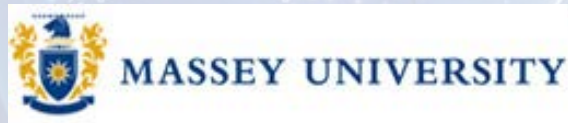


# “A thorn in the side”

## 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



# 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



# 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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