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Introduction to Composition

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The concept of a life after death is one that holds multiple implications and questions. Based on the diverse group of human ideologies, races, ethnicities, and religions, a life after death may be Heaven, Hell, meeting Allah, reincarnation, attain nirvana (a state of the highest form of happiness) among many other possibilities. Due to the many types and forms of religion that stray from each other, there is no general consensus as to what a life after death may entail. In addition, there is no consensus as to whether a life after death is even possible because many people do not believe in a higher power or a place where you could reside. In the year 2018, we do know that not even science has been able to fully prove or disprove the idea of life after death. Some studies say, an afterlife exists and there may be a higher power, while others would say that when people die, they would enter a coma like sleep meaning they would no longer feel or experience anything. It's possible that humans may never know what happens when they die until they actually die. Nevertheless, based on the multiple studies, research, and theories, a life after death, no matter what it could lead to, is plausible whether it may be proven true or false in the future and it's essential for people to continue research on the topic in search of an answer so that the human race can have scientific proof as to what happens to people when they are presumed dead.

The plausibility of a life after death should not be denied because people have not proved nor disproved it. For example, it is possible that a life after death may be true, based on scientific studies on human psychology and the nervous system. Based on what is considered to be the largest study on the

subject of life after death *AWAREness during Resuscitation – a prospective study* by the Official Journal of the European Resuscitation Council, near-death experiences may prove the presence of a conscious during the early minutes of death. A near-death experience is a personal experience that comes with certain or impending death. An example is the time after a person is hit by a car and images begin to pass through their mind in the blink of an eye until their body can no longer function properly and they die or enter a coma. Dr. Sam Parnia, a co-author of another study of life after death by a team at the NYU Langone School of Medicine reported his findings and theories to Healthline, a health information journal. In an article by Healthline, he explains when a person in cardiac arrest (when the heart stops beating and circulating blood, breathing stops, and the brain becomes non-functional) receives CPR, the brain only gets approximately 15 percent of the blood normally circulated to it, thus not sufficient enough to reactivate the brain. He further explains this fact by saying, “As soon as the heart stops, you not only lose consciousness and your brain stem reflexes are all gone, but also the electricity that your brain creates slow down immediately, and within about 2 to 20 seconds, it completely flatlines” (Cassata Accessed 18 November 2018). It is believed that when a person flatlines, they are unconscious because no brain waves are detected. Dr. Parnia challenges this theory. Dr. Parnia said that after a person has died, the cells in the body undergo a process of death as well, taking hours for the cells to decompose. Sam points out that because cells take time to decompose to reach a point to where they become unsalvageable, if the heart can be restarted after a person’s cells have become irreversibly damaged, then a person can be brought back to life. (Cassata Accessed 18 November 2018)

To dive deeper into the study that Dr. Parnia’s work is based on, the study from the European Resuscitation Council goes into the range of cognitive/mental experiences and awareness associated with CPR. Throughout a four year, multi center observational study with a sample size of 2060 cardiac arrests, 140 interviewees of those events had some form of awareness during their cardiac arrest and

101 were objectively verified that they were aware based on specific tests. Other results showed that 46 percent had memories of common cognitive themes such as fear, animals, light, etc., 9 percent had a near death experience, and 2 percent were able to explicitly recall seeing and hearing events during their resuscitation (Parnia Accessed 18 November 2018). This study brings into detail the concept of being close to death but not entirely, the main reason being, the fact that many of the interviewees were able to be aware of what took place during their cardiac arrests implies that their brains was still functioning. Due to this, the brain becomes an extremely important organ to observe in the study.

As the brain becomes crucial in understanding the concept of death, it begs the question what are people in cardiac arrests truly experiencing. Parnia suggests two theories: the first is that the psyche (the totality of the human mind) and consciousness come from brain cell activity; meaning the brain generates thoughts. The second theory is that the conscience and the psyche are separate entities from people and the conscience and psyche interact with the brain but are not produced by it. Parnia said “Our study supports this idea. You should not have consciousness or activity [during death], but paradoxically, we found evidence to the contrary, so we are doing more research” (Cassata Accessed 18 November 2018).

