

# **The Conscious Universe: A Narrative–Research Exploration of Mind, Science, and Possibility**

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**By Jim Griest**

## **1. Defining ESP and Its Legitimacy**

Extrasensory Perception, or ESP, is most often defined as the reception of information that bypasses the known physical senses -- perceiving with the mind rather than the eyes or ears. The difficulty begins there: a phenomenon that cannot be measured, repeated, or clearly bounded by physical laws defies the very framework of science.

For a claim to be scientifically legitimate, it must satisfy three conditions. First, it must yield a “*testable hypothesis*” that can be stated clearly and examined under controlled circumstances. Second, its “*results must be reproducible*” -- independent investigators should obtain the same outcomes. Third, it requires a “*causal mechanism*” that explains how and why it occurs. ESP has yet to meet any of these.

Telepathy experiments using Zener cards, clairvoyance trials involving hidden objects, and precognition tests attempting to predict random events have all produced results that hover around statistical chance. A few studies, such as Daryl Bem’s controversial work on “feeling the future,” briefly suggested significance, but subsequent replication failed. No repeatable mechanism, no cumulative data—only patterns that disappear under scrutiny.

To many researchers, ESP’s persistence says more about “*people*” than phenomena. Human beings are wired to find meaning, to notice coincidences, to remember hits and forget misses. The scientific consensus, reflected by organizations such as the National Academy of Sciences, remains clear: no conclusive evidence supports extrasensory perception. Yet the question endures precisely because it refuses to be confined to laboratory terms. Even without proof, countless experiences feel personal, numinous, and real. In that space between evidence and experience, the story of ESP continues to unfold.

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## **2. Did Jesus/Yeshua)/or Your God Have ESP? Ancient Accounts of Hidden Knowing**

Long before Rhine's laboratories or government remote-viewing projects, sacred texts told of extraordinary perception. In the New Testament, Jesus/ Yeshua perceives the thoughts of others -- asking the scribes in Matthew 9:4, "Why do you harbor evil in your hearts?" -- and tells the Samaritan woman her life's private details in John 4, leading her to declare him a prophet. The prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures likewise display awareness beyond ordinary senses: Elisha exposes an enemy king's secret plans; Daniel interprets dreams; Isaiah foresees nations rising and falling.

But theology draws a crucial boundary. Such insight is not described as a human faculty but as divine revelation -- a message *from* God, not a power *within* man. Where the modern mind might see telepathy, scripture sees the Spirit. Thus, what modern language calls "psychic," biblical language calls "prophetic." Whether one reads these stories as miracle, metaphor, or proto-psychology, they reveal a timeless fascination with unseen communication and the longing to know more than our physical senses permit.

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### 3. J. B. Rhine and the Birth of Modern Parapsychology

In 1882 the Society for Psychical Research formed in London, determined to examine apparitions, telepathy, and mediumship with scholarly rigor. Across the Atlantic, William James and other American academics joined the effort, convinced that if such effects existed, science should face them, not flee them.

The movement's most enduring voice was **Joseph Banks Rhine**, a botanist turned psychologist at Duke University in the 1930s. Using decks of cards marked with simple symbols—star, cross, circle, wave -- Rhine asked subjects to guess hidden images while controlling for chance. Over tens of thousands of trials, he observed slight but consistent deviations from randomness. To him, this hinted at a genuine though elusive phenomenon.

Rhine coined the term *parapsychology* and insisted on stricter methods: randomization, blind testing, and statistical analysis. His 1934 book *Extra-Sensory Perception* made national headlines, shifting the question from séance to statistics. Critics accused him of loose procedure and selective reporting, yet his meticulous record-keeping marked a turning point -- an attempt to translate mystery into data.

By mid-century, however, mainstream psychology turned elsewhere. Behaviorism and positivism -- schools that recognized only observable behavior and measurable cause -- pushed subjective experience to the margins. Still, Rhine's work planted an idea both scientific and philosophical: if thought can influence outcomes, then consciousness itself may participate in the fabric of reality. For a handful of researchers, that possibility proved irresistible.

