

***Dr. Nicholas Kardaras's Interview with Consciousness Research Pioneer Dr. William Braud  
(Conducted late 2009-early 2010)***

Oftentimes we read about various research and the implications thereof. But we don't very often have the opportunity to pick the brain of a research pioneer and ask what they thought was the most compelling or illuminating research during their careers. Or, also very telling, the reasons why that person chose to get into a particular research field; what were their personal thoughts and reflections on the subject?

It's for those reasons that I feel quite privileged to have been able to interview Dr. William Braud for this book.

Dr. Braud is widely regarded as one of the most respected and published pioneers in consciousness research. He had earned his Ph.D. in experimental psychology at the University of Iowa in 1967 and went on to the University of Houston where he taught and conducted research in learning, memory, motivation, perception, psychophysiology, and the biochemistry of memory.

He left his tenured position at the University of Houston in order to further explore the nature of human consciousness at the Mind Science Foundation (San Antonio, TX) where Dr. Braud directed research in parapsychology; health and well-being influences of relaxation, imagery, positive emotions, and intention; and psychoneuroimmunology. A prolific writer, Dr. Braud has published his findings and thoughts in over 250 professional journal articles, book chapters, and books.

He is currently Professor Emeritus at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology where he had served as Core Faculty and had directed doctoral dissertation research. Today, he continues

research, teaching, and writing in areas of exceptional human experiences, consciousness studies, transpersonal studies, spirituality, and expanded research methods.

I consider Dr. Braud one of the most intelligent, thoughtful and sincere people that I have ever met; and, in addition to having served as the chairperson of my doctoral dissertation committee, I am also proud to call him my mentor and my friend.

The following interview took place via e-mail over several weeks from late 2009 to early 2010 and is included here in its entirety.

**NK:** *I'd like to start by asking you to explain what first got you interested in consciousness research and, more specifically, consciousness research that explored past the boundaries of traditional or "mainstream" science?*

**Dr. Braud:** Temperamentally, I always have been drawn to unusual events—to things that do not fit our conventional understanding of how the world works. The American psychologist and philosopher William James once remarked that it is by studying such unusual and exceptional events—he called them the “unclassified residuum”—that important advances occur in science and in our general understanding, and that our later and more complete theories will be informed more by those irregular, exceptional phenomena than by what were supposed to be the rules.

My interest in consciousness studies and in parapsychology and psychical research did not arise from early or dramatic experiences in these areas. Rather, it arose gradually as an attraction to “exceptions” and as a form of intellectual curiosity.

As a youngster, I had read books--by J. B. Rhine, L. E. Rhine, Eileen Garrett, Rosalind Heywood, Edmund Gurney, Frederic Myers, Frank Podmore, Henry Sidgwick, and others—that

described spontaneous psychological experiences and serious research on topics such as extrasensory perception and psychokinesis, and I accepted the evidence for such things as sound.

During my later undergraduate training in physics and psychology and during my graduate training in experimental psychology I seem to have temporarily put aside or repressed my interest and belief in such phenomena. This may reflect a general tendency—present in all of us, to various degrees—of forgetting or discounting even strong evidence that does not fit well with our customary way of understanding the world. In the limited form of empiricism that was being taught and emphasized in my academic training, there was no place for psychological phenomena or even for consciousness itself.

My training focused on learning, memory, and motivation, and was strongly influenced by logical positivism and by behavioral approaches to psychological inquiry. I studied philosophy of science, epistemology, and ontology with Gustav Bergmann, who had been a member of the Vienna Circle, and studied theories of learning that had a neo-behaviorist (Hull-Spence and Skinnerian) emphasis.

I recall explaining to the introductory psychology classes that I led as a teaching assistant how extrasensory perception was a misnomer, since it was not possible to have a perception without a prior sensation. I was particularly taken with a paper that physicist Luis Alvarez had recently published in the journal *Science*, wherein he showed, mathematically, that what seemed to be unusual coincidences were not unusual or unexpected after all.

