



AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF THE METAPHYSICAL PHENOMENA OF LIFE AFTER DEATH AND NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the metaphysical periscope of the phenomena of life after death and near death experiences with the lenses of epistemology and logic. Although most cultures and religions accept the belief in life after death unassailably, the questions concerning its actuality, its nature, and near death experiences have been under keen debates by some thinkers in the disciplines of Philosophy, Religion and Psychology. This study analyses these metaphysical phenomena critically and exposes in details some religious, cultural and psychological claims made about them. It examines the epistemological and logical status of these knowledge claims. The study argues that although some claims made about afterlife and near death experiences seem rational and convincing; any claim to knowledge of absolute certainty regarding the phenomena - removed from mundane existence and experiences - epistemologically suspicious since there is no valid epistemic intersection between extra-terrestrial realms and the material world. The study also argues that just like any affirmation, any denial of certain knowledge of afterlife and near death experiences conversely rests on logical fallacy of argumentum ad ignorantia. It then recommends careful and detail examination of these phenomena before their acceptance or rejection, since the belief or non-belief in them influences the way we live our lives. Conclusively, it holds that given the weight of evidence, the affirmations of the claims to afterlife and near death experiences seem more rational than denial, and are more likely to be true than otherwise. The study adopts the conceptual, critical and speculative methods of philosophical inquiry.

Keywords: Epistemology, Afterlife phenomenon, Near death experiences, Epistemological uncertainty, Logical flaws, Reality.



INTRODUCTION

Epistemology is an aspect of philosophy that deals with issues relating to the nature of knowledge. It studies critically the sources, validity, scope, criteria, justification, limit of, and impediments to human knowledge. It pries into the extent to which human claims to knowledge and the sources of such knowledge claims can be trusted. Against this background, this study inquires epistemologically into knowledge claims regarding the phenomena of life after death (also known as hereafter and afterlife) and near death experiences (which will henceforth be referred respectively to as LAD and NDE), that seem prevalent in some cultures. The instinct of survival, which seems to be ingrained in human consciousness, slopes into survival after death. It stimulates the desire to live *ad infinitum*, especially if such life is characterized with good health, material satisfaction, dignity, and so on, in the present state of existence. Since this instinct to live *ad infinitum* cannot be met in this world of material existence, there is some desire to continue it after death.

These beliefs in LAD and NDE can be subjected to epistemological and logical scrutiny. We do not claim any competence to unravel all the issues and problems, nor provide solutions to all the controversies surrounding them. But it is necessary to pry into them and examine them with the aim to understanding exactly what they are, rationalizes about them, and clarifies some gray issues and thus expands our scope of knowledge about them. This will not end at the level of conceptualizations; it can concretely inform our beliefs, influences the way we live and how we prepare for the next.

Questions concerning LAD garner numerous debates among different people and at different times. While some affirm knowledge about it, some others deny it, and yet some others are skeptical and thus suspend judgement. But the occurrences of, and testimonies about NDE tend to lay credence to LAD, since NDE appear to be a glimpse of, or a pathway to understanding or pre-experiencing LAD by the experiencers. Almost all cultures and all religions have an idea of or a belief in LAD. For most people, the continuation of life after death is undisputable. But the beliefs



which such people have about it are widely different.

The recounted experiences about NDE by near death experiencers, irrespective of age, sex, education, social status, nationality, religions, cultural background, as well as different illnesses, injury and mode of experiencing of the experiencers have stark similarities. Today, thanatology, the science of dying, uses scientific method to investigate matters regarding LAD and NDE that are removed from mundane experiences. The results of these investigations by researching thanatologists are similar to those of local people (non-experts) where these occurrences are also prevalent. To meet the objective of this investigation, the study begins by analyzing the concept of LAD. Thereafter, it analyses NDE and how it authenticates and serves as a glimpse to LAD. The study then exposit the epistemic and logical dilemmas regarding knowledge claims about LAD and NDE. It concludes by prescribing the exercise of caution in accepting or rejecting these phenomena removed from empirical domain because of the implications they would have on how we live.

Life After Death (LAD)

Both LAD and NDE are metaphysical phenomena. Etymologically, metaphysics is the study of reality beyond the physical. It may also be conceived as the study of reality beyond sensory experience. As time progresses, it acquired a wider meaning and has as such been conceived as the study of the totality of reality - both physical and non-physical. It is the study of being *qua* being, of being as such, or of the fundamental substratum of reality or of what is. It investigates into the ultimate nature of reality. It is concerned with reality as a whole, and the nature of existence. It also makes investigation into possible existence. The focus in the study is on the conception of metaphysics as it pertains to what lies beyond sensory experience. However, in addition to, and before analyzing this transcendental aspect of the subject, it is important to note that even as man continues to live in the physical world, he continues to experience his death every day. From the existentialists' perspective, he continues to die every day from the moment he is born, for he is a being unto death. He grows, wanes and degenerates until they culminate in death. His life experiences are experiences toward death.



