that the body may be beyond repair, it releases itself from the etheric body and moves to a different body that is invisible to onlookers. A similar movement of consciousness to a different body occurs at the beginning of an OBE.

According to the proposed theoretical framework, the creation process inherent in consciousness brings the new body into existence. The framework asserts that any created object such as the new body has a holographic-like representation in consciousness. However, the new body clearly differs from the etheric body in that it cannot be seen by human onlookers. Therefore, it must have a higher vibration than the etheric body. The onlookers' perceptual process is tuned to the lower etheric vibration and cannot decode the information in the new body. Practitioners of OBEs say that the higher-vibration body exists in the astral realm and so it is known as the astral body.

The astral body that appears during an NDE or OBE is often said to exist in an environment that is initially similar to the familiar etheric earth environment. Experiencers may report flying to another location or moving there at the speed of thought. The environment may change according to their expectations or intentions as if their thoughts were externalized. Ziewe (2008, 2015) observed that thought occasionally influenced objects and events during his astral travels, although not all thoughts were equally effective. Thinking spontaneously or allowing thoughts to arise naturally out of expectation was more powerful than the mere intention to create. Nevertheless, he concluded that some laws of nature still apply in such higher-vibration experiences (Ziewe, 2015).

Control of the environment by thought alone is not noticeable in our normal etheric existence. However, small but statistically significant effects of mind over matter have been observed in many experiments (e.g., Schmidt, 1977; Jahn, 1982; McTaggart, 2007; Radin, 1997, 2012). So the universality of the creative process proposed in the theoretical framework is supported in both the etheric and astral contexts.

The visual appearance of the astral body has been observed to change according to the intention of the deceased personality involved. Ziewe (2015) met his departed mother a number of times during his out-of-body experiences in the higher-vibration astral realm. Her visual appearance changed so much between successive encounters that she was often unrecognizable. Although her appearance was unpredictable, her identity was still revealed by the intuitively sensed energy of her personality that remained constant. In the astral realm, the identity of an individual need not be defined by the visual appearance of the body.

Conclusion

Some people believe that the failure of the body to function signals the end of their existence, while others believe that they continue on in a spirit form after the body dies. The first belief is typically associated with scientific materialism, while the second is an article of faith in most religions. We show that a theoretical framework based on consciousness can bridge the gap between the two schools of

thought. The framework accounts for the experience of matter, and it accommodates the view that life continues after the body fails. It makes sense of the NDEs and OBEs that many people have reported. The experienced astral body and its environment have a higher vibration in consciousness, and are therefore not visible to onlookers still in their lower-vibration etheric bodies. The theory also suggests the existence of innumerable other realms and forms of life at vibrational levels beyond our ability to perceive.

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