Once I completed my graduate studies and began my own university teaching career, however, my horizons began to expand. My interest in consciousness studies and in parapsychology was rekindled in the late 1960s due, primarily, to discussions with my undergraduate and graduate students about their psychic, out-of-body, and mystical experiences;

my growing interest in nonordinary ways of knowing and altered states of consciousness (in which psychical events often manifested); certain books that were coming to my attention; and personal experiences I began having in connection with relaxation, imagery, hypnosis, meditation, and various twilight states of consciousness.

I do not recall having had any psychic experiences myself—dramatic or otherwise—before this period; yet, I was intellectually curious about them and open to hearing and seriously considering the reports of others. To learn more about such experiences, I started reading the professional journals devoted to psychical research and parapsychology, and I began attending professional conferences in these areas. The more I learned, the more I became intrigued by these phenomena.

My first formal psi experiment was one that a graduate student and I designed to learn whether we could find evidence for telepathy and/or clairvoyance during experimental sessions conducted while the percipient was hypnotized. This early study, in which I played the role of “agent” or “sender,” yielded accurate and time-locked correspondences, even when the percipient and I were separated by great distances.

These results convinced me that it was possible for me to conduct fruitful studies in this area, and the findings led, ultimately, to a long series of research projects designed to uncover factors that might facilitate or impede psychic functioning in the lab—i.e., a research program devoted to exploring psi-conducive and psi-antagonistic conditions. (Psi is a shorthand expression for psychical experiences.)

Along with these formal laboratory studies, I began having many psi experiences myself, not only in the lab but also in my own life, outside of the laboratory—personal experiences of telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, psychokinesis, poltergeist-like occurrences,

synchronicities, and mental healing—so that I no longer could doubt the reality of these forms of psychic functioning.

**NK:** *I'd like to ask about that first psi experiment that you just mentioned with the hypnotized participant where you acted as sender. You mentioned that it "yielded accurate and time-locked correspondences"; can you talk a little bit more about that experiment and the results?*

**Dr. Braud:** In the hypnosis study that I mentioned, there were accurate correspondences between what the “sender” or “agent” was experiencing and what the distant “receiver” or “percipient” reported. The correspondences were not only for the sessions as a whole, but they also appeared to be time-locked—that is, the percipient’s tape recorded reports corresponded in time, within a given session, to the times of the agent’s experiences (early, middle, or late in a session).

For example, when the agent was thinking about a piano, the distant hypnotized percipient mentioned a piano; when the agent held a glass of ice water, the percipient mentioned “hands around a glass ... shaking because it’s cold”; when the agent held a hand over a candle flame, the distant percipient (located in a different part of a building or in another part of the city) mentioned “flames ... little flame which spread out ... felt heat.”

The major effect of this study was that it demonstrated to me that I was able to obtain accurate results in a telepathy experiment, and it led to a long series of studies in which my research team and I explored the psi-facilitating role of relaxation and related processes, similar to some of the processes involved in hypnosis.

**NK:** *From all of the research that you've conducted over the years, which two or three experiments (and results) stand out for you as being the most significant or the most eye-opening?*

**Dr. Braud:** Of the many research projects that we conducted, I'll mention three sets of experiments or experiences that stand out for me. The first set is a series of experiments in which we studied the psi-facilitating effects of various techniques that reduce “noise” or distractions—techniques that foster physical and mental quietude.

These techniques included progressive muscular relaxation (to reduce somatic distractions), autogenic training exercises (to foster emotional and autonomic quieting), sensory restriction techniques (to reduce sensory distractions and induce perceptual quietude), exercises to reduce excessive logical and analytical thinking, meditation-like exercises to reduce excessive cognitive and mental activity in general, and exercises that helped reduce excessive effortful striving for success in these psychic tasks.

All of these quieting techniques freed percipients from internal and external structuring constraints of their thoughts, images, and feelings, and allowed those three vehicles of awareness to change in ways that corresponded to what distant agents were experiencing. The same quieting techniques also served to reduce distractions so that the percipients were better able to attend to those subtle carriers of psi information—similar to ways in which reducing “noise” can help one detect ordinarily weak “signals.”