The belief in immortality or at least in life of some kind hereafter seems to be ingrained in human consciousness (Orubu, 2001: 160). Immortality literally means freedom from death (Shallo, 1943: 313) or to live forever. This belief implies that death is not the end of human being and such belief is hardly absent in any human civilization, culture or race. Beliefs such as reincarnation, gyratory existence, ancestorship, necromancy, apparitions, heaven, hell, purgatory, reward and punishment after death, as well as paranormal powers such as clairvoyance, precognition, telepathy and psychokinesis, tend to lay credence to LAD. Out-of-body experiences and near death experiences also tend to lay this credence. For example, Christianity and Islam believe in LAD either in heaven or hell, although there may be some essentials variations in their beliefs on a detailed analysis or theological interpretations. For both Christians and Muslims, heaven is a place of eternal reward for those who lived according to God's requirements. While hell is a place of eternal torment for those who lived contrary to God's requirement in Christian belief, in the interpretations of Islamic theology, there are opposing views. Some authors such as M.M Sharif and Mohammad Ali hold that hell is a place of remediation. But

the Mu'tazilites bows the Christian understanding of hell – a place of eternal punishment for wrongdoing. We shall analyze these in details.

The Mu'tazilites (Valiuddin, 1961: 280-282; Airoboman, 2014: 80-83) argue that man is the author of his own acts and decisions, and he can be held responsible for them. Therefore he deserves reward or punishment in the next world for whatever he does. According to them, the justice of God makes it incumbent upon Him to deviate from doing anything contrary to justice and equity. From this, they believe that a grave sinner will undoubtedly be punished in the hereafter. The Mu'tazilites argues further that Allah adheres to strict observance of His principles of justice. He will only forgive the evil doers who have repented sincerely in this world at an appropriate period.

Contrary to the preceding view of the strict justice of God, some other authoritative teachings in Islam and Islamic philosophy do not separate the love of God from His justice as part of the cardinal teachings of Islam. For example, M. M. Sharif, relying on the teachings of Quran and Islamic traditions writes that God is never unjust. On the Day of Judgment, He will take into account even the smallest action of man on



account of justice. While He rewards the good, He subjects the wicked to divine punishment. Divine punishment may be less than evil done, but it is never more because of God's love, mercy and forgiveness. Sharif argues that those in hell shall be redeemed at the end (Sharif, 1961: 176-185; Airoboman, 2014: 81-82).

Mohammad Ali argues that “[j]ust as the blessings of Paradise are a manifestations of the hidden realities of this life, so are the depths, the fire and unfruitfulness of the next, the Day of Resurrection being the day of the manifestation of hidden realities” (Qur'an, 86:9; Ali, 1990, 228). Like M.M Sharif, Mohammad Ali argues that the munificence, merciful and forgiving nature of God will not permit that evil doers be punished forever in hell. According to him, hell is temporary. It only represents the evil consequences of evil deeds. It is a place where people suffer temporary punishment to atone for their evil deeds while on earth. Ali thus argues that sinners will not live forever in the torments of hell because hell is only a remedial plan. It is not a place merely for torture or undergoing the consequences of what has been done; rather, its chastisement or ordeal is for the purpose of purification; so that man, rid of the evil consequences which he has brought about with his

own hands, may be made fit for spiritual advancement and obtain his lost opportunity. This purification is an attribute of God's Divine mercy. Ali supports his view with the Islamic tradition which holds that those in hell are pardoned by Allah and none will remain in hell because the angels, the prophets and the faithful will intercede for them and because of the mercy of God. Ali inferred from this that abiding in hell will cease to be at a point and hell must come to an end (Ali, 1990: 229-234, Airoboman, 2014: 81-83).

M.M. Sharif describes Heaven and hell as part of the Philosophical Teachings of the Qur'an this way:

The sinners will meet a grievous penalty but it shall not be more than the retribution of the evil they will have wrought. All in proportion to their respective deeds and for a period longer and shorter shall go through a state of pain and remorse, designated in the Qur'an as hell, and the righteous saved from hell shall enter a state of perpetual peace, designated as paradise. Paradise has been described in the Qur'an by similitude in terms of what average human beings value most: dignity, honour, virtue, beauty, luxury, sensuous pleasures, and social discourse and hell



*in terms of what they all
detest (Sharif, 1961: 183).*

According to Muhammad Ali, “a faith in a life after death is the last of the basic principles of Islam.... Death... is not the end of man’s life; it only opens the door to another, a higher form of life”. It is a change of state of existence. Ali adds that “[l]ife after death...opens out for man a new world of advancement, before which the progress of this life sinks into insignificance”. The basis of that life is laid in the present (Ali, 1990: 219-220).