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#### 4. Edgar Cayce – The Sleeping Prophet

In the early twentieth century, few figures captured the public imagination like **Edgar Cayce**, the man newspapers dubbed *the Sleeping Prophet*. Born in rural Kentucky in 1877, Cayce was an unassuming photographer who, under self-induced trance, began offering “readings” on health, healing, and later, metaphysical themes. Over his lifetime, he gave more than fourteen thousand such readings -- diagnosing illnesses, recommending remedies, and describing past lives, dreams, and spiritual laws.

Cayce's sessions always began with a ritual phrase -- after which he spoke in a slow, measured voice, as though accessing a vast inner library. To those who heard him, it seemed he was drawing information from a higher source, what he called the *universal mind*. Remarkably, many of his medical recommendations, though unconventional, proved helpful enough to attract physicians' attention and a devoted following.

A devout Christian, Cayce saw his abilities not as psychic trickery but as expressions of divine law -- evidence that the soul could attune to a broader consciousness that transcended time and space. Through the **Association for Research and Enlightenment**, founded in 1931, his work inspired what would later become the New Age movement.

To skeptics, his readings were vague or self-confirming; to admirers, they were glimpses into an interconnected reality where mind, spirit, and matter interpenetrate. In either case, Cayce broadened the discussion: he transformed psychic ability from parlor curiosity into spiritual vocation. He made the extraordinary seem not occult but human—an aspect of our shared potential to heal and to know.

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#### 5. José Silva – The Training of Consciousness

If Cayce represented the intuitive mystic, **José Silva** embodied the practical experimenter. A self-taught radio technician from Laredo, Texas,

Silva began in the 1940s to wonder whether the human brain—like a radio—could be tuned to receive clearer “signals” of intuition.

Using early electronic equipment, he monitored brainwave frequencies while teaching his children to relax deeply and visualize solutions to problems. He noticed that when they entered a calm, meditative rhythm—around ten cycles per second, what neurologists call the *Alpha state*—their intuition and creativity appeared to sharpen. Encouraged, he developed exercises to help others consciously enter that state.

These experiments evolved into the **Silva Mind Control Method**, first taught publicly in the 1960s. Participants learned to visualize desired outcomes, project healing thoughts, and use mental imagery for problem-solving. Silva emphasized that this was not magic but mental training -- learnable skill grounded in focus and expectation. His 1977 book *The Silva Mind Control Method* became an international bestseller, attracting millions to seminars worldwide.

By reframing ESP as a *discipline of consciousness* rather than an inherited gift, Silva democratized the idea. His methods anticipated modern mindfulness, guided imagery, and biofeedback therapy. Today, variations of Silva’s techniques persist in coaching, meditation, and personal development programs under names like *The Silva Ultramind System*. Whether or not one accepts its metaphysical claims, Silva’s central premise endures: the mind, when properly trained, is not a passive observer but an active participant in shaping experience.

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## 6. Helen Hadsell – The Contest Queen and the Law of Expectation

Among Silva’s early students, Helen Hadsell became his most striking success story. A Texas homemaker, she began entering consumer contests in the 1950s -- slogans, jingles, and “why I like this brand” essays. After taking Silva’s course, she applied his mental techniques with remarkable results.

Over the next two decades, Hadsell won hundreds of prizes -- cars, trips, appliances, even a fully furnished home at the 1964 New York World’s Fair. Her method, outlined in *The Name It and Claim It Game*, followed a clear formula: **Select it, Project it, Expect it, Collect it** -- the SPEC method. “You don’t hope,” she said. “You know.”

Skeptics dismissed her streak as luck, but Hadsell insisted success came only with absolute conviction. When she doubted, she lost. To admirers,

her message anticipated the idea of *self-efficacy* -- belief in one's power to create results.