The second set of experiments involved distant mental interactions with living systems. In these experiments, persons were able to influence the physiological and behavioral activities of distant persons or animals by means of their focused intentions. When influencers attempted to increase or decrease specific actions (such as autonomic activity in persons or behaviors in

animals such as gerbils and fish), mentally and at a distance, the target systems of those persons or animals responded in appropriate ways.

In other words, one person's intentions and wishes that a distant person might become, for example, more relaxed, could actually foster greater relaxation in that distant person. That lengthy series of experiments also demonstrated that simply directing full attention toward another person (such as staring at that person's image on a closed circuit TV screen) was able to affect the distant person's physiological condition.

In one of our later studies, the attention focusing actions of one person were shown to help a distant person's ability to concentrate. These kinds of experimental results have important implications about our profound interconnections with others, and they also have helped identify processes that might play useful roles in the healing of ourselves and others.

The third thing I'd like to mention is not an experiment or set of experiments, but rather a set of personal experiences. During the many years in which we were conducting parapsychological research, I experienced many instances of telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, healing, and psychokinesis in my own life, outside of the laboratory. I'll mention only two of these. When I was teaching a university course on parapsychology, I would have personal experiences of the phenomena that I was covering in class.

For example, for about 2 weeks, I had almost daily experiences of precognition. I would have dreams about something I would hear on the radio (not a clock radio) about 20 minutes after awakening. To give a flavor of these, one of my dreams involved a monkey that was a catcher in a trapeze aerial act; on the radio about 20 minutes after my dream ended there was a skit about a monkey that was a catcher in a trapeze aerial act.

A few years later, while I was heavily involved in psychokinesis research projects, I had the experience of a closed folder of safety matches bursting into flames as I reached for them, right after someone had reminded me of a personnel firing issue. The part of me that knows how to do such things somehow was able to convert a firing-related thought into an actual physical fire. All of these kinds of personal psychical experiences helped me understand more about psi processes, helped convince me further about their reality, and indicated some of the practical functions that such experiences can serve.

**NK:** *When you mentioned your experiments on reducing "noise" as well as your research on DMILS, can you give a sense of how statistically significant your findings were (without getting too technical)? And, if you can, can you give an idea as to just how much research was done exploring these types of phenomena so that the reader who might not be that familiar with psi research might be able to get a sense of the incredible amount of research that was done?*

**Dr. Braud:** You asked about the magnitudes of effects and the statistical significance of our various kinds of parapsychological experiments and information about how much other research might have been done exploring these.

Our own early work on direct mental interactions with living systems (DMILS) involved 15 experiments, 323 sessions, 271 different "influencees," and 62 different "influencers." The overall effect size—a measure of the effective strength of a treatment—was 0.25. Effect sizes in psychological and medical experiments can vary from zero to 1.00. An effect size of 0.25 can be understood as the percentage of improvement that might be expected from some treatment—in



this case, a treatment with such an effect size could improve, say, survival rate from 37.5 percent to 52.5 percent.

This is hardly a trivial effect. It is noteworthy that much-heralded findings of studies of the effectiveness of cardiovascular-helping drugs such as propranolol and aspirin yielded effect sizes of only .04 and .03. So, these psychic influences were nearly 10 times as powerful as these conventional drug effects.

The noise-reduction and DMILS studies are only a few of a large number of other kinds of psi studies that we and others have conducted. Overall, thousands of such studies have been conducted, and space does not allow an adequate treatment of these and their results. However, Dean Radin has provided excellent summaries of many of these experiments in two recent books, *The Conscious Universe* and *Entangled Minds*.

In those books, readers will find statistical summaries of a variety of parapsychological experiments such as dream telepathy, psychic functioning under conditions of sensory restriction (Ganzfeld), DMILS and remote detection of staring studies, card-guessing ESP studies, precognition (future-knowing) studies, psychokinesis (mind-over-matter) influences of dice and electronic random generators, and testing under hypnosis studies.

