




AUTHOR INTERVIEW

Imants Barušs and Julia Mossbridge: On the Transcendent Mind

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This is the latest in a series of interviews with APA Books authors. In this interview, Ron Teeter, Technical Editing and Design Supervisor at APA Books, spoke with Imants Barušs, BSc, MSc, PhD, and Julia Mossbridge, PhD. Their book, [Transcendent Mind: Rethinking the Science of Consciousness](#) was recently released by APA Books.

Note: The opinions expressed in this interview are those of the authors and should not be taken to represent the official views or policies of the American Psychological Association.



Your new book is titled *Transcendent Mind*. What does that mean?

IB: By “transcendent mind” we mean that mind cannot be fully explained in physical terms.

JM: We examine data pertaining to the idea that there is a nonlocal mental aspect to us –

Imants Barušs is a professor of psychology at King's University College at Western University where he has been teaching undergraduate courses about consciousness for 29 years. His research has been focused on the fundamental nature of consciousness, with academic papers having been published not only in consciousness journals but also psychology, philosophy, physics, mathematics, anthropology, and other science journals. He is the author of five previous books including *Authentic Knowing* and *Alterations of Consciousness*.



Julia Mossbridge is an experimental psychologist and cognitive neuroscientist

an extended and shared mind. Another name for this mind is “transcendent” because, to the extent it exists, it seems to transcend our waking experience as well as our physical boundaries.

How do you see this book as fitting in with the field of consciousness studies today?

IB: Consciousness studies has become its own discipline with contributions from psychology, cognitive science, neuroscience, philosophy, medical science, physics, anthropology, religious studies, and other disciplines. This book is timely because we are reflecting the growing recognition in the field of consciousness studies that consciousness is an ontologically primary aspect of reality.

JM: When writing this book, we kept in mind that consciousness studies curricula are cross-disciplinary. Consciousness studies asks, “How can we use physics, biology, sociology, psychology – all the academic tools at our disposal – to answer this one question: How does consciousness work?” The question is difficult enough and complex enough that to even begin to address it requires bringing together multiple disciplines.

Throughout *Transcendent Mind*, you emphasize that there is a credible case to be made for a paradigm shift in how we study the mind. Can you offer an example or two here? What would you like to see the field move toward?

at the Institute of Noetic Sciences and a Visiting Scholar in Psychology at Northwestern University. She pursues an understanding of time, especially in terms of the relationships between conscious and non-conscious processing of events. In 2014, she received the Charles Honorton Integrative Contributions award for her work in bringing the phenomenon of presentiment to the mainstream. She is the author of *Unfolding: The Science of Your Soul's Work* and the upcoming mystical/philosophical adventure *The Garden: An Inside Experiment*.

IB: The paradigmatic cases are those in which a person who has had a near-death experience subsequently makes veridical reports of events that occurred during a time when there was insufficient brain activity of the sort that is usually thought to be required for perception and cognition to occur. There are no adequate conventional explanations of such reports. I would like to see the field of consciousness studies move toward an exploration of alternative theories, along with experiments and field studies to test those theories.

JM: The evidence from carefully controlled telepathy, precognition, and clairvoyance studies indicate that there is some aspect of the mind that is nonlocal. An example will not do this research justice, as frankly for most of us in our everyday consciousness we do not experience these events, and when we think we do, we can easily dismiss them because they arose in situations that were not well controlled. Other explanations can always be found outside the rigor of a controlled experiment, and in many cases, these other explanations are correct. What I would like to see the field move toward is a willingness to examine these results, which have been replicated in some cases more than most other psychology and physiology results, with the seriousness they deserve. In order to get there, we must first acknowledge and remove a great deal of persistent and unscientific knee-jerk bias against these results.

You open your first chapter, “Beyond

Materialism,” with the quotation “The idea that consciousness may be fundamental and matter secondary is gaining ground.” How so?

IB: Science, in brief, is the activity of continuously generating empirical data and of discarding theories with poor goodness-of-fit and replacing

them with theories with better goodness-of-fit. With that quotation we are suggesting that there is growing recognition by scientists that the theory that matter is primary and consciousness is secondary is being replaced by the theory that consciousness is primary and matter is secondary.

JM: The idea that matter is fundamental and creates consciousness does not seem to work, so people interested in understanding consciousness are turning to other ideas. In the past decade or so we have seen formalized hints from clinical psychologists, experimental psychologists, and neuroscientists that the idea that consciousness is fundamental is perhaps not beyond the pale. For instance, we refer in the book to a set of papers from clinical psychologists that explore seriously the idea that telepathy may occur in the therapeutic setting. Experimental psychologists have been quietly examining access to extended (non-local) mental abilities such as precognition and clairvoyance. Neuroscientists are now discussing a pantheistic view – that everything has consciousness in it – which is difficult to separate from the idea that consciousness is fundamental.

I’m quoting from your Introduction: “The purpose of this book is to explore what consciousness looks like when we do not automatically assume that consciousness must arise from the workings of matter.” Why do you think that the pursuit of so fundamental a question inspires such resistance among scientists, especially when vast majorities of people profess religious beliefs that paint a similar picture?