Traveling widely, Hadsell taught visualization and mental rehearsal long before they entered mainstream psychology. She wasn't selling superstition but illustrating belief in action -- showing that the frontier of mind lies not in laboratories but in everyday choices shaped by expectation.

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### **Transition to the Next Section**

From Cayce's trances to Silva's training and Hadsell's contests, the twentieth century transformed psychic possibility into personal experiment. The mind was no longer seen solely as a witness to reality, but as a potential architect of it.

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## 7. The Science of Brainwave States – Alpha, Beta, and Delta as Gateways of Mind

By the late 1960s, neuroscience began to catch up with what mystics and meditators had described for centuries -- that consciousness moves in rhythms. Electroencephalography, or EEG, revealed that the brain emits measurable electrical patterns corresponding to different states of awareness.

**Beta waves** dominate during active thought, analysis, and decision-making -- the mental chatter of daily life. **Alpha waves**, slower and smoother, accompany relaxation and inward focus. **Theta waves** appear in daydreaming and the threshold of sleep, the realm of intuition and imagery. **Delta waves** arise in deep, restorative rest.

The Menninger Foundation in Topeka, Kansas, became a hub for this research. Psychologists **Elmer and Alyce Green** used biofeedback instruments to show that subjects could learn to *voluntarily* produce Alpha and Theta states—slowing heart rate, lowering blood pressure, and accessing vivid internal imagery. Their findings demonstrated that consciousness could, in fact, *tune itself*—echoing José Silva’s intuition that the mind was both receiver and transmitter.

Other scientists, such as **Charles Tart** at the University of California, Davis, proposed that altered states were not distortions of perception but *expansions* of it—windows into dimensions of awareness normally filtered out. As brain-imaging tools evolved, researchers observed that meditation and visualization enhance neural coherence and strengthen regions associated with attention, empathy, and creativity.

These discoveries blurred the old Cartesian boundary between mind, body, and matter. Where philosophers once saw an immaterial soul and a mechanical body, neuroscience now suggested a continuum -- a feedback loop in which intention and physiology shape one another. What was once called “paranormal” began to look like a natural capacity of consciousness to reorganize itself.

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## 8. Russell Targ and the Physics of Perception

If José Silva offered a do-it-yourself model of mental training, **Russell Targ** tried to measure psychic perception under the microscope of physics. A laser scientist at the Stanford Research Institute (SRI), Targ joined fellow physicist **Harold Puthoff** in the early 1970s to conduct experiments in *remote viewing*—the alleged ability to describe distant or unseen targets through mental imagery alone.

Their work coincided with Cold War anxiety. Reports suggested that the Soviet Union was funding psychic espionage; American intelligence agencies quickly followed suit. Under CIA sponsorship, SRI launched what became known as **Project Stargate**. Trained “viewers” like Ingo Swann and Pat Price attempted to sketch hidden objects, geographical locations, or coded installations they had never seen.

The results were provocative. While not precise, many descriptions contained verifiable details beyond statistical expectation. When the data were declassified in the 1990s, the CIA concluded that remote viewing had produced *occasional* successes but lacked operational reliability -- useful for curiosity, not intelligence. Still, the consistency of anomalous results intrigued researchers.

Targ’s interpretation was elegantly heretical: perhaps consciousness itself is **non-local**, not confined to the brain but distributed, like light, across the fabric of space-time. In his books *Mind-Reach* (1977) and *The Reality of ESP* (2012), he argued that psychic perception might be related to quantum entanglement -- the instantaneous exchange of information across distance.

Whether one accepts that analogy or not, Targ’s legacy lies in his courage to apply the rigor of physics to the mystery of perception. He refused to dismiss what data revealed simply because theory could not yet explain it. For him, the frontier of mind was an extension of physics itself -- a field awaiting its equations.

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## 9. Dean Radin and the Contemporary Science of Consciousness

If Targ represented the physicist-adventurer, **Dean Radin** became the bridge-builder—the scholar who wove parapsychology, quantum theory, and philosophy into a single fabric of inquiry. A psychologist and electrical engineer, Radin emerged in the 1990s as one of the most methodical voices in consciousness research.

