

08.04 | Wednesday

- 17:00-18:00 | Registration
- 18:00-18:30 | Opening Session (in Portuguese)
- 18:30-19:15 | Opening Conference
Chairman | **Axel Cleeremans**
- Beyond physicalism - Looking at the world with fresh eyes
Christof Koch

09.04 | Thursday

1st session - End-of-life processes

- Moderator | **Helané Wahbeh**
- 09:00-09:15 | Opening remarks
Helané Wahbeh
- 09:15-09:45 | Studying ageing as a two-phase process: the biology of dying
Michael Rera
- 09:50-10:20 | The evolutionary origin of near-death experiences
Daniel Kondziella
- 10:25-10:55 | The puzzle of terminal lucidity in dying children and adults: Exploring permissive vs. productive hypotheses for brain function
Marjorie Woollacott
- 11:00-11:30 | Coffee, posters session and contacts with faculty
- 11:30-12:15 | Keynote lecture
On the Banks of the River Styx: An overview of the spectrum of end-of-life experiences
Michael Nahm
- 12:30-13:00 | Morning Discussion
- 13:00-14:30 | Lunch
- 14:30-16:00 | Oral poster presentations - Grant holders
Moderator | **Mário Simões**
- 16:00-17:00 | Coffee, posters session and contacts with faculty

08.04

09.04

10.04 | Friday

2nd session - End-of-life moments

- Moderator | **Etzel Cardeña**
- 09:00-09:15 | Opening remarks
Etzel Cardeña
- 09:15-09:45 | Anomalous cognition / Veridical perception during NDEs
Janice Holden
- 09:50-10:20 | Neurosciences confronting near-death experiences
Charlotte Martial
- 10:25-10:55 | Are we failing to provide choice and peace at life's end?
Bárbara Gomes
- 11:00-11:30 | Coffee, posters session and contacts with faculty
- 11:30-12:15 | Keynote lecture
Children's reports of past-life memories: A global phenomenon
Jim Tucker
- 12:30-13:00 | Morning Discussion
- 13:00-14:30 | Lunch
- 14:30-16:30 | Parallel Workshops (W)
- W 1** - Room Braga; without translation
Dying within the Buddhist tradition and how to prepare for death
Moderators | **Rainer Goebel and Stefan Schmidt**
Invited presenter | **Yesche Regel**
- W 2** - Auditorium; without translation
Living fully: The wisdom of near-death experiences
Moderator | **Chris Roe**
Invited presenters | **Marieta Pehlivanova and Etzel Cardeña**
- W 3** - Room Medicoteca; without translation
Enabling everyone to die well - what are the gaps and who is responsible for addressing these?
Moderator | **Rui Costa**
Invited presenter | **Julia Verne**
- W 4** - Room Conferências; with simultaneous translation - bring your mobile
"End-of-life landscapes" in different cultures and contexts
Moderator | **Miguel Castelo-Branco**
Invited presenter | **Bárbara Gomes**
- 17:00-18:00 | Get-together Cheese & Wine

10.04

11.04 | Saturday

3rd session - End-of-life beliefs and impacts

- Moderator | **Veena Kumari**
- 09:00-09:15 | Opening remarks
Veena Kumari
- 09:15-09:45 | What it takes to die. Intercultural intuitions and ideas on life's endings
Mira Menzfeld
- 09:50-10:20 | Culture, context, and the mystical: Some anthropological notes
Allan Kellehear
- 10:25-10:55 | Near-death experiences: Glimpses beyond death and the journey back to life
Marieta Pehlivanova
- 11:00-11:30 | Coffee, posters session and contacts with faculty
- 11:30-12:15 | Keynote lecture
To be or not to be that is not the question. Near-death experiences in ayahuasca ceremonies
Fanny Charrasse
- 12:30-13:00 | Morning Discussion
- 13:00-14:30 | Lunch
- 14:30-16:30 | Final Roundtable
Beyond the threshold: Perspectives on experiences surrounding death
Moderator | **Axel Cleeremans**
Participants | **Etzel Cardeña, Janice Holden, Christof Koch, Charlotte Martial, Marieta Pehlivanova**

Registration Fee

The 15th Symposium will be organized only for in-person audience.

€200

€80 - for university students under the age of 25 and PhD students (please enclose copy of your student card and/or university/supervisor declaration).

These amounts include access to all Symposium sessions, coffee breaks and certificate of attendance. It does not include meals. Limited number of registrations.

Online registration - www.bialfoundation.com

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PROGRAM

11.04

15th SYMPOSIUM OF
BIAL FOUNDATION

BEHIND AND BEYOND THE BRAIN

Aquém e Além do Cérebro

End-of-life experiences

Casa do Médico - Porto
April 8 to 11, 2026



Organizing Committee:

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Symposium's Venue

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Etzel Cardeña | Thorsen Professor of Psychology and Director of the Center for Research on Consciousness and Anomalous Psychology (CERCAP), Department of Psychology, Lund University, Sweden. Scientific interests: the psychology of anomalous experiences/non-ordinary mental expressions, including parapsychological phenomena; neurophenomenology of hypnosis, meditation and dissociation; stream of consciousness.