The possibility that such experiences close to or during death necessitates the need in understanding the paranormal. To get a better focus on these experiences, it is important to look into some of them in detail. Scott S. Smith, a freelance journalist, wrote for the Huffington Post to help explain what people perceive after death. Two experiences to look into particular are death-bed visions and near-death experiences. Typically during a death-bed vision, people may imagine heaven, hell, etc. Karlis Osis, a noted physics professor, and Erlendur Haraldsson, a clinical psychologist examined 5000 cases of death-bed visions and found that brain malfunctions were more likely to reduce visions, a history of psychoactive drugs did not increase or decrease the likelihood of having the visions and no evidence was found as to whether a lack of oxygen induced the visions. Not to mention, the visions did

not fit with any religious preconceptions of people, for example, those who believed in reincarnation did not see any visions that confirmed that they would be reborn. For near-death experiences, the most common experiences were a sense of dying as a release from cares and pain, a feeling of rising from the body, and approximately 29 percent remembered having their lives flash before their eyes (Smith Accessed 18 November 2018). When noticing these facts, because the visions did not prove the idea of an afterlife, but a near-death experience gave a feeling of being risen or released of something, it is still possible that a life after death can happen.

Dr. Parnia's research into the decomposition of humans hold great importance to the idea of life after death. People have taken great strides in the name of science and medicine to both combat and learn more about the circumstances of death. A National Geographic article illustrates strides in medicine and science by telling the story of Karla Perez, a 22 year old pregnant mother who had suffered a stroke. The brain ceased functioning and would not recover. While she survived the ordeal, she is now considered brain dead but Perez's family hopes that a miracle would come in hopes that her brain would function properly again (Henig Accessed 18 November 2018). Such a miracle was possible with the Martin family after their youngest son, Gardell was presumably considered dead when he fell into an icy stream. When Gardell was rushed to the hospital, he already looked like a corpse. The EMTs attempted chest compression and CPR, among other methods, all of which to no avail. Eventually, doctors had the idea of bringing Gardell into surgery for a cardiopulmonary bypass. After a last ditch effort, to get him back on his feet, suddenly, there was a heartbeat, three days later, he was alive and kicking (Henig Accessed 18 November 2018). While Gardell's and Karla's cases are different, both involve the failure of important organs that necessitates life. In Gardell's case, he was able to live again despite having the appearance of a cold, dead corpse, while in Karla's case, even though Dr. Parnia had already described death as the brain no longer functioning, Perez came out of her ordeal alive. When

looking into these cases carefully, it begs the question if they had experienced death for a short time or they were never dead to begin with? (Henig Accessed 18 November 2018)