In his landmark work *The Conscious Universe* (1997), Radin analyzed more than a thousand controlled studies on telepathy, psychokinesis, and precognition. When aggregated statistically, he found consistent but subtle effects—too small to impress skeptics, too persistent to dismiss. His conclusion was modest but radical: that mind and matter appear to share a faint, measurable correlation.

Radin's subsequent books, *Entangled Minds* and *Real Magic*, proposed that such correlations may not violate physics but expand it. If quantum entanglement shows that particles remain connected across space and time, perhaps consciousness functions similarly—not supernatural, but *super naturalized*, an extension of nature itself.

Working at the **Institute of Noetic Sciences**, founded by Apollo 14 astronaut **Edgar Mitchell**, Radin continues to design experiments that test whether focused intention can influence random systems or even biological processes. The effects, though statistically tiny, often repeat -- a whisper of interaction between thought and physical reality.

More than proving psychic powers, Radin's work reframes the debate. If consciousness participates in reality -- rather than merely observing it, science must eventually broaden its scope from matter to meaning

While mainstream academia remains cautious, Radin's approach has gained thoughtful allies in neuroscience, philosophy, and physics—those willing to ask whether consciousness is the next great frontier, not an afterthought of evolution but its very medium.

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## Transition to the Final Section Set

From the psychic laboratories of the Cold War to the quantum speculations of the twenty-first century, ESP has traveled from superstition to hypothesis to philosophical possibility. The question has shifted from “*Does it exist?*” to “*What does it reveal about consciousness itself?*”

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### 10. Alan Dulles, the Manhattan Project, and the Shadow Side of Mind Research

While some pursued consciousness to expand human potential, others sought to control it.

During and after World War II, intelligence agencies became fascinated by the pliability of the human mind. **Alan Dulles**, the first civilian director of the CIA, oversaw programs such as **MK-Ultra**, which explored hypnosis, sensory deprivation, electro-stimulation, and hallucinogens as tools of persuasion and interrogation.

Dulles’s curiosity was not born in darkness alone. He had watched the **Manhattan Project** convert invisible theory into world-altering power. If hidden laws of physics could split the atom, perhaps hidden laws of psychology could command the will. In that intoxicating belief, moral lines blurred. Scientists who once studied ESP and hypnosis for healing found their work repurposed for manipulation.

Declassified documents later revealed experiments that violated consent and conscience alike. The same frontiers that inspired Rhine, Silva, and Radin -- the notion that thought might shape reality -- were mirrored here in a grim inversion: that reality could be engineered to shape thought.

This shadow history forces an ethical reckoning. Knowledge without wisdom corrodes; curiosity without compassion corrupts. Every exploration of consciousness, from the laboratory to the battlefield, must answer the same question: *to what end?*

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## 11. Synthesis – Between Science and Spirit

Taken together, the lives of Rhine, Silva, Hadsell, Targ, Cayse, Radin, and even Dulles trace the double helix of human aspiration: the longing to understand and the temptation to control. One strand points toward liberation—the belief that consciousness is creative participation in the universe. The other winds toward domination -- the urge to exploit that participation for advantage.

Across a century of research, a quiet pattern emerges...awareness **precedes form**. Whether glimpsed in an EEG graph or a moment of meditation, consciousness behaves less like a product of matter and more like its organizing principle. Modern neuroscience, once strictly material, now acknowledges that belief and intention can alter physiology. Studies of meditation, placebo effects, and neuroplasticity confirm that thought leaves measurable traces in the brain.

Meanwhile, modern physics continues to hint at a participatory cosmos. In quantum experiments, observation influences outcome; at the largest scale, energy and information appear interchangeable. The two disciplines, long-estranged, now meet at the same frontier: the recognition that reality may not be a fixed stage but a responsive field.

This synthesis does not discard skepticism; it enlarges it. True skepticism is not denial—it is disciplined wonder, the courage to keep questioning even our most comfortable certainties.