The above understanding and interpretation of afterlife experiences by some Muslim philosophers and theologians captures some aspects of Catholic belief in afterlife but with some variation. In Catholic belief, there are two kinds of judgements – Particular Judgement and General Judgement. While Particular Judgment is the judgment we have to undergo immediately after death, General Judgment is the judgment which all men have to undergo on the last day. In Catholic belief, Christ judges men immediately after death to reward or punish them according to their deeds. The reward or punishment appointed for men’s soul after the Particular Judgment are heaven, purgatory, and hell (Kinkead, 1978: 348-351).

The understanding of hell by some Muslim theologians (such as Sharif and Ali) captures the Catholic idea of purgatory. In Catholic belief, all those who died in God’s grace and friendship, but imperfectly purified undergo temporal purgation or purging or final purification after death, “so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2000: 268). This means purgatory is where those whose lives were not so imperfect as to warrant everlasting condemnation in hell nor so perfect as to be admitted directly into heaven without purification suffer temporarily to atone for their venial sins before admittance into heaven since nothing impure can see the face of God. While purgatory is temporary, meant only for purgation of venial sins, heaven and hell and the abiding lives therein will last forever. This implies that after the general judgment, there will only be heaven and hell, and not purgatory, since there will be no human beings living or dying on earth to go there. All humans will be dead, judged and sent to their final abodes (Kinkead, 1978: 352) - Heaven or hell.

The Catholic Church warns of existence, eternity, sad and lamentable reality of hell. In her authoritative teachings, hell is the



state of definitive self-exclusion from communion with God and the blessed.... Immediately after death the souls of those who die in a state of mortal sin descend into hell, where they suffer the punishments of hell, “eternal fire”. The chief punishment of hell is eternal separation from God, in whom alone man can possess the life and happiness for which he was created and for which he longs (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2000: 269, 270, 275).

It is “a state to which the wicked are condemned, and in which they are deprived of the sight of God for all eternity, and in dreadful torments.... Hell is the absence of everything good and the presence of everything evil, and it will last forever” (Kinkead, 1978: 351-52). The sufferings of the damned in hell are worse than the sufferings one could imagine on earth.

According to *An Explanation of the Baltimore Catechism of Christian Doctrine*, Heaven is the state of everlasting life in which we see God face to face, and are made like him in glory, and enjoy eternal happiness. Thomas Kinkead explains that the most delightful place we could possibly imagine as heaven would not be near what it really is. In his view, everything that is good is there and

forever, and we shall never be tired of its joys. He explains further that all the pleasure and beauties on earth are nothing compared with heaven; and although we think we can imagine its beauty and happiness now, we shall see how far we have been from the real truth if ever we reach this heavenly home (Kinkead, 1978: 355). According to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2000: 272-273), in Heaven, God will wipe away tears from the eyes of the citizens of Heaven; and death, mourning and crying shall be no more.

There is a fundamental question arising from the view above regarding judgement: If everyone is judged immediately after death, then, what is the need for a general (also called final) judgment? There are needs for General Judgement; and part of such needs is that the providence of God, which, on earth, often permits the good to suffer and the wicked to prosper, may in the end appear just before all men (Kinkead, 1978: 353). In his explanation of this Catholic eschatological belief, Kinkead (1978: 354) submits that sometimes, the wicked perform good actions here on earth. For example, they contribute to some charity. Since God, on account of their wickedness, cannot reward them in the next world, He rewards them chiefly in this world by temporal



goods and pleasures. While they get their reward for all their good deeds in this world, they get their punishment in the next world for their evil deed. Conversely, the good man who suffers in this world gets all his reward in the next world. Even his sufferings here atone partly for the evil he has done. The above explanations answer, but in a religious manner, a perturbing philosophical musing: why do good people suffer and why do evil people prosper? A second reason for general judgment is to show the crimes of sinners and the justice of their punishment. A third reason is that the saint may have all their good work known before the world and receive the glory they deserve. Christ (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2000: 270-271, 272) will separate the just (righteous) from the unjust (unrighteous); while the unrighteous will go into eternal punishment, the righteous will go into eternal life of happiness. “The last judgement will reveal even in its furthest consequences the good each person has done or fail to do during his earthly life”. It will reveal that God’s justice triumphs over all the injustices committed by his creatures; it will also reveal that God’s love is stronger than death. Michael Shallo (1934: 312-317) supports the afterlife thesis when he argues that the human soul is not annihilated at death. He

based his arguments on proof from the moral law, the sanctity and justice of God, man’s desire for perfect happiness, and the universal judgement of mankind. All the lifetime rituals and worships of Christian and Muslim faithful are hinged on the preceding eschatological beliefs. Some other major religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism (Watchtower, 1990: 95-160, 235-260, 284-305; Parrinder, 1983: 192-240, 262-303; Nogosian, 1994: 75-155) have at the center of their religious worship birth, death, rebirth, and liberation from the circle of existence.

