



SPECIAL ESSAY
PREFACE

Reader Advisory for Sudduth's BICS Treatise: Preface to Long Essay Section

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A single, peer-reviewed essay appears in this issue by design—a de facto special subsection featuring a formidable treatise that took approximately a year to prepare and at my request. Readers may criticize me for allotting considerable *Journal* space to this work, but consistent with the actions of other journals (e.g., Kuhn, 2024), my editorial policy has always emphasized generous flexibility as appropriate (Houran, 2023). Dr. Michael Sudduth's paper is a warranted case, in my judgment, as the complicated topic of postmortem survival of physical death has arguably stagnated from a research perspective. Indeed, heated and polarized positions on survival often stifle discussions, thwart adversarial collaborations, and hinder advancements in this domain. *JSE's* Summer 2022 issue (<https://shorturl.at/qX056>) therefore attempted to motivate progress via a brokered exchange between ostensible skeptics and advocates (i.e., Keith Augustine et al. and Stephen Braude et al.) who debated the outcomes and lessons from the BICS essay contest on the best available evidence for survival (Kelleher & Bigelow, 2022). No sea-change on either side of the conversation occurred, but at least a more constructive dialogue about the key issues and confounds took root.

However, that published exchange undoubtedly holds many observations and insights that are still waiting to be mined, shared, and contemplated. In this spirit of exploration, Sudduth accepted my invitation to conduct a comprehensive "forensic-type audit" of the assumptions and approaches underlying the positions of Augustine versus Braude. He is especially well-suited for this task given his background teaching and publishing in the areas of critical thinking and epistemology, with a focus on theories of evidence and the justification of belief across different domains of inquiry, including general and legal epistemology (e.g., Sudduth's entry on "Defeaters in Epistemology" in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*: <https://iep.utm.edu/defeaters-in-epistemology/>), topics in the philosophy of religion (Sudduth, 2009), and more recently postmortem survival (Sudduth, 2016). This exercise thus aimed to unstick the apparent stalemate by identifying previously unacknowledged or unexamined points of agreement and sources of divergence in the two camps' respective arguments. Given the scope and depth of the original material, Sudduth's extensive commentary still manages to condense a rather vast territory of issues. It is important to note that his assessment sought neither to declare an ultimate "winner" of *JSE's* BICS debate nor to defend or indict anyone on a personal level. Rather, the goal was to apply precise, logical analysis to uncover new learnings that can help to foster dispassionate thinking and fresh studies on the survival question, irrespective of any researcher's ideological leanings.

But be warned—Sudduth's examination is not for casual readers, offhand thinkers, or the faint of heart. His paper should be tackled only by those who are seriously committed to wrestling with thorny conceptual and empirical issues surrounding the question

<https://doi.org/10.31275/20243333>

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of survival. Even so, many pitfalls and traps await readers, including the length, density, and complexity of the core material under scrutiny. Without a careful reading, these factors make it easy to overlook or mistake Sudduth's main points, critical nuances, notable caveats, or even specific references to illustrations in other works. Therefore, *JSE's* editorial team recommends some steps to engage best with this treatise: (a) Familiarize yourself with the key background literature that anchors Sudduth's approach (i.e., Augustine, 2022a, 2022b; 2022c; Braude et al., 2022; Nahm, 2022); (b) Slowly read Sudduth's analysis at least twice, with a gap in between readings to reflect thoughtfully on the content and perhaps also to consult other works on survival from diverse ideological viewpoints (for a suggested reading list, see Houran et al., 2023: Appendix); and (c) Discuss the end-products of your homework with others who have followed suit.

This exercise might help to cultivate a dedicated and rejuvenated group of maverick pioneers poised to systematically confront humanity's truly final frontier. The BICS contest successfully popularized past and present academic studies on the survival hypothesis. Yet the extant literature is not an endpoint but merely a launching pad for future studies. Sudduth likewise offers no definitive solution at this time. Instead, his treatise encourages researchers to take a strategic step back in an effort to better specify and understand the fundamental questions that must be asked and answered before any substantive progress can be made in the first place.

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