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## 12. Max Planck – The Originator of Quantum Theory

To ground this discussion, it helps to remember **Max Planck**, the physicist whose discovery of energy quanta reshaped modern science. In 1918 he received the Nobel Prize for showing that energy is emitted in discrete packets rather than continuous waves—an idea that birthed quantum mechanics.

Planck's scientific legacy rests on mathematics, not mysticism. He never claimed that quantum physics proved consciousness could move matter. Yet his philosophical reflections are often misquoted to suggest otherwise. "I regard consciousness as fundamental," he once said, meaning that any *description* of nature must begin with an observer, not that consciousness itself performs physical miracles.

Planck's insight—that observation and energy are inseparable—remains fertile ground for reflection. It reminds us that reality is participatory, and that the observer is woven into what is observed.

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### **13. Deepak Chopra – The Quantum Mind**

If Planck offered science, **Deepak Chopra** offers metaphor. Rising to prominence in the 1980s as a physician-philosopher, Chopra popularized the idea that quantum physics validates spiritual truth—that minds are “entangled” across the universe and that health arises from harmony between consciousness and matter.

Physicists often object that these parallels are poetic rather than empirical; the quantum effects he cites vanish on the human scale. Yet Chopra's influence endures because he re-enchanted a culture weary of material reductionism. He translated scientific awe into accessible language, urging people to see themselves as dynamic participants in a living field of energy and intention.

Whether one views him as visionary or salesman, Chopra's message echoes a central intuition running through centuries of ESP inquiry: that separation is an illusion, that the boundaries between self and cosmos are more permeable than we imagine. His “quantum mind” may not satisfy the physicist, but it satisfies a deep psychological need -- the hunger to belong to something vast, conscious, and benevolent.

### **14. ESP in 2025: Belief, Bias, and the Brain**

Today, nearly a century after Rhine's first card tests, extrasensory perception occupies a liminal space—dismissed by most scientists, embraced by much of the public. Surveys in 2025 show that over half of Americans believe in some form of psychic ability, even as peer-reviewed research continues to find no replicable mechanism.

What has evolved is the language. The old vocabulary of “*telepathy*” and “*clairvoyance*” now mingles with “*intuition*, *energy*, and *frequency*.” Mindfulness, quantum consciousness, and neuroplasticity provide new metaphors for an ancient mystery. Functional MRI studies demonstrate that expectation and emotion shape perception; we literally “see” what we anticipate. In parallel, philosophers of information theory suggest that consciousness may be a field phenomenon—an organizing principle rather than a chemical accident.

Skeptics remind us that the human brain is a prediction machine. It seeks order in noise and comfort in pattern, converting randomness into meaning. What feels like foreknowledge may be memory, bias, or coincidence polished by hindsight. Yet the persistence of belief in ESP reveals something profound: our collective refusal to believe that mind or spirit ends at the skull.

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## **15. Conclusion – The Continuing Quest for the Conscious Universe**

From Rhine's card tables to Silva's classrooms, from CIA basements to Radin's quantum detectors, the past century has charted the same quest: *to understand the nature and scope of the human mind.*

Each explorer contributed a piece of that mosaic. Rhine gave data. Silva gave discipline. Hadsell gave a demonstration. Targ gave physics. Radin gave an analysis. Dulles gave a warning. All revealed that curiosity without compassion can mislead, but wonder balanced by wisdom can transform.

My own view stands between wonder and restraint. I do not claim that ESP has been proven, yet I believe its endurance points to a deeper intuition -- that consciousness itself is not merely a by-product of matter but a participant in its unfolding. Whether or not the universe is "psychic," it is surely *responsive*, meeting our inquiry with the same mystery that first drew us to ask.

If the twentieth century mastered matter, the twenty-first may yet be remembered as the century that discovered mind -- not as illusion or magic, but as the quiet architect of reality. Perhaps the universe has been conscious all along, waiting patiently for us to recognize ourselves within it.

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