For each of these types of studies, the number of studies varied from 15 to 595, the number of sessions or trials varied from 379 to 1.1 billion, and the results of the experiments in terms of odds against chance varied from 100 to 1 to  $2.6 \times 10^{76}$  to 1. Overall, it is not unusual to find effect sizes between .25 and .33, which compare favorably with those found in conventional psychological and medical studies. These are impressive findings, especially considering the very small number of researchers who are active in this area and considering the very slight funding that has been available for such studies.

*NK: I was fascinated to hear about your experiments that endeavored to reduce "noise" or distractions in order to foster "mental quietude" with the idea that those type of techniques would facilitate or increase psi-effects. One of the ideas discussed in this book is the Pythagorean notion of "tuning" oneself to be able to apprehend the larger "Informational Realm" aka Plato's Ideal Realm; thus, in that Greek context, psi phenomena would be the ability to access that transcendent information. And there's been, to my understanding, the tendency to privilege either "mental quietude" or, at the other extreme, "mental dis-quietude" in the form of intensive intellectual thinking or contemplation as psi-facilitating methods.*

*But I discovered a rather fascinating perspective put forth by Marghanita Laski's in her work exploring the "Eureka" experience. I'm not sure if you're familiar with her work (her book was "Ecstasy: A Study of Some Secular and Religious Experiences) wherein she interviewed people who had scientific Eureka-type of breakthroughs and was able to identify some common themes (what she identified as 6-steps). But the first part of the process involved deep, intensive thinking about a problem (what we'll call "tilling the soil") before the later steps that involved a person quitting entirely out of frustration as they put the subject out of their (conscious) mind entirely...and then--Shazam! the lightning bolt of inspiration, with the solution manifesting fully formed.*

*Joseph Chilton Pearce called these Shazam moments of inspiration necessarily "unconflicted"; it was the "quietude" after the "intellectual storm", as it was, that allowed the transcendent information to enter the mind. But not just any mind; it was a mind where the appropriate charge was generated by deep-thinking that then allowed the lightning bolt to co-create itself to form a sky--ground dynamic. And I think that this dynamic might also explain some of those amazing Savant abilities that we've discussed in the past.*

*So I guess my first question, after that rather long intro, is to ask you what your thoughts are about that. Does that notion of deep thinking-then quietude as a means towards transcendent insight ring true based on your research and your own insights and reflections?*

**Dr. Braud:** You asked whether the notion of deep thinking then quietude as a means of obtaining transcendent insight might also apply to my own parapsychological research. Yes, the common idea here is that one first fills one's mind actively and deliberately by thinking about or contemplating some issue, problem, or aim, and then releasing that active effort and "relaxing" and allowing the needed information to surface or the effect to occur more effortlessly and automatically.

This fits nicely with a well-known model of the creative process in areas of art, literature, science, and music, in which one first prepares oneself by actively seeking and thinking about relevant information (immersion), then releasing that effort during a period of quietude (incubation), and awaiting the sought-after information to spontaneously erupt into awareness (illumination). Then, of course, one begins to think actively again in order to verify, revise, communicate, and validate what has arisen.

In parapsychology, researcher Rhea White, back in 1964, presented a similar model or method for obtaining accurate psychic information. In her method, the steps were (1) Relaxation,

(2) Engaging the Conscious Mind, (2A) The Demand, (3) The Waiting, the Tension, and the Release, and (4) The Way the Response Enters Consciousness. A very interesting account of the method and findings can be accessed at <http://www.aspr.com/methods.htm#1>

In my view, the “active” part of the approach to good psychic functioning is handled through the deliberate use of *full intention* and *focused attention* on what one wishes to learn or influence. Then, one releases that effort, frees oneself from various structuring constraints, enters a condition of quietude, and confidently awaits the desired outcome.

**NK:** *And that then leads me to my next question: what are your thoughts about the nature of things...the nature of thoughts...information...the universe...I guess what I'm asking is what cosmological paradigm do you embrace that might explicate some of your research findings.*

**Dr. Braud:** You asked for my thoughts about what sort of cosmological paradigm might be useful in understanding these kinds of parapsychological research findings. Let me respond to this in two ways—in terms of types of theories that have been proposed to account for psychic functioning and in terms of a more general worldview that accommodates not only psi but other special experiences as well.