Like some other cultures, African cultures believe concretely either in gyratory existence, reincarnation, ancestral world or in all of these. There is the traditional belief that after death, the deceased transit into another life. There is also the belief in reincarnation. Although the critical contemporary mind will conceive this as contradiction, but for the traditional mind to which these beliefs seem evident, there is no contradiction since contradiction only exists where people do not understand the connection between concepts or phenomena. Among the Esan people of Nigeria, there are claims pertaining to apparitions, that is, the physical manifestations of the spirits of the dead to the living, especially to their



relatives. These spirits sometimes pass unknown information that conforms to reality upon investigation. There are also claims about dead persons who begin another physical life on earth after their death in places they were unknown in their original terrestrial lives. When accidentally they are seen and recognized by those who knew them before they died, they disappear and relocate to other places where they are unknown to continue their physical existence. It is believed that these are those who have not completed their life span before death.

According to Julius Ekoh, part of the Esan belief which has some socio-behavioral and moral implications is judgement after death. Esan people believe that there is reward for the good and punishment for the wicked. They believe that at death the soul of the deceased

leaves the body and proceeds on a journey to the world of the spirit to meet 'Osenobulua' the Supreme Being for judgement.... [T]hose who lead good and upright lives enter the ancestral world and join the ancestors to enjoy perfect union and rest. The wicked and those who lead evil lives... are sentenced to a wretched, aimless, hopeless, restless and miserable

existence in... Agbin Ihianmhinvin, (Life of the shell of the kernel) (Ekoh, 2014: 205).

Agbin Ihianmhinvin depicts a life of torture, an unbearable life or a life of maximum discomfort in the hereafter. This is a predominant belief in Esan culture which predates Christian era; and it is one of the several areas where Esan belief and Christian eschatology dovetail. Besides, it expresses the fact that similar idea can traverse cultures, races or institutions. In order to escape this descriptive life of ordeal after death, the Esan people would choose to lead good lives even when sacrifices are involved and in order to have a blissful life in the hereafter. In Esan traditional belief, the notorious evil doers who are known to have committed some serious crimes inescapably begins their punishment here on earth after death. “[T]hey are not given proper burial at death, they are not venerated or consulted or invoked at prayers for blessing and mediation” (Ekoh, 2014: 205-206). They are thus consigned to spiritual and ancestral redundancy. Besides, their being is diminished, corrupted, their force quenched, and their well-being in the spirit world impaired. Hence, the Esan believed that hell begins on earth. Reward and punishment after death transcend earth to ethereal domain. In the Esan



belief system, “one’s moral rectitude or turpitude in his or her earthly life warrants reward or punishment” after death. In other words, “all that is done on earth shall be accounted for in this life and or in the hereafter”. This “belief in judgement... serves as a check to the perpetuation” and perpetrators of “evil in the traditional Esan society” (Ekoh, 2014: 205-206). Thus, in Esan belief, reward and punishment in the hereafter help to maintain law and order in the society.

Belief in necromancy also lays credence to LAD since through it people obtain knowledge from the dead. Wilson Ehianu describes the processes of necromancy among the Ika people of Delta state, Nigeria (Ehianu, 2005: 54-55). When the dead are consulted they reveal knowledge about themselves and their state of existence in the spirit world to the living. They also communicate some other information to the living and reveal some issues concerning the material world, some of which are verifiable. Psychologists also found out that under hypnotic regressions some individuals reported that they have lived before in distant past and places. These individuals tell of their careers and give some other pieces of information, which are confirmed by investigations. The investigation conducted by Wambach (1982;

Orubu, 2001: 163-164) using a wide range of subjects indicates that subjects have lived and died many years before coming to this present life. The phenomenon of dream also seems to authenticate LAD. The fact that we dream when we are sleeping and this dream state is another plane of existence, suggests that there could be another plane of existence at death (a long sleep), and that it is not annihilation that awaits human being at death. It can be inferred from this philosophically that since we do not fully comprehend all the circumstances of dream and dream state, (a reality which we have personally and directly experienced during sleep), we cannot at this stage claim to understand in totality all the circumstances of afterlife occurrences which we have not yet experienced.