Miguel Castelo-Branco | Full Professor, University of Coimbra, Portugal. Affiliate Professor, University of Maastricht, The Netherlands, where he has held a Professorship in Psychology in 2000. Before, Postdoctoral fellow, Max-Planck-Institute for Brain Research. Director of IBILI and Scientific Coordinator of the National Functional Brain Imaging Network. Director of CIBIT and former Director of ICNAS, University of Coimbra. Scientific interests: sensory and perceptual neuroscience, and neurobiology of decision-making; social cognition and reward in health and disease, with a focus on autism research.



Fanny Charrasse | PhD in Sociology from the EHESS - "École des hautes études en sciences sociales". She is currently a post-doctoral fellow at the Université UCLouvain Saint-Louis, Brussels, Belgium. She has published several articles in academic journals, as well as an essay entitled "Le retour du monde magique. Magnétisme et paradoxes de la modernité" (La Découverte, 2023). Scientific interests: contemporary legitimisation of magical practices, the Western interpretation of paranormal experiences and the therapeutic use of psychedelics.



Axel Cleeremans | Research Director with the F.R.S-FNRS, Belgium; Director of the Center for Research in Cognition & Neurosciences, Université Libre de Bruxelles; Member of the Royal Academy of Belgium. Scientific interests: consciousness; unconscious cognition; computational modelling of cognitive processes; agency; affective neuroscience.



Rui Costa | President and CEO, Allen Institute, Washington, and Professor of Neuroscience and Neurology, Columbia University, New York, USA. Scientific interests: molecular, cellular and systems mechanisms of action generation, sequence and skill learning, goal-directed actions versus habits, across-level approach to study cognitive and sensorimotor disorders (PD, OCD, and autism).



Rainer Goebel | Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience, Faculty of Psychology and Neuroscience, Maastricht University, The Netherlands. Founding director of the Maastricht Brain Imaging Centre (M-BIC). Scientific interests: neuronal representations in the brain and how they are processed to enable specific perceptual and cognitive functions; neural correlates of visual awareness; clinical applications in brain computer interfaces (BCIs) and neurofeedback studies.



Bárbara Gomes | Researcher specialized in palliative, end of life and bereavement care, Faculty of Medicine, University of Coimbra, Portugal. ERC Grantee developer of the International Classification of Dying Places. Scientific advisor of the "la Caixa" Foundation Programme of Comprehensive Care for People with Advanced Diseases in Portugal. Scientific interests: dying places, preferences and priorities at the end of life, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of non-pharmacological interventions in advanced illness, person-centred care, palliative care in different contexts, bereavement.



Janice Holden | Professor Emerita of Counseling, University of North Texas, Denton, Texas, USA. Past president, International Association for Near-Death Studies. Scientific interests: counseling implications of near-death and related transpersonal experiences, including philosophical and cosmological implications, with particular focus on apparently non-physical veridical perception in NDEs and implications for the relationship between mind and brain.



Allan Kellehear | Professor of end-of-life care, Faculty of Health and Wellbeing, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK. Scientific interests: interdisciplinary study of dying conduct and experiences, anthropology of mystical experiences near-death, sociology of health & illness, public health/health promotion approaches to palliative and end-of-life care, and health humanities.



Christof Koch | Meritorious Investigator, Allen Institute, Seattle; Chief Scientist of the Tiny Blue Dot Foundation, Santa Monica. Former president, Allen Institute for Brain Science; former professor, California Institute of Technology, USA. Scientific interests: the biophysics of electric fields in the brain, the cortex and its circuits, detecting consciousness in behavioral unresponsive patients, consciousness and its substrate.



Daniel Kondziella | Consultant neurologist at Rigshospitalet, Copenhagen University Hospital, and Professor of Neurology with special focus on Acute and Critical Care Neurology, University of Copenhagen, Denmark. Lead author, the European Academy of Neurology guideline on the Diagnosis of Coma and Disorders of Consciousness; Co-chair, the European Academy of Neurology Scientific Panel Coma and Disorders of Consciousness; Fellow, the European Board of Neurology (FEBN); Board-certified physician in Germany, Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. Scientific interests: coma and disorders of consciousness and acute and critical care neurology.



Veena Kumari | Professor of Psychology and Director of the Centre for Cognitive and Clinical Neuroscience (CCN), Brunel University, London, UK. Scientific interests: cognitive aberrations in psychosis, mood and personality disorders, and the evaluation of current and potential therapies for these disorders; the impact of social and environmental factors on brain function and mental health across the life span.



Charlotte Martia | Researcher in Biomedical Sciences, GIGA Research Institute, GIGA-Consciousness, University of Liège, Belgium. Scientific interests: human consciousness, focusing on conditions in which individuals are outwardly unresponsive such as during general anesthesia or cardiac arrest, with a particular interest in near-death experiences.



