

## Panpsychism and the Afterlife

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Abstract: I speculate on the underdeveloped theory of materialist panpsychism and the concept of the afterlife

One of the more terrifying concepts to me regarding panpsychism is that of panpsychism and the concept of the afterlife. More specifically, the concept of a materialist panpsychist worldview/metaphysics. Panpsychism posits that consciousness is an innate property of matter or the world and that all things have some degree of consciousness. This would include formerly living things. The concept then presented is the idea that after death, one remains conscious, but is unable to move or affect force or change on one's body anymore, since brain activity to the muscles has ceased. You still exist, if in just a lower conscious form. You are still conscious of things like rigor mortis, cremation, embalming, being buried, decaying, etc. and you are totally unable to do anything about it *forever*. (Or at least until your protons decay.) Sound fun?

A potential consolation to this is the idea that since we do not remember our existence pre-birth, we will not experience much sensation post-death. I think this is flawed reasoning because (1) the structure of our brain remains even after the cessation of neurological activity and (2) the structures of the sperm and the egg are inordinately less complex than the structures of the brain. The idea is that the more complex one's physical-mathematical structure, the more complex (or aware) one's consciousness is. Most theories of panpsychism accept a spectrum or degree of consciousness, with simple matter like atoms or rocks possessing little consciousness and complex matter like brains and nervous systems possessing higher consciousness. Since brains and nervous systems are living organic matter, it is not a stretch to say that they are not that relatively structurally different from dead organic matter. The degree to which this could be measured is akin to measuring the consciousness of inanimate objects like rocks, only one is dealing with matter that was once more highly conscious due to its internal structures. Additionally, if there are extradimensional forces at work affecting the nature of conscious materials orthogonally (i.e., non-physicalist theories of soul or mind are true and describable), this would be difficult to measure, since we would be attempting to measure four-dimensional constants within three-dimensional means. And, if the soul or mind is somehow transporting into another physical realm, and undergoing complex physical change to some degree, the fear of eternally rotting helplessly in one's decaying body in the ground for eons is alleviated. This notion however is mostly associated with non-naturalist or supernatural worldviews, and we are herein concerned with a materialist (or physicalist) one. That being said, if such a process occurs, or can be shown to occur, it would follow that such a process would be describable naturally with natural language and mathematical and physical equations, unless the mystics' worldview is correct, and nothing divine (like souls, or mind, or God, or spirit, etc.) is comprehensible or describable.

Presented then is an idea fundamental to panpsychist worldviews that I think is not often reflected upon by its proponents or detractors. The concept presented here, that of literal consciousness or awareness after death, in the physical body, does not in my view effect the likelihood of panpsychism being true or false. On Google there are about 55,400 [results](#) for "panpsychist afterlife" versus about 464,000 [results](#) for "panpsychism". There are a few articles and videos online regarding ideas relating to

panpsychism and the afterlife, but very little scholarly publications that I am aware of. Philip Goff has argued for panpsychism and is one its biggest philosophical proponents, but has only speculated briefly on what panpsychism means in terms of the afterlife and death.

Probably the most appealing aspect of panpsychism is that it purports to resolve the hard problem of consciousness, but it has lacked development as a proper philosophical theory of nature and is often regarded, perhaps unfairly, as bunk. I will list about all I could find online about this subject below as there is not much written literature on the matter; I invite the reader to share and publish their own thoughts on panpsychism, death, and how they relate to interpretations of quantum physics, philosophical viewpoints, and theological doctrines.

### Suggested Reading

The Case For Panpsychism [https://philosophynow.org/issues/121/The\\_Case\\_For\\_Panpsychism](https://philosophynow.org/issues/121/The_Case_For_Panpsychism)  
Phillip Goff, Philosophy Now, Issue 121 (2017)

Panpsychism, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Panpsychism&oldid=1098943490> (last visited July 23, 2022).

Panpsychism <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2012/entries/panpsychism/> Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, May 23, 2001; substantive revision Aug 23, 2010

More thoughts on consciousness and afterlife in the cosmic ocean <https://turingchurch.net/more-thoughts-on-consciousness-and-afterlife-in-the-cosmic-ocean-c94018189c32> Giulio Prisco, July 24, 2020

<https://philosophy.stackexchange.com/questions/76085/does-panpsychism-imply-consciousness-after-death>