Near Death Experiences (NDE)

The phenomena of NDE can partly be used to argue for LAD. Orubu (2001: 161-164) gives some instances including some recent scientific research findings that support the belief in afterlife experiences and NDE. According to him, medical and psychological research findings indicate that there is something in human being which survives physical death. The investigation by Moody (1982) concerns those who have experienced the first stage of death



(near death experience) and thereafter come back to life. According to Orubu, the reports of the experiences by Moody's respondents were very lucid. They knew all the events which surrounded them in that state, including the attempts to revive them, their extra-terrestrial experiences and when they came back into their bodies. If the claims they make concerning the events of such occasions (which are verifiable) are true, inductively the unverifiable claims they make could be true as well about other experiences from their near death conditions, following the inductive methods of enumeration and analogy (Airoboman, 2016: 187-192; Herry, 2022; Kaplan: 2022).

Richard Steinpach examines Moody's account of NDE and corroborates the reports of the dying that Moody compiled, including "reports of those who had been declared clinically dead, and who nevertheless could be brought back to earthly existence. The interesting point here was the startling similarity of the experiences which those people had in their interval between life and death" (Steinpach, 1993: 6). These research participants experience "out of body existence". "[A]s they hover between life and death, they had to pass through almost identical phases". They saw their

body with which they no longer identify themselves with

lying on the bed or the place of the accident; they saw the efforts of those around them and hear their words. Those persons who – according to Dr. Moody – 'had penetrated more deeply into the realm of death' had the feeling of being drawn through a dark narrow passage. Then they saw a bright but not blinding light, sensed the nearness of a loving being, and experience a 'playback' of their life. Their concept of time and their knowledge had altered, expanded, and they thought they understand the true connections (Steinpach, 1993: 6-7).

These descriptive experiences are similar to those accounts held by non-expert reports in local communities and in different places.

After examining and authenticating Moody's account of NDE, Richard Steinpach advises against having the attitude of rejecting something new or startling or that are not in agreement with one's previous conceptions, but to examine them instead. He also advises us to "rid ourselves of the habit of rejecting what is invisible as incomprehensible" because of the



inadequacies of our senses. For Steinbach, the denial of the existence of realities beyond our senses is absurd and unjustified. He uses as analysis, the analogy of sleep, which eventually culminates in dream to support ethereal or out of body existence and as a prelude to understanding out of body existence (Steinpach, 1993: 15-18). According to him,

[T]here are accounts of people who lay seriously ill, and who on the threshold between life and death saw deceased relatives or helpers from the beyond, and spoke with them. Then finally, there are the descriptions of those who found themselves already outside their bodies, and of whom some had already been considered "clinically dead". But none of these was really dead, that is, the connection-cord had not yet been severed (Steinpach, 1993: 26-27).

These descriptive accounts of NDE represent the intermediate stages between life and death on the one hand and between dream and death on the other. According to Steinbach, the further the loosening of the soul by the dying person, and as withdrawal from the physical body progresses, the more impressions of the beyond it experiences. As the body-radiation of

the seriously ill diminishes, the soul is able to loose itself; it sees the world of the beyond more clearly and more distinctly. Then he experiences out-of-the-body state where the person is able to see what is happening around his physical body. They hear the words of those standing by. Beyond this, they could even recognize their thoughts just before they utter them and can perceive persons who are invisible to others (Steinpach, 1993: 27-28).

Steinpach writes that one of those questioned by Moody summarizes the experience in the beyond thus: “As soon as one has detached oneself from the earthly body, everything seems to speed up” (Steinpach, 1993: 32-33). Steinbach explains this to mean that “owing to its faster intrinsic movement the ethereal soul-body is lighter, thus more permeable, and that brings with it an increased receptivity to experiencing” (Steinpach, 1993: 33). Those who hover between life and death are able to gain special significance.

[T]hey experienced that in the world beyond only a completely different kind of knowledge counts. It was, as they described it, a deeper knowledge, a knowing as it were ‘with the soul’, which is connected with the origins



and interweavings of that which ‘holds the world together as its core’. To acquire this kind of knowledge, as they were told by helpful beings in the beyond, is the most important thing, even here on earth (Steinpach, 1993: 34).

Steinpach explains further that

[a]ll who during the temporary withdrawal from their physical body had left the earthly world experienced the nearness of a loving light-being, who mediated to them a review of their earth-life. Entirely of themselves, they came to recognise thereby how much had been wrong in it, how much suffering they had caused others, often unknowingly, and how much time they had wasted. Some of them returned to earthly life with the greatest reluctance, and even remonstrated vehemently with their rescuers. But all who had been ‘over there’ like that brought back with them the resolve to live differently, more consciously, in future (Steinpach, 1993: 35).

Steinpach argues that these people were not actually dead. They only temporarily left their earthly body for

greater or lesser distances. According to him, they had already come back into their body when they gave an account of their experiences. He writes that at the time when they had the experiences described, the ethereal connection-cord was not yet severed. He infers that all these descriptions relate to an intermediate realm, a short-term transition, and that they confirm to us the existence of a “beyond”, and of an extra-terrestrial life. Nevertheless, they tell us nothing about what happens to the soul after final severance from the earthly body (Steinpach, 1993: 37).