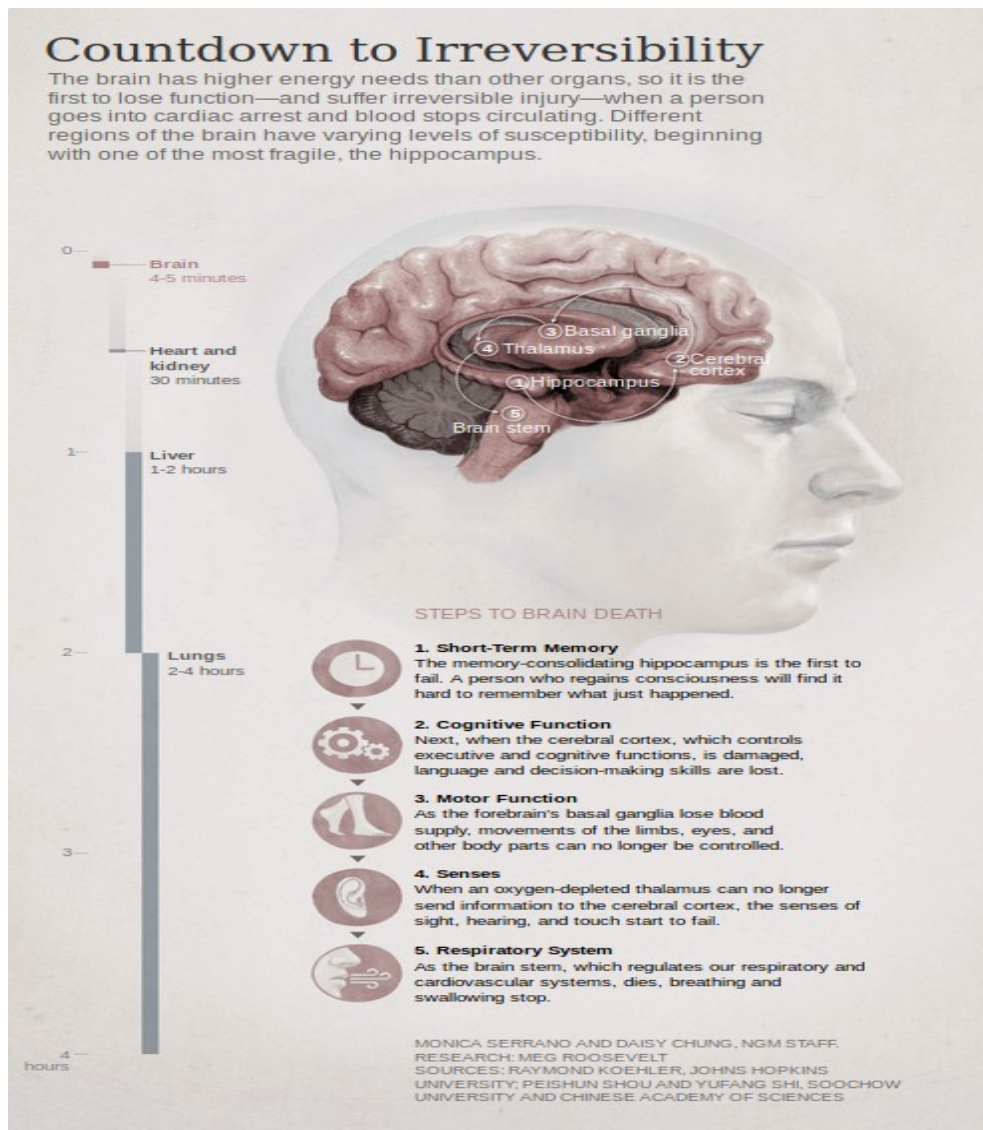


Fig 1. The brain failure that appears when a person is dying. The functions of the brain eventually affects other organs as the brain eventually reaches a state of irreversibility. Countdown to Irreversibility (9 November 2018; nationalgeographic.com; Web; 18 November 2018)

Organs has been shown as an extremely important factor as to how people are able to perceive life after death. To many, it's obvious that organs begin to fail as we die but what to take from the evidence shown above is the importance of the brain and even the heart when researching life after death. The brain may be linked to the images that the dying person sees and experiences. Images of an afterlife or other cognitive themes may be due to the brain. As shown by Figure 1, when the brain begins to fail, it affects other organs. Specifically the heart because the brain would prevent the heart from circulating blood. However, from Perez's case, despite being brain dead, she is still alive which can mean three things: the brain and heart may still function, which in retrospect means that based on Dr. Parnia's claim, the brain and heart must have stopped function but somehow reverted back to some form of their normal state. The second being that the brain no longer functions at any capacity but the heart can still function. Or, it could be possible that both the brain and heart never stopped functioning to begin with. This creates many implications. There might be more standards as to how someone can truly be dead; meaning that there is a possibility that those who were said to be in a near-death experience, death-bed vision, etc., may not have experienced death at all, as the patients could have been alive the whole time but in a state of limbo. However, because of the many possibilities as to what could happen during those death experiences, it cannot be proven for sure that what has happened was being in a state of limbo. The patients could be deemed as dead because brain, heart, and other organ functions cease or slow down. The patients can be considered dead due to the absence of organ functionality, making their life after death another form of living because their "death" is actually a state of limbo.

The National Geographic article goes on to discuss ways to help Perez, one such method was to deprive her of oxygen. Mark Roth, a Seattle biologist claims "Yes, if you take away oxygen, you can kill the animal. But if you further reduce the oxygen, the animal is alive again, but it's suspended." Mark's reasoning for this idea is based on his observations of soil nematodes. The nematodes are alive

with as little as .5 percent oxygen but they are dead when that percentage is reduced to .1 percent. However, when the worms have only .001 percent oxygen in their bodies, they enter a state of suspended animation where they need significantly a lot less oxygen in order to survive. This would help those who had their hearts stop beating during a heart attack because the patients would be cryogenically frozen in suspension without having the need to breathe, in order to eventually help them with any disease that occurred in the patient if cures can be discovered. (Henig Accessed 18 November 2018) The patients' cryogenic state is important to note because when patients are frozen, they can be considered dead as well. The idea of being suspended in animation can also be classified as staying alive, dying, already dead, or just somewhere in between because the purpose is to hopefully freeze them and keep them in a state of being where they would not need to function in order to be preserved, thus being frozen and any future documented experiences from it a life after death.

A life after death, as it stands right now, is not something that can be easily proven as fact or fiction. All forms of evidence, studies, statistics and more can only be provided to introduce the plausibility. Studies can be shown to contradict each other such as Dr. Parnia's claim of death when the brain and heart stops functioning and Gardell's and Perez's cases of having a near-death experience. However, because they are alive, it's possible that their organs still function meaning they weren't dead, thus disproving claims by others about what they also experienced during their supposed "death". In addition, while in Roth's study that focuses in taking away oxygen from a person, the study done by Osis and Haraldsson could not find any evidence of oxygen being linked to any experiences of death. What we can gather from this is that there are multiple theories and standards as to what could be perceived as dead and what happens to them during that time. It is possible that humans may never know the full truth of what happens after death, there are some clues that can allow us to look deeper into the possibility and that a life after death may be there, all in due time.

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