IB: That is an empirical question for which psychologists, who study

human behavior, have answers. We give some of those answers in Chapter 1 “Beyond Materialism.” In brief, the relevant parameters are a list of the usual suspects, highlighted perhaps by critical thinking being drowned out by compliance with normative behavior.

JM: For decades neuroscientists were taught that our subjective experience is an illusion (discounting the obvious fact that illusions are subjective experiences themselves). To me, the impressively strong dismissal of the only thing that we can actually be sure of – that we have subjective experience – suggests that scientists, and probably others, have to be scared of something. What is that? Well, I think many people have an intuition about how consciousness really works, but it is more unconscious in some people than others. The intuition is that at some basic level we are all connected – there is no clear boundary between some aspects of ourselves. This lack of boundaries suggests a lack of control, which can induce fear in all of us. At the risk of seeming too Freudian, one might imagine that the more unconscious this intuition is, the less likely someone will recognize it as an accurate intuition and the more likely it will only manifest fearful behavior as its telltale signature.

There appears to be a growing recognition in psychology of the importance of spirituality in clients’ worldviews, and certainly APA has published significantly in this area. Do you see the concept of transcendent mind as having reverberations here?

IB: My background is in mathematics and experimental psychology, and Julia’s background is in neuroscience and experimental psychology, so we simply allowed the arguments for transcendent mind to naturally grow out of the science itself without the use of the s-word. The overlap between what we have written and “spirituality” of various sorts can be developed by those who are interested in doing so. In fact, I myself have previously written two books along those lines: *Authentic Knowing: The Convergence of Science and Spiritual Aspiration* (Purdue University Press, 1996) and *Science as a Spiritual Practice* (Imprint Academic, 2007).

JM: The “s-word” Imants is referring to is “spirituality” – we use the

“science” word a lot, and it is science we are trained to do. But yes, people interested in spirituality tend to be interested in exploring the idea of a transcendent or non-physical mind. As to books about the science of spirituality, I too have written one: *Unfolding: The Perpetual Science of Your Soul’s Work* (New World Library, 2002).

In one chapter you review near-death experiences, a subject that is often given much attention in the popular media. You state that “the evidence could be read as indicating that, in some exceptional cases, the more the brain is compromised, the greater the clarity of mental activity when it comes to perceiving information that seems normally to be hidden from the realm of our ordinary experiences.” This is one of a number of directions in which you discuss and present evidence for the separation of mind from brain. How close do you think we are – in the scientific community and society – to taking this seriously?

IB: We give some of the survey data to answer that question in the book. In general, I would summarize those data by saying that the idea that the mind could be separate from the brain is taken seriously by a much greater proportion of the scientific community than we are led to believe, because scientists who take that idea seriously stay silent so as to avoid reprisals. One of the purposes of our book is to encourage other scientists who have similar ideas to speak up. In “society,” outside the scientific community and away from formal institutions of various sorts, the notion of a mind separate from the brain is, arguably, the normative view.

JM: However, this societal or non-academic view is rarely made explicit or rigorously tested, even in thought experiments. It is more the folk view that “mind” and “body” are separate, which doesn’t inform us about their relationship. That’s one of the difficulties here; the data support both clear instances in which changes in the brain’s status influence the mind – in both directions! In some cases you have a demonstrable, seemingly causal relationship between brain and mind – and in other cases you have a demonstrable, seemingly causal relationship between mind and brain. So the integration of these data, rather than falling on one side of a philosophical debate or another, is what we are attempting to facilitate.

You’ve probably answered this question, or a variation of it, many times, but have either or both of you had a particular experience, or experiences, that led you to take on the subjects in *Transcendent Mind*?

IB: I became intellectually interested in the subject matter of *Transcendent Mind* as a child and have continued to study it ever since. Personal experiences came much later, first, in the form of precognitive dreams, and, years later, as remote viewing and influencing. I have described those experiences in a separate book titled *The Impossible Happens* (Iff Books, 2013).

JM: For me it was the reverse. As a child I had multiple precognitive dreams that were about mundane occurrences, but were remarkably specific. I kept a dream journal to make sure I wasn’t just confabulating my memories. These experiences continuously reminded me that we do not understand time very well. As an adult I had a near-death experience and a healing experience that were both so remarkable that I had to think about alternatives to materialism.



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Dr Ruth Richards says:

February 19, 2019 at 1:46 pm

This is a marvellous, visionary, and very well documented book that heralds a shift in paradigm in the mainstream for Consciousness Studies. This is now a required book for a

course I teach at Saybrook University. Congratulations to APA Books and to Drs. Baruss and Mossbridge for your vision and insight.

Dr. Ruth Richards, Editor (APA Books, 2007). *Everyday Creativity and New Views of Human Nature; Psychological, Social, and Spiritual Perspectives* (Note: my excellent editor at APA was the interviewer here, Ron Teeter)

(also) Ruth Richards, Author (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018). *Everyday Creativity and the Healthy Mind: Dynamic New Paths for Self and Society*. The Baruss and Mossbridge book is cited repeatedly in this new book of mine!

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