

DR. DEAN RADIN SHARES HIS VIEWS ON PARAPSYCHOLOGY, MATERIALISM AND CONSCIOUSNESS

By Mary Ann Bohrer

Dean Radin, PhD, is a founding board member of the Academy for the Advancement of Postmaterialist Sciences (AAPS). He is also Chief Scientist at the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS) and Associated Distinguished Professor of Integral and Transpersonal Psychology at the California Institute of Integral Studies. He earned BSEE and Masters degrees in electrical engineering and a PhD in psychology, and is one of the leading parapsychology researchers in the country. His most recently released book, Real Magic (Penguin Random House, 2018), gained endorsements from two Nobel Laureates, a president of the American Statistical Association, a former program director from the National Science Foundation, and many other prominent academics.

When Dr. Dean Radin was 10-years old, he was reading a great deal of science fiction and fairy tales, and those stories sparked his curiosity. “I thought, ‘Could the things that are described in these stories be true?’ And that led me to discover that there was actually a scientific discipline that studied those questions -- called parapsychology,” says Dr. Radin. “So I started reading the parapsychology literature, and that is what first attracted my attention to this field.”

When Dr. Radin went to college, his primary focus was the violin, which he started playing at age 5. But he majored in electrical engineering, partially because pursuing a career as a professional violinist requires one to also be an athlete (which he is not), and also because studying parapsychology was not an option. “There wasn’t anywhere in the world at the time where you could go to study parapsychology at an accredited university. And – even today -- there’s still only a handful of places where that is possible,” explains Dr. Radin. “There are still no accredited departments of parapsychology. It’s not considered a stand-alone discipline. So I earned a BSEE degree in electrical engineering, with honors in physics, from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and later an M.S. in electrical engineering and a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Illinois.”

After graduating from graduate school, Dr. Radin worked as a scientist engaged in industrial research at AT&T Bell Labs. But his career path took a radical shift in 1985 when he was asked to join a classified program studying psychic ability for various U.S. military and intelligence organizations. Later, he was a visiting scholar at the University of Edinburgh and held an appointment at Princeton University, where he focused on studies of telepathy and psychokinesis. Today, Dr. Radin is considered one of the foremost researchers in the field of parapsychology.

The broader scientific community has been slow to accept the findings of parapsychology, and the reason for that reluctance runs deep. “If you earn an advanced degree in a scientific discipline, you’ve spent something like 25 years working within a certain scientific worldview,” says Dr. Radin. “And that worldview, called materialism, is very difficult to reconcile with the idea that psychic or magical phenomena can be real. For many scientists, such phenomena are viewed as literally impossible because they

don't fit within a materialistic framework. That's why most scientists reject any evidence for these phenomena, regardless of how rigorous the empirical data may be. It's really that simple."

While many scientists publicly deny an interest in parapsychological phenomena, privately most are intrigued. They have just learned to hide their interests to protect their careers. "There are plenty of people -- in fact, the majority of the population and the majority of scientists -- who are very interested in these topics, but they know they're not supposed to talk about it," says Dr. Radin. "It's considered beyond the pale, so you admit an interest in these topics at risk for your career. That's why I have plenty of mainstream colleagues who are interested in these things but they dare not talk about it. It's similar to any kind of social taboo -- most people, because they want to be responsible and not lose their job, will go along with the status quo. When the status quo changes its views, then they'll be happy to admit their interests."

Regardless of the risk, in the past few years Dr. Radin is seeing a growing number of scientists who are beginning to accept the phenomena of parapsychology. "More and more prominent scientists from different fields are slowly developing a more comprehensive view of the nature of reality and consciousness," says Dr. Radin. "I mean, this is not exactly a sea change yet, but it's a little like when the ocean retreats just before a tsunami. It's an indicator that something big is in the process of happening, and the changes are already evident at the top tier of the scientific mainstream."

Some scientists have still not decided how they view parapsychology and related topics -- one way or the other. "These scientists were open-minded to begin with -- they just didn't know that these data were available, or they didn't know that there was a relevant scientific literature -- so they were on the fence," explains Dr. Radin. "But people who are on the fence can be persuaded by evidence, because the evidence is there. For people who are on the other side of the fence, nothing can persuade them -- with one possible exception, and that is personal experience with these phenomena. A single personal experience, like a near death experience, is far more convincing to a skeptic than loads and loads of data."

Fortunately, society in general appears to be embracing the concept of consciousness more than ever before. "Just look at the number of conferences that are being held on consciousness -- both inside and outside of the academic world," notes Dr. Radin. "Thirty years ago, there weren't any meetings on this subject. Now, we're saturated with them. Every weekend, you can find a serious venue discussing the nature of consciousness in one form or another. So it's clear that there is a trend toward more openness to these topics."

"I believe that one of the reasons for this trend is due to people's concern about what we're doing to the planet -- what's happening with climate change. So there's real-world pressure to better understand who and what we are, and history shows that society as a whole can move quickly when that sort of pressure arises. We seem to be getting more

and more of these pressures every day to do something to raise awareness about consciousness, otherwise humanity might well be headed toward extinction.”

Would an acceptance of consciousness prove to be a benefit to the world? According to Dr. Radin, there would likely be many important benefits, but individuals who stubbornly insist that materialism is the only way to understand reality could slow down the process. “Basically, the current materialistic worldview is nihilistic. It says there’s no purpose or meaning to anything, so life is pointless,” says Dr. Radin. “This is the worldview presented by science, and it gives rise to behavior like greed. That is, if you only live once, and nothing actually matters, then the most rational thing you can do is grab everything that you possibly can, and to hell with other people. If the current scientific worldview is completely correct, and we do in fact live in a nihilistic universe, then that’s a completely rational way to live. But if that worldview is not completely correct, then we had better figure it out where we’ve got it wrong. I think a case can be made that an exclusively materialistic worldview is making the Earth uninhabitable. We are killing it and ourselves.

“To prevent that murder, we need to be much clearer on who and what we are, and what consciousness actually is. Maybe there’s more meaning inherent in the universe, and maybe consciousness is much more powerful than we think. Gaining a better understanding of consciousness could change the very nature of civilization, and how civilization works.”

As a founding board member of the AAPS, Dr. Radin is optimistic about the future – particularly as it relates to the way that the scientific community views parapsychology and consciousness. “Scientists are like all other humans -- we tend to follow the herd. If thought leaders change their minds, then the rest of us will tend to go along with them,” says Dr. Radin. That could make the study of psi phenomena and related topics far more acceptable in the academic world, which is where it needs to be. With greater acceptance, we could crack the taboo that has prevented these topics from being discussed seriously. I’m an optimist, so I believe that this paradigm shift is not only possible, but in the process of happening.”