

On the Other Side of Life

Exploring the Phenomenon of the Near-Death Experience

By Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino

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According to researchers in the field, over 8 million Americans have undergone a phenomenon so overwhelming that it can only be categorized as a moment between the real and the transcendental, a state close to that of death – in other words, a near-death experience (NDE). Over the last 20 years, there have been many books published in various languages that dutifully present the essential facts about the NDE and are replete with examples and case histories: some explore the NDE from a spiritual, theological, or reductive scientific perspective.

For the first time, we are proud to present a book which presents the most up-to-date findings on near-death experiences (NDEs) from an objective, scientific perspective. *On the Other Side of Life; exploring the phenomenon of the near-death experience* provides a startling yet down-to-earth look at the latest research and discoveries related to near-death phenomena.

The author, a respected NDE researcher, brings no agenda to the table other than a desire to set forth both the latest scientific and anecdotal information available on near-death experiences, to see what actual conclusions we can draw, and where speculation begins. Neither a first-person testimonial nor a thesis to prove a point.

On the Other Side of Life: exploring the phenomenon of the near-death experience is a probing examination of the NDE that will influence your attitude towards life and death – *especially toward life*. Supported by fascinating testimonies of people who have undergone near-death experiences, Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino, an expert in the history of the NDE, presents this phenomenon in a systematic and analytic way, and discusses the rise of interest over the last 15 years. The author then sets up a forum with distinguished investigators and scholars in the fields of psychology, biology, physics, neurophysiology, theology and philosophy.

These six eminent personnel propose original and scientifically stimulating hypotheses on the phenomenon of the near-death experience: **Professor Kenneth Ring**, a worldwide renowned psychologist, presents a vast survey of the latest research in this field; **Professor Michel Lefeuvre**, a philosopher, provides the first extensive philosophical analysis of the NDE phenomenon; **Professors Louis-Marie**

Vincent, a biologist, **Régis Duthail**, a theoretical physicist, and **Paul Chauchard**, a neurophysiologist, propose their own unique and highly interesting theories with respect to their own scientific fields of expertise; and **Lord Bishop Jean Vernet**, delegate of the French Episcopate and advisor to the Vatican, puts forth the views of the Catholic Church. The result is the first cross-disciplinary scientific research into the theoretical understanding of the NDE.

Drawing on her years of experience researching NDEs, Ms. Elsaesser-Valarino poses provocative questions to each of the experts she interviews, drawing out the essentials of their research, their findings and the fascinating conclusions many of them have reached. The author takes care to ensure that their often complicated responses are discussed in detail, in terms any educated, non-specialist reader can understand.

On the Other Side of Life is an unbiased and thoughtful exchange of ideas and knowledge on the NDE. Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino infuses this book with disarming intellectual honesty so that the reader is not unintentionally prejudiced by the controversies surrounding the NDE phenomenon. The book will undoubtedly leave a lasting impression on anyone willing to open up to this fascinating phenomenon.

Foreword by Kenneth Ring

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Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino's book, *On the Other Side of Life: exploring the phenomenon of the near-death experience*, is to my knowledge both unique and a uniquely valuable contribution to the rapidly expanding literature dealing with near-death experiences (NDEs). In the last twenty years, for example, there have been more than two score books, published in various languages, which present the essential facts about these fascinating encounters with death and are replete with many examples and case histories of NDEs, and quite a few volumes that explore the phenomenon from a variety of points of view, ranging from the narrowly and reductively scientific to the dogmatically theological and even the unabashedly spiritual, depending on the particular predilections of their authors.

Entirely lacking among this literature until the appearance of Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino's book, however, has been a thoughtful and penetrating theoretical and philosophical examination of the NDE and its implications by persons who have achieved eminence in various fields of science – biology, neurophysiology, physics – as well as philosophy and religious thought. Here, in *On the Other Side of Life*, Elsaesser-Valarino has provided all those with a serious interest in the NDE with the opportunity to encounter and ponder the thinking of a very distinguished and diverse group of scholars and researchers as they themselves reflect on this phenomenon from the perspective of their own professional specialities. (I am honoured to be included among them, by the way, but I do not mean to assign to myself the adjectives I have used to describe my coparticipants!) The result is a extremely stimulating cross-disciplinary approach to the theoretical understanding of the NDE, which affords a level of intellectual illumination to this experiences unmatched by any

previous work on the subject. In consequence, you now hold in your hands a book that for some years to come will surely be an indispensable reference for anyone who wishes to acquaint him- or herself with the most searching analysis of the nature and meaning of the NDE itself.

Although many of the concepts presented in this book about the nature of NDEs, brain functioning, and consciousness may be at times a bit abstruse, *On the Other Side of Life* is on the whole very accessible to the general reader because of the *form* in which this information is presented. Rather than each contributor writing a chapter on this speciality, for example, what Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino has done, and done superbly, is to have conducted interviews with each of her participants. The dialogues that result, then, have the sparkling immediacy of conversations between a thoughtful inquirer who knows where she wants to steer the discussion and the interviewee who is only too happy to oblige her lead and to engage her fully (and the reader eavesdrops) as he brings his own training and insight to bear on the phenomenon of the NDE.

In assembling this group of researchers and commentators on the NDE, Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino has performed a very great service to the field of near-death studies, and her book will certainly provide many professionals who read it with a further impetus not only to take seriously but also to study and explore the NDE itself. In consequence, the field of near-death studies will certainly be strengthened by its continuing to draw the attention of investigators and scholars in philosophy, science, medicine, psychology, and religious studies, as well as other fields that have something to contribute to our understanding of just what it is that is seen through this window of death that modern medical resuscitation technology has disclosed to us all.

The great American author, Herman Melville, in his most celebrated book, *Moby Dick*, observed : "And the drawing near of Death, which alike levels all, alike impresses all with a last revelation, which only an author from the dead could adequately tell." These "authors from the dead", whom Melville could only imagine in the nineteenth century, are the thousands of persons who in our own time have returned to speak of the revelatory nature of their NDEs. Their tales inspire us, amaze us, and puzzle us, but they can no longer be dismissed. Our task is now to understand them, how they may happen, and what they mean. Toward this end, the volume that Evelyn Elsaesser-Valarino has given us is a giant step in our infinite journey in quest of discovering the ultimate secrets of death – and life.