

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Worldviews: Personal Opinions vs. Official Endorsements

To the Editor:

I was impressed by the responses to the editorial published in the Special Issue of the *Journal* on whether the International Association for Near-Death Studies (IANDS) should endorse a post-physicalist worldview (Holden, 2023). However, I think that many of the respondents confounded their personal opinions about the best explanation of near-death experiences (NDEs) with the question of whether IANDS should forsake its neutrality and endorse one particular worldview.

As I wrote in my contribution to that issue (Greyson, 2023), I believe that the evidence so far for physicalist explanations of NDEs—that they can best be understood solely in terms of physical matter and energy—is unconvincing and open to other explanations. I also find idealist explanations—that NDEs can best be understood solely in terms of a nonphysical mind—unsatisfying because, however rational they may be philosophically, I see no way they can be corroborated or contradicted by empirical evidence. Those exclusions leave me with dualist explanations—that NDEs can best be understood in terms of an interaction between the physical and mental. I think that some form of dualism, though still incomplete and full of explanatory gaps, would be most compatible with the empirical evidence. I do not think, however, that I can accurately be called a “dualist.” I think of myself as a scientist who currently believes that the weight of the evidence currently points toward a dualist position; but I am not closed to evidence for physical explanations or to idealist reasoning. I am not so arrogant as to think that my interpretation of the data must be the correct one, that those who disagree with me must be wrong, or that I myself won’t change my views as more data come in. That is one of the reasons I think it would be disastrous for IANDS to adopt an official post-physicalist position.

I believe my personal opinion, and the opinions of the other contributors to the Special Issue, are irrelevant to whether IANDS should endorse an official position on a preferred worldview. As Charlotte Martial et al. (2023) noted, the survey cited of IANDS members asking how they viewed the mind-brain relationship is a totally different

question from whether they think IANDS should endorse a position on the question. Regardless of my personal thoughts, I don't see how IANDS and the *Journal* can continue to encourage dissenting opinions if they promote themselves officially as a post-materialist organization and journal.

The bottom line for me is that IANDS has always stood for researching NDEs, educating the public about NDE phenomenology and after-effects, and helping NDErs cope with their experiences and their aftereffects. A philosophical worldview is irrelevant to all three of those goals. I suggest that IANDS should continue to focus its efforts on humbly promoting research, education, and providing resources for experiencers in an open-minded manner, rather than on endorsing any one particular explanation of NDEs.

References

- Greyson, B. (2023). Response to editorial "Should IANDS endorse a post-physicalist worldview?": Why IANDS should not endorse a specific worldview. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 41(2), 103–108. <https://doi.org/10.17514/JNDS-2023-41-2-p103-108>
- Holden, J. M. (2023). Should IANDS endorse a post-physicalist worldview? [Editorial]. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 41(2), 81–90. <https://doi.org/10.17514/JNDS-2023-41-2-p81-90>
- Martial, C., Fritz, P., & Gosseries, O. (2023). Response to "Should IANDS endorse a post-physicalist worldview?": Balancing perspectives: The significance of empirical evidence in scientific inquiry. *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, 41(2), 123–128. <https://doi.org/10.17514/JNDS-2023-41-2-p123-128>

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