

Professor Bernard Carr - Synopsis

Mainstream materialist science suggests that consciousness is generated by the brain, so any notion of personal identity, individual characteristics or memories surviving the death of the physical body is excluded. However, the evidence from psychical research goes against the materialist view. It suggests that there is a direct interaction between minds and between consciousness and the material world which cannot be explained in materialist terms. Furthermore, phenomena such as near-death experiences and out-of-body experiences suggest that consciousness may exist independent of the body. This supports the notion that the brain may be a filter rather than a generator of consciousness, just as a TV set is a channel rather than a source of TV transmissions. In this case, some aspects of personality may survive death, and studies of apparitions, mediumistic communications and memories of previous lives may support such a view.

This talk will focus especially on the evidence for reincarnation from the testimony of young children and the study of birth defects, as pioneered by Ian Stevenson. It will also cover the evidence from hypnotic regression and religious experience, although this has a somewhat different status. More generally, psychical research suggests that mind is a fundamental rather than incidental feature of the universe and this raises the question of whether some form of post-materialist science can accommodate spiritual realities.