While arguing for the exercise of caution in confirming and pronouncing people dead and in taking them to mortuary in a hurry, Moses Makinde asserts that some of those who are pronounced clinically dead can have their organs revived and come back to life if they are not brain dead. He argues that such people are not dead but alive since if they were dead they would not come back to life because death is irreversible. He cites as an instance that “the English philosopher, Sir Alfred Ayer, was reported ‘dead’ for four minutes! After he had come back from ‘death’ to life, he recounted his ‘experience’, probably on his way to the other world which he never got to, because he was only clinically dead.



As he was not brain dead, he came back to life at the resurrection of his heartbeat and other vital organs” (Makinde, 2010: 419). Although Makinde did not tell us the experiences Ayer recounted during this interval, it is clear that this encounter was NDE. One very important lesson from Makinde’s submission is that we need to be extremely careful and patient in declaring people dead, or else we will be churning into the mortuary and grave those who are only in a state of NDE.

Theodore Schick and Lewis Vaughn write that near death experience is one of the many “extraordinary things that thousands of people experience, believe in, and change their lives because of” (Schick and Vaughn, 1995: 6). According to them, hundreds of people who were near death have told of blissful experiences in the beyond. Although their reports vary, certain details keep recurring. In each case, their experiences do not seem like dream or fantasy; it seems vividly real. And many who have had such experiences hold that such experiences are undeniable proof of LAD. Sometimes, some face the difficulty of finding human words adequate enough to describe their experiences of unearthly episodes. Nevertheless the experiences affect

their lives profoundly, especially their views about death and its relationship to life (Schick and Vaughn, 1995: 271; Moody, 1975: 21-23). The great similarities in these reports indicate that they reflect reality (Schick and Vaughn, 1995: 52; Alcock, 1981: 76). So, NDE seem to be the most impressive evidence that we can survive the death of our physical bodies. Although our physical body will certainly die, (Schick and Vaughn, 1995: 270-272) this does not mean we cannot survive death. The fact that the accounts of NDE in some parts of the world do not have essential differences from the reports in other parts laid credence to the credibility of its claim and of LAD.

Similar experiences abound in Esan and other African societies. Those who were already dead, such as parents, grandparents, other relatives, including deities and unknown but describable benefactors, prevent the dying (the experiencers) from going beyond a point and they then return back to their physical bodies. In addition, mountains, rivers, ditches, and other barriers may obstruct their way. These are followed by awesome, describable and some indescribable experiences; and some of which are blissful or sorrowful concerning the experiences of the dead. Sometimes, experiencers relate message(s) of



admonitions or requests from the dead to their families; especially those concerning their state of existence.

Epistemic Dilemma Regarding LAD and NDE

The aim of this section is to interrogate and evaluate epistemologically the claims made by near death experiencers and about **LAD**. One can ask for instance: to what extent can we be sure that these experiences are not hallucination, which the condition of near experience of death generates? The fact that the experiences have similarities all over the world independent of time and place does not lay automatic credence to the claims nor makes it unassailably true. The conditions, which generate these various experiences and narrations are similar, just as the conditions, which generate the experiences of intoxication and malaria attack are similar independent of sex, time, place and personality. The purpose of this seeming scepticism is not to denounce and reject the credibility of these accounts, but to enable the filtration of error from them, if there are, and thus avoid epistemic gullibility and imprudence.

In philosophy, particularly in metaphysics, philosophy of mind and epistemology, there is the intense debate between the substance dualists and the substance monists. The substance dualists believe in the existence of body and mind or soul and their capacity for independent existence. This position is supported by the argument from the existence of paranormal powers such as telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, and psycho-kinesis; and the argument from out-of-body experiences and NDE. The materialists or substance monists on the other hand, reject the independent existence of body and mind and the existence of the soul; if the soul exists at all, it perishes with the body at death. Thus, their views reject NDE and the belief in LAD.

There is another epistemological problem regarding the knowledge claims about LAD and NDE. It is the problem of epistemic access. How do we gain veridical access to these phenomena that are completely removed from mundane existence and experience? According to Felix Airoboman, although many people believe in LAD and this belief is partly what make death look pleasant to them, but

there is a... dilemma. How do we know about afterlife and reincarnation or their



negation? Can both beliefs constitute knowledge? Since the dead cannot come back after a time to tell what is attainable in the world beyond the present, what is the source of our knowledge claim about after life? And since no dead person has come back to tell about it, does that mean there is no LAD? To think in either way is to be susceptible to logical fallacies (Airoboman, 2014: 83).

