Anomalistic psychology: Exploring paranormal belief and experience

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Ever since records began, in every known society, a substantial proportion of the population has reported unusual experiences many of which we would today label as “paranormal”. Opinion polls show that the majority of the general public accepts that paranormal phenomena do occur. Such widespread experience of and belief in the paranormal can only mean one of two things. Either the paranormal is real, in which case this should be accepted by the wider scientific community which currently rejects such claims; or else belief in and experience of ostensibly paranormal phenomena can be fully explained in terms of psychological factors. This presentation will provide an introduction to the sub-discipline of anomalistic psychology, which may be defined as the study of extraordinary phenomena of behaviour and experience, in an attempt to provide non-paranormal explanations in terms of known psychological and physical factors. This approach will be illustrated with examples relating to a range of ostensibly paranormal phenomena.

Biography

Professor Chris French is the Head of the Anomalistic Psychology Research Unit in the Psychology Department at Goldsmiths, University of London. He is a Fellow of the British Psychological Society and of the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry, as well as being a Distinguished Supporter of the British Humanist Association and a member of the Scientific and Professional Advisory Board of the British False Memory Society. He has published over 100 articles and chapters covering a wide range of topics within psychology. His main area of research is the psychology of paranormal beliefs and anomalous experiences. He frequently appears on radio and television casting a sceptical eye over paranormal claims, as well as writing for the Guardian and The Skeptic magazine which, for more than a decade, he also edited. His most recent books are Why Statues Weep, co-edited with Wendy Grossman, Anomalistic Psychology, co-authored with Nicola Holt, Christine Simmonds-Moore, and David Luke, and Anomalistic Psychology: Exploring Paranormal Belief and Experience co-authored with Anna Stone. Follow him on Twitter: @chriscfrench