An Objective Correlate of Consciousness

To the Editor:

The work of many parapsychologists over the years suggests that it is likely that consciousness, when it has left the body, carries an energy envelope. This would account for the energy orbs that have been photographed in the past at purportedly haunted sites (Swanson, 2003). This envelope would consist of electromagnetic energy that could be detected by light sensors and strain gauges, for instance. This energy envelope would be an objective correlate of consciousness more useful to near-death researchers than the neural correlate of consciousness proposed by reductionist consciousness researchers (Chalmers, 1998) as it would allow an observer to “follow” consciousness during the initial “local” phase of exteriorization. It is important to realize that a correlate is just that: a concomitant phenomenon that is significantly statistically associated with that with which it correlates, and not necessarily identical with it or causally related to it. This fact sometimes seems to have been forgotten by proponents of biologically-based consciousness.

I propose equipping a room in which near-death experiences (NDEs) and/or out-of-body experiences (OBEs) might occur with light sensors and strain gauges, as was done with a target room by the American Society for Psychical Research (ASPR) (Osis and McCormick, 1980). If this procedure worked, it would allow an observer to witness an NDE or OBE during its occurrence under the right circumstances. Perhaps the procession of the individual’s consciousness about the room could be displayed on a video monitor driven by a computer that processes the sensor readings.

This would go a long way toward making consciousness accessible to science, in that it would provide an objective referent to what is inherently subjective. This would also possibly provide for the development of a “consciousness meter” as proposed by philosopher David Chalmers (Chalmers, 1998).
References


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