Although we shall not go into unending epistemological interrogation, however, it suffices to ask the following questions: Can the claims made concerning afterlife or the beliefs which people have concerning it constitute knowledge? Can there be any epistemic validity for such claims? Since the dead cannot come back to tell of the attainable in the world beyond the present, then there seems to be no valid source of knowledge claims about afterlife. Rather, such claims seem to be nothing but speculations, claims to revelations and intuitions which are in themselves epistemologically suspicious. Although these claims may satisfy some traditional criteria of knowledge such as belief and justification, (since people believe them with reasons), but they do not satisfy truth condition

since we do not know for sure their truth status.

Even if some claims to afterlife seem rational and convincing, epistemologically speaking, all sources of knowledge are suspect. Those that are most philosophically scrutinized, potent, dependable, and reckoned with, such as rationalism and empiricism are diametrically opposed on claims, beliefs, sources and methods. If this is so, other sources of claims to knowledge such as intuition, revelation, introspection, authority, necromancy, clairvoyance and so on, which are less dependable, will be fraught more with controversies and contradictions, and thus more suspect. The situation is worse when phenomena about which claims are made are beyond the physical, completely removed from terrestrial terrain, material existence and ordinary human experience.

This suggests that the supposed claims to afterlife, or its experience and knowledge can be rejoined. Some of the evidence we have had are not death experience but NDE. Since no one had really died and returned to tell the true nature of life there, if there is, then, there seems to be interactive restraint or chasm, which is forever set between the living and the dead. This implies that there is no



valid epistemological intersection of the assumed two worlds. Besides, we can have epistemic perversion. For example, one can ask concerning NDE: if death actually occurs will these experiences continue? How are we sure they are not mirages of death just like a pool of water which appears real but that is not real?

Theodore Schick and Lewis Vaughn (1995: 52) hold that although researchers generally agree that people do experience such things, but whether their experiences show that they literally leave their bodies and enter another world is another question. Moody was convinced that near death experiencers do have a glimpse of the beyond, a brief passage into a whole other reality, but Theodore Schick and Lewis Vaughn's concern is: whether such a belief is justified. They argue that "a claim is justified if it is beyond a reasonable doubt, and it is beyond a reasonable doubt if it provides the best explanation of something" (Schick and Vaughn, 1995: 274). Since the evidence from NDE does not provide the best explanation it does not establish the belief in LAD beyond reasonable doubt. This argument by Schick and Vaughn portends the danger of reducing reality to logic and epistemological justification. Realistically, reality is beyond logic

and justification because, matters concerning truth or reality cannot be meaningfully or reasonably reduced to semantics and analysis.

Another counterargument for life after death is that some thinkers thought of the notion of disembodied existence as meaningless. Michael Scriven (1966: 175) argues that the belief in personal immortality through the survival of a spirit or soul clearly serves important functions in the psychic economy of many people. This makes death seem less frightful, morality more meaningful and life more significant. But speaking uneconomically, very little can be said about the truth of this claim. Scriven submits further that

[f]ascinating though the literature of survival research is, then, it does not provide us with anything more than a thorough education about the experimental investigation of allegedly supernatural phenomena. And there is no other source of evidence to support belief in our survival of bodily death. We die, and then we rot; and that is the only reward or retribution for our life as a whole that we shall ever receive. The meaning of man's existence lies within



his life and not beyond the grave (Scriven, 1966: 177).

But Helen Buss Mitchell is inclined to mediating this argument and suspends categorical judgement about it. According to her, as “[c]ompelling as the account of life after death may be, we currently have no way of verifying their truth by means of controlled experiment” (Mitchell, 2011: 203). She argues further that near death experience accounts do not establish LAD empirically – that is, through the scientific method of objective data gathering and hypothesis testing. There is simply no evidence for it. Looking at it from the other perspective, by listening to accounts of NDE, it is also clear that these people feel that they know what they experienced. “Children make particularly compelling witnesses because they tell of their experiences so matter-of-factly” (Mitchell, 2011: 203).

Thus, to argue against LAD and NDE because they have not been proven to be true is to lean on fallacy of argument from ignorance since they have not been proven to be false either. To reduce their authenticity to empirical verification is like saying among others that the debate over the truth or falsity of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan being the President of Nigeria from 2010 to 2015 the

rightness or wrongness of abortion, whether it is good to do good and avoid evil, and so on, are to be verified only by subjecting them to laboratory analyses. This would make nonsense of value, truth and reality. The over confidence in this empirical sort of a thing, is misleading. It encourages knowledge arrogance, experiential hegemony and epistemic insularity. It poses as if empirical verifiability is the sole panacea to fathom all reality. This cannot be the case. Some centuries ago, any claim to the present state of communication development would be regarded as a myth, a misnomer, an abuse of common sense, an empirical nihilism and a verification nullity. But today, a piece of information or write-up can go round the world in a minute or seconds without public address system, connecting wires and mail-carriers. This is the present state of information technology, which scientists and empiricists would have probably rejected some centuries ago. May be some hundreds of years to come, or less, scientists may by laboratory analysis confirm immortality or LAD and even NDE.