Mira Menzfeld | Principal investigator, University Research Priority Program "Digital Religion(s)", and senior researcher, Department of Religious Studies, University of Zurich, Switzerland. Religious studies scholar and cultural anthropologist. Scientific interests and main areas of expertise: fieldwork with dying persons in different cultural contexts, heterogeneous concepts of dying, European Salafism, digital religiosity with a special focus on Islam-related conspiracy theories.



Michael Nahm | Research Associate, Institute for Frontier Areas of Psychology and Mental Health, Freiburg, Germany. Scientific interests: end-of-life experiences including terminal lucidity, near-death experiences, coma experiences, reincarnation cases, physical mediumship, theories of parapsychology and their philosophical implications, and the history of parapsychology.



Marieta Pehlivanova | Research Assistant, Professor of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences, Division of Perceptual Studies, University of Virginia School of Medicine, USA. Member of Expert Advisory Board of International Association for Near-Death Studies. Scientific interests: near-death experiences and children's purported memories of past lives, including cognitive, personality, and genetic factors contributing to their occurrence, veridical perceptions reported by experiencers, impact and correlates of these experiences, cross-cultural comparisons, and the development of support resources within healthcare settings for those who have such experiences.



Yesche Regel | Buddhist meditation teacher and lecturer, Bonn, Germany. Involvement with Buddhist meditation centers in Germany and Europe since 1978. Ordained Buddhist monastic from 1980-1997. Disciple of Tibetan lamas and absolvent of a 3-year-meditation retreat. Interested in Tibetan Bardo-teachings (after-death i.e. cycle of life-and-death-teachings) and specialized in mindfulness, mental calm, and compassion trainings in meditation. Guided many retreats and meditation courses; meditation instructor for physicians and the nursing staff in projects in both cancer and palliative care units in German hospitals.



Michael Rera | Research Director, CNRS, Principal Investigator of the research group UTELife (Understanding The End-of-Life), Department of Adaptive and Functional Biology, Université Paris Cité, France. Scientific interests: mathematical modeling of ageing, human health applications and ethics of the two-phase model, evolution of ageing and associated theories.



Chris Roe | Professor of Psychology, and Director of the Centre for Psychology & Society, University of Northampton, UK. Past-President of the Society for Psychical Research and Parapsychological Association, and past chair of the British Psychological Society Transpersonal Psychology Section. Scientific interests: understanding the nature of anomalous experiences, including experimental approaches to test claims for extrasensory perception and psychokinesis, particularly where they involve psychological factors.



Stefan Schmidt | Professor of Systemic Family Therapy and Head of the Academic Section of Systemic Health Research, Department of Psychosomatic Medicine and Psychotherapy, University Medical Centre, Freiburg, Germany. Scientific interests: systems approaches in health research, psychophysiology, consciousness research, mindfulness meditation, experimental parapsychology, exceptional experiences and placebo research.



Mário Simões | Retired Professor of Psychiatry and Mental Health and Introduction to Consciousness Sciences, Faculty of Medicine of Lisbon (FML), Portugal. Past Director of LIMMIT - Laboratory of Mind-Matter Interaction with Therapeutic Intention - and of the Post-Graduation Course in Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, FML. Member of the Scientific Committee of the Bial Foundation. Research interests: psychology and psychophysiology of altered states of consciousness, parapsychology, ethnic medicine, human exceptional experiences (NDE) and spirituality.



Jim Tucker | Bonner-Lowry Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry and Neurobehavioral Sciences, University of Virginia, USA. Retired director, Division of Perceptual Studies. Research interest: children's reports of past-life memories. Clinical interests: child and adolescent psychiatry, ADHD, childhood mood and anxiety disorders.



Julia Verne | Visiting Professor of Public Health approaches to Palliative Care and Hepatology, Dame Cicely Saunders Institute of Palliative Care, Policy and Rehabilitation, King's College, University of London, UK. Honorary Assistant Chaplain, King's College University Hospital - hoping to bring spiritual comfort to people approaching the end of their lives. Doctor with special interest in: preventing and ameliorating suffering; palliative care, leading work to improve the quality of end-of-life care - physical, psychological, social and spiritual - through a Human Rights Approach to addressing inequality in access, especially for the most vulnerable groups in society.



Helané Wahbeh | Director of Research, Institute of Noetic Sciences, Novato, California, USA. Adjunct Assistant Professor, Department of Neurology, Oregon Health & Science University, Portland, Oregon, USA. Former President and current Board Member of the Parapsychological Association. Scientific interests: complementary and alternative medicine, mind-body medicine, stress and post-traumatic stress disorder, extended human capacities, and channeling approached through a noetic framework.



Marjorie Woollacott | Professor and member, Institute of Neuroscience, University of Oregon, USA. Past chair, Department of Human Physiology, University of Oregon; President of the Academy for the Advancement of Post-Materialist Sciences, Science Committee of the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS); Co-Director, Galileo Commission; Research Director, International Association of Near-Death Studies. Scientific interests: the nature of conscious awareness, neural filters to conscious awareness, and the effects of meditation and end-of-life experiences on these filtering capacities.



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