

**Imants Barusš & Julia Mossbridge**

*Transcendent Mind: Rethinking the Science of Consciousness*

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This book arrives with a reputation. Apparently, it is the first book on *psi* and other anomalous human experiences to be published by the rather traditionalist APA (American Psychological Association). If this is true, this is likely due to the fact that much of the book relies on carefully monitored and repeated experiments to demonstrate the statistical veracity of such things as precognition, remote viewing, clairvoyance, mental telepathy, and even psychokinesis. This is the key to the authors' claim of empirical testing and scientific proof.

Many of the claims, such as the Ganzfeld telepathy experiments and remote viewing trials, are well known but have been dismissed as proving nothing because of flaws or fraud or because the results were not consistent. However, in 1996, an unbiased statistician named Jessica Utts was contracted by a U.S. government agency to review the experiments. She stated:

Using the standards applied to any other area of science, it is concluded that psychic functioning has been well established. The statistical results of the studies are far beyond what is expected by chance. Arguments that these results could be due to methodological flaws in the experiments are soundly refuted. ... Such consistency cannot be readily explained by claims of flaws or fraud. (as cited by the authors, pp. 36-37)

This is the sort of evidence that allows the authors to assert empirical validity and scientific proof for the extraordinary claims they make. These statistical reports are made throughout the early chapters and do not make for the most spellbinding reading, but later they apply their findings to conclusions about the nature of consciousness and develop a transcendent ontology of their own that requires mental experiences that escape the net of the physical in general and brains in particular.

This is not a long book, consisting of only eight self-contained chapters that work in concert to lead toward the implication of a kind of idealist ultimate reality. Despite its size, it seems they manage to cover all aspects of *psi*, including post-mortem communication with 'discarnate entities', and they cite nearly all the well-known authors in this field over the past decades and earlier. Perhaps a short review is in order before I offer my own critique.

The Introduction and first chapter set the tone and make it clear that reductive materialism is considered to be moribund, though they resist an emotional polemic against it:

We are in the midst of a sea change. Receding from view is materialism, whereby physical phenomena are assumed to be primary and consciousness is regarded as secondary. Approaching our sights is a complete reversal of perspective. According to this alternative view, consciousness is primary and the physical is secondary. In other words, materialism is receding and giving way to ideas about reality in which consciousness plays a key role. (p. 3)

Since consciousness released from its physical limitations may be unbounded, the door is opened for an examination of the wide variety of experiential phenomena that constitute what today is called simply 'psi'. Chapter 1 is a critical examination of materialism. It contains an especially strong section noting how scientific materialism so dominates the academy that any other worldview is often subject to mockery, dismissal, or official censure. I have seen this myself when seeking promotion in my university: my consciousness studies publications (rarely involving psi) were still archly interrogated for lack of experimental proofs.

Chapter 2 explores 'shared mind', that is, a concept that will allow for 'anomalous information transfer', once known as ESP, including remote viewing. There are a great many experimental proofs of a statistical nature explored, and they certainly make the case that *something* is missing from the skeptical materialist worldview since there are so many phenomena that cannot be explained within it. Chapter 3 questions our daily sense of the passage of time by bringing up strong evidence for precognition. They note that unconscious precognition is common but most of us fail to bring it to consciousness or forget it once we have done so. They suggest actual time is *deep time*, a reversible ordering of events beyond our daily sense of apparent time.

Chapter 4 was the most difficult chapter for me to take seriously, but I strove for an open mind while reading their anecdotes or evidence. The authors make the claim that 'discarnate beings' seem to exist in some realm of their own and communications with them are possible. This leads to the question posed in chapter 5: can the mind exist outside of the brain? Here their *empirical* evidence centres on near-death studies. They claim impartiality by listing what they see as all possible objections to the evidence, but in the end they embrace most such claims. Mental control over physical processes (related to psychokinesis) is examined in chapter 6, and here they come up with strong scientific evidence (which will no doubt be just as strongly refuted).