In epistemology, there is problem with the traditional criteria of knowledge which considers “justified true belief” as sufficient for knowledge. This traditional account



garners lots of criticism from contemporary epistemologists (Gettier, 1963: 121-123; Chisholm, 1959: 90-93; Russell, 1948: 155). Besides, this classical definition of knowledge is too stringent to define what is real; it is too narrow to state the essence or sufficient attributes of knowledge generally. Hence, concerning matters of afterlife and NDE with which we are engrossed *in* this essay, the sufficient criteria of knowledge is grossly inadequate. Here we are concerned with fathoming and knowing what is real. But the classical criteria constitute a definition of what it entails for a person to lay claim to knowledge and not what is real as such. Such requirement extricates many existent phenomena from reality. Things are what they are independent of epistemological musing to human knowledge. In other words, what is true is true, just as what is real is real independent of epistemological speculation, analysis and human awareness. Going by the sufficient conditions for knowledge, if there is a plant or animal species, which no one has ever come across, although it truly exists, it is not part of human knowledge because the epistemological conditions and human factors of belief and justification are absent. This matter is worse when we are concerned with

non-empirical phenomena. The epistemological requirements for knowledge to exist blurs out some existent phenomena which are outside the confines of the sufficient conditions for knowledge. Concerning LAD and NDE, most people believe them with justification and the beliefs which they have about them help in organizing their lives. On the other hand, some people do not believe them with or without justification. But the major contention here is not with belief and justification but with truth condition. Following the logical principle of identity, if it is true, it is true independent of people's beliefs and justifications.

There are some logical dilemmas confronting these beliefs and their denials. For instance, the belief in afterlife with particular reference to reincarnation, predominant in most traditional cultures seems to be in logical error. It defies some logical laws of thought such as exclude middle and non-contradiction. It raises the question whether the deceased can be in ancestral world and reincarnate at the same time? It is commonsensical that the deceased would either be in ancestral world or reincarnates and not both. The problem is more than that. Logically speaking, what is the source of the assumed inference that the deceased



is, or is not anywhere after death? Some may reject afterlife on the ground that “[t]he abode of the dead has no clearly defined geographical location” (Orubu, 2001: 160). Those who reject LAD on this ground may do so enthusiastically since for them, to exist, is to be in a place. Since such claimers have not discovered all there is in the material universe, why should they think of a must discovery of realities outside the universe, and in spiritual matter at that? In whichever way, any claim made so far is susceptible to the logical fallacy of *argumentum ad ignorantiam*, that is, the fallacy of argument from ignorance (Engel, 1981: 133-134; Hirschberg, 1996: 821; Copi and Cohen, 2005: 140-141). Since fallacy is involved, the argument cannot be logically valid. If we deny that the deceased is anywhere, then, how do we know that he or she is nowhere? This is a logical gibberish too, an invalid assumption that is beyond logical demonstration. Any affirmation or denial of knowledge and experiences about afterlife in the preceding do not pass the test of logic. However, reality is not all about logic or passing the test of logical principle. This is because there are more to reality than logic. Just as logical validity is not determined by conformity to reality, so reality is not conditioned by logical validity.

Logical validity only conforms to reality in sound arguments. But the focus of logic is not sound argument, not even on valid inference as such, but on argument *per se*. We shall not go beyond this point here to avoid overindulgence in the topic of afterlife as it pertains to the scope of this investigation.

Conclusion

In this study, knowledge claims about afterlife and NDE were expository and some concerns were raised about them. Just as the study rationally queries the authenticities of these claims, so it queries their denials. However, this probing does not eliminate the possibility of afterlife and its knowledge and experience including that of NDE. A Hindu philosopher, Nikhilananda (Watchtower, 1997: 4) puts it that “experiences of after death cannot be demonstrated by reason”; but “the doctrine of rebirth is more probable than improbable”.

Given the stark similarities of the various claims of the phenomena of NDE independent of time, place, age, sex, profession, kind of illness and the nature of event which led to these experiences, it seems that its accounts cannot be false. And if not false, the claims to LAD cannot be false as well since NDE seem to be glimpses or



lead ways to after death experiences. From the above submissions, the debate should not be whether or not there is LAD or NDE since these claims seems to be closer to truth than falsehood; the phenomena seem to be real. Rather, the debate should be about what exactly lay after death, that is, on the nature of that life or those experiences.

From the above, the accounts of NDE posed an existential challenge. Since many people who are confirmed dead do wake up either after some minutes, hours or even days, and often do tell of their experiences, this means they were not actually dead but only in the state of near death experience. Therefore caution should be exercised in confirming people dead and an ample of time observed to avoid disposing as corpses those who are only in this state of NDE.

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