Although overall research findings do establish the reality of psi and although we have identified various physical, physiological, and psychological variables that have relationships with psi, we do not yet truly understand the essential nature of psi or understand “how it works.”

Many theories have been proposed to account for psychic functioning. These are of three major types. The first set of theories are *transmission* theories that suggest that remote knowing or remote influence is accomplished through some physical or quasi-physical force that carries information from one location to another through some channel or medium in a manner

analogous to mental radio: There is transmission and reception of information, intelligence, or energy.

Such models have many difficulties. The mediating force has not been identified, nor has the "channel," nor do we know of mechanisms through which conscious content at the "source" can be coded into or modulated onto the "carrier" then decoded or demodulated from the carrier at the "destination." The process does not behave as other forms of transmission customarily behave with respect to physical factors such as distance, shields, screens, amplifiers, attenuators, the nature of the "target" or of the conveyed information (message content), or (perhaps most problematically) time. So, this does not appear to be a satisfactory explanation.

A second set of theories could be called *reorganization* theories. In these, nothing is posited to be transmitted from point to point. Rather, the "noise," randomness, or disorder already present at the "target" (in cases of psychokinesis) or in the brainmind (in cases of telepathy, clairvoyance, or precognition) is reorganized in a manner that creates the desired outcome (and *appears* force-like) at the "target" or results in some intelligence or information in a percipient's brainmind that resembles or corresponds to that at the "source."

The process is one that is analogous to resonance, but without the familiar mediators of resonance. The challenges facing such theories are determinations of what precisely "feeds" the reorganization process at the target end or brainmind end, and what precisely specifies the particular form the reorganization will take.

In the third set of theories, which could be called *holonomic* or *correspondence* theories, nothing is either transmitted or reorganized. All information is already present throughout all parts of all systems, in some implicate or potential form, in a manner not unlike the complex interference patterns in which information is represented in a hologram.

The problem then becomes one of accessing or reading out (through intention and focused attention) information that is already available at all points, specifying the grounds or fields that make all of this possible, and accounting for creation of novelty within such a system. How do the *intended* readouts or effects occur at some particular time, as opposed to a vast number of alternative possibilities? This third type of theory is the one that I personally prefer.

In more general terms, the data not only from parapsychological research, but also from other areas such as quantum physics, the study of genius and savants, and the study of mystical and similar experiences, tends to suggest that there exist two realms or levels of reality. One is the familiar physical realm in which we function daily and which is governed by the familiar processes and laws involving space, time, matter, energy, causation, sensation, and conscious thought.

However, there seems to be another underlying or overarching realm that has a different nature and functions in a different manner. Perhaps this could be called a *nonlocal realm*, in which the expected processes and principles no longer apply and which has its own nature and laws, and in which everything is very profoundly interconnected and interaccessible. This other realm has been described and named in different ways by workers in different disciplines.

In physics, this might be what has been described as configuration space or Hilbert space (the realm of the Schrödinger wave function before it is reduced or “collapsed” to yield an observable particle) or perhaps the quantum foam or zero point field or implicate order from which more “physical” entities may emerge. In various psychological, philosophical, spiritual, wisdom, and esoteric traditions, this other realm might be known as the akashic field, the ideal realm, the realm of archetypes, the collective unconscious, the subliminal or transliminal realm, and so on.

In any case, under special conditions, knowings or influences or entities might enter or rush from such a realm into our familiar physical realm. These inrushes may take the forms of creative insights, inspirations, genius, psychic functioning, mystical experiences, epiphanies, and other exceptional human experiences. They may even take the form of the physical particles, energies, cabbages, kings, and the many Ten Thousand Things that we have come to know and love in this physical realm.

**NK:** *How beautifully—and quite comprehensively—said! Thank you so much for having taken the time to participate in this interview. I just want to ask you one final question: Pythagoras or Plato?*

**Dr. Braud:** Both!

>>>> End of Interview <<<<<