“A thorn in the side”

Near-death experiences and consciousness

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Consciousness

What is Consciousness?

- The condition of being aware
- Subjective experience of internal and external phenomena
- Central to understanding, meaning, and volitional choice
- Consciousness defines our existence

Source: http://www.in5d.com/what-is-consciousness.html

Theories of Consciousness

- Conventional scientific theories based on materialist-reductionist approach
- Emphasises complex computational-like activity occurring in brain
- Consciousness can only occur in the ***presence*** of neurological activity

Source: http://www.scienceagogo.com/news/20140017222508.shtml

Near-Death Experiences

What are Near-Death Experiences [NDEs]?

"…subjectively profound psychological experiences involving a combination of elements; where the boundaries of space, time and perception are typically transcended…"

Source: http://www.supernaturalworldview.com/2014/05/02/gary-habermas-on-near-death-experiences-and-the-afterlife/

- Emotional Elements
  - intense, overwhelming emotions
  - cosmic unity and oneness

- Cognitive Elements
  - enhanced awareness/perception
  - rapid travel, often through a tunnel
  - life review

- Transcendental Elements
  - seeing a bright light
  - meeting deceased others

- Paranormal Elements
  - disembodiment
  - perception of future events

Who has NDEs?

- Usually people who have had a ‘critical incident’
  - heart attack, drowning, car accident, suicide, among others
  - 5-25% of cardiac arrest survivors
  - 4-9% of general community members will report an NDE
- No specific demographic characteristics are associated with an NDE
- NDEs have been reported across the globe throughout history

What happen after an NDE?

- The person is usually profoundly affected and transformed
- Typical positive aftereffects include:
  - loss of the fear of death
  - increased love and compassion for others
  - increased ‘thirst’ for knowledge
  - change to underlying values and beliefs
  - less concern with materialism
  - greater sense of spirituality

What causes NDEs?

- Some suggest involvement of biological, psychological, and transcendental factors
- None of these theories accounts for totality of elements in NDE
- No empirical studies have established these factors are involved in or produce NDE

A thorn in the side

Out-of-Body Episodes

- Characteristics:
  - feelings of disembodiment
  - perception of physical body and surrounding environment from position external to the physical body
  - perception of events not ordinarily perceived, due to physical condition

Paranormal Perceptions

- Characteristics:
  - non-local perception
  - Peak-in-Darien experiences

Complex Cognitive Abilities

- Characteristics:
  - lucid, vivid perceptual experiences
  - life review

The Thorn Embeds Deeper

- Implications:
  - consciousness appears to persist in the absence of a physical body
  - consciousness appears to persist across time
  - consciousness appears to operate in the absence of / beyond the reaches of conventional sensory modalities
  - consciousness may be more advanced than we can currently perceive

Conclusion

- NDEs provide some compelling examples that contradict current conventional theories

- Rather than being a ‘thorn in the side’, NDEs could be used to propel the field of consciousness studies

“Only when neuroscientists and psychologists examine current models of mind in light of NDEs…will we progress in our understanding of consciousness and its relation to brain”

(Kelly, Greyson, & Kelly, 2007, p. 421)

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