This leads to their conclusions and applications in the two final chapters. Chapter 7, 'Reintegrating Subjectivity Into Consciousness Research', suggests that we need to pay more attention to our own psychological biases in consciousness studies. In this way, an open-minded logic will help us to more honestly evaluate the empirical evidence, which they suggest will lead to knowledge of anomalous ways of gaining knowledge. These insights could be transformative for the researcher, and lead to transcendent states of consciousness. 'Assuming the existence of something like what we have loosely identified as deep consciousness, extended mind, shared mind, the prephysical substrate, and so on, we are likely a long way from understanding consciousness. What is needed is a surge of creative research taking the investigation of consciousness in new directions' (p. 184). They then list 10 explicit steps that should open consciousness studies to the deeper truths of psi and transcendent experience that they have affirmed. They seem to back the second-person phenomenological perspective as outlined in *The View from Within* issues of JCS 6 (2-3), 1999, and JCS 16 (10-12), 2009, when they state, 'Again, we emphasize that keen self-observation as well as

comparing notes with others can help inform a determination about whether information is being fabricated or accurately received' (p. 189).

If such transcendence of the physical is really possible – and the authors claim that's exactly what they have discovered – then a new model of consciousness (really a new ontology) is necessary, and that's what they describe in chapter 8, 'Transcendent Mind'. Their choice is called the 'flicker-filter' theory. The *filter* part sees the brain as what Aldous Huxley called a reducing valve, which basically limits or filters access to transcendent experiences, leaving only daily functional consciousness. The *flicker* part is the stroboscopic image of reality described in both Buddhist meditation texts and in some 'stochastic' quantum explanations of consciousness: 'The idea is that physical manifestation comes into existence and disappears, over and over again, producing the appearance of a continuous stream of consciousness from a series of discrete "nows"' (p. 181). Between these flashing 'nows' is the 'total aliveness' of a 'timeless, spaceless void', which implies the world is born anew in each new flashing 'now' appearance. What does this matter to us? 'This model predicts that both the future and past can be changed, although it is not clear how one would obtain evidence that that had occurred given that one is always in a "now" with consonant past and future projections' (p. 183). In other words, we would never know if this was true.

This is strong stuff that, despite all the evidence and argumentation in the book, demands a willing suspension of disbelief to read with full attention and an open mind. It is certainly significant that a statistician who examined the pages of experimental evidence declared that the "statistical results of the studies are far beyond what is expected by chance," but for the rest of us a 54% success rate in testing, say, direct mental influence still looks a lot like chance. The statistical evidence proves mental influence, but the percentage indicates that conscious agency operates only irregularly and may reveal that such influence is often a random, unconscious event.

Baruš and Mossbridge claim they approached their evidence objectively but with open minds that led them to their extravagant conclusions. I have my doubts. The authors have, professionally speaking, a lifelong commitment to such research and, most likely, experiences of their own they only hint at here, so it seems likely they began this book as committed to their findings. I find much of their data convincing, *as data*, but this does not necessarily convince a critical thinker of the deeper truths behind these anomalies. For example, I just *feel* that discarnate entities are impossible. Why haven't they dispersed and in what in-between realm could they possibly exist?

The authors' premier example of the deceased grandmaster chess player from the beginning of the last century who played Victor Korchnoi (once ranked third in the world) through a non-chess playing medium in a slow game that lasted over seven years is certainly entertaining. Even though the dead grandmaster finally lost because he had apparently not learned that the "French Defence" he used had been penetrated since his death and was now obsolete, the story finally stretches credibility. There are so many such stories (which may be taken as support or skepticism)! Rather than dead discarnate entities existing in a non-physical ether, it seems to me much more likely they are projections of living psyches that may be having clairvoyant experiences or not.

I have not had any conscious experiences, so far as I can remember, that would incline me to believe in, say, discarnate entities, so all the statistics and anecdotes in the world cannot really turn me (and probably other readers) into channelers or transcendentalists. My own mother

promised me that she would try to contact me after her death, but, to my relief, has not done so. The authors' noting that most psi experiences happen unconsciously or are soon forgotten does not help the problem. In that case, it's no wonder I feel bemused by all the wonders revealed in here.

However, the evidence *is* there, and the authors are obviously well versed in the data, anecdotes, and their own personal experiences. I would agree that their research recommendations to the conscious studies community and psychologists should be taken seriously. If we come to recognize that such extended mind experiences are happening for others, they may be more likely to happen for us. I for one would love to gain insight or even directly experience the transcendent mind, but in the meantime I must accept the burden of my mundane consciousness and soldier on, as will most readers, though some will likely considerably expand their worldview.