

GENERAL DISCUSSION DAY ONE

McCLENON: I have a question for Julian. I was wondering—have you ever thought about false feedback? Do you think that would work?

ISAACS: Yes, I have thought about false feedback because I am very interested in the whole issue of feedback. My presentation deals in detail with that issue. What I want to do to explore this issue is to build a device which produces measurable amounts of determinate noise, that is noise which is not from a quantum driven source. I want to inject this noise into the PK feedback signal and see how people behave with noisy systems and quiet systems. This exactly overlays William Braud's conceptualization of labile and inertial systems as PK targets. His hypothesis is that the labile system will see more PK effect than the inert system. I think that his conceptualization as it was stated initially mixed up the issues of the feedback system properties with the real system properties. What I plan to do is to give people noisy feedback which will produce essentially false feedback and then record the output of the system independently of that noise addition. I want to contrast people's performance on this system with or without the extra noise added in. So yes, the issue of feedback is very important. The biofeedback literature seems to indicate that false feedback destroys performance. If performance is enhanced at the lower ranges by artifactual feedback, presumably at the higher levels, there must be some level at which false feedback will destroy performance rather than increase it. We will get detriments instead of increments. That is a secondary issue which I certainly want to look at, but I do not know what the answer is there at all.

TART: It is the whole issue that has been discussed before of the difference between feedback as a learning device and feedback as a motivator. When you do not know you can do anything, a false feedback gives you the impression you are making something happen and motivates you to try harder. That is fine, but that same level of false feedback later on will get you into trouble. I mean, you do that in your experiment. You start somebody with the gain turned so high on the machine it is a noisy system that gives perturbations. It seems to be helpful at that stage.

ISAACS: When I have used noise before in England people have felt very cheated because they could not estimate whether it was themselves or not producing the output. That gives some credence to what you are saying.

PANCOAST: You mentioned Kundalini Yoga as if it was a practice. I was not referring to that. I was not referring to people who have practiced Yoga and then say their Kundalini is awake and tell about what ever happens from that. I am really referring to a more spontaneous practice that it is a little hard to find the words for, but it suddenly arises in one without ever having practiced or known Yoga and yet seems very guided and in fact is very guided. I was struck when you were talking about your use of mediums and shamans whether you were using anyone who works that way. It is really a work through the body rather than a Yoga practice. It is whatever force is released that moves the body and from the body there are the other kinds of knowing.

ISAACS: Right, thank you for making that distinction.

PANCOAST: Yes, it's a real distinction. That is the process that is going on in me because I have never studied Yoga.

ISAACS: We have not encountered what you refer to.

PANCOAST: The process itself is a very controlled step-by-step process.

KRIPPNER: There might be some people in the audience who would talk to you afterwards on this topic now that you have made your process clear.

STANFORD: My question is also directed at Julian and I imagine it concerns something that you have had to deal with in your own mind and which you and I discussed previously. That is let us suppose that you really can train or encourage some form of PK ability. There are probably a lot of spin-offs of this kind of experience from the point of view of the persons who learn this. They come to cognize themselves as a different sort of person, as we have already indicated. They start to talk about their experiences with others. But what I am concerned with specifically is what kinds of screening followups, both short and long term, are involved here to insure that persons are not being harmed by their experience with these things. Then, too, if there are problems coming up, can you help them to cope with those problems? Let me make quite clear what I am referring to here. What I am saying is that as soon as people start to cognize that they have certain powers, it may create various problems for them, including social problems. It breaks a sense of reality with most people out there. There are many temptations of different sorts that come about when you believe that you have those kinds of powers. I personally know of a person who, in

my opinion at least, was very definitely very, very psychic and had demonstrated this at least to my satisfaction, who pulled out of it because there are many, many temptations. Outside the scientific community you start to be treated like a demi-god when someone finds out. I am talking about what goes on when they walk out the doors of our labs. Suddenly they are little gods and they are treated as though they were all-wise because they can do a few things. I get concerned about what happens to these people outside of the context of our laboratories. I am not pointing an accusing finger at you or anyone else or saying that these things should not be done. But I would like to know what do we do to try to make sure that, aside from the objectives of our own studies, we are not in some way hurting the personhood of the individual and his relationships with the society out there?

ISAACS: Thank you very much, Rex. I acknowledge that question as being very important, because I think that if this program goes forward and it does work, these really become more and more serious and important issues for us to address. We will apparently be creating a set of people with extraordinary abilities who may be subject to ill effects due to our interaction with them. This is a serious and important issue which has to be addressed. The first point that I want to make is that we did screen every single person through a two-hour interview before they came into the project, so that we got a good fix on their beliefs. The second thing was that we gave them a questionnaire in which they identified what kinds of experiences they had; so that what we did first of all was to gather data on these people. Every single one of them perceives him or herself as following a spiritual path in which the psychic component is at the bottom line a relatively unimportant component compared to spiritual unfoldment. We think this is a crucially important feature in maintaining the balance of our participants. We only accepted people with very high personal beliefs in their own psychic ability in the first place, so that we are not changing a person's belief system from zero to five, we are changing it from five to six or from five to seven or whatever. So what we are doing is working with people with a spiritual commitment, with a perspective on what they are doing, with an acknowledgement of their own previously existing psychic capacity. That is very important because a lot of our people are very experienced. One of them has been practicing for 15 years as a shamanness.

Many have been working with their psi ability for five years or more, so the usual profile of our participants is that these are not "ordinary people." They are people who are to a large extent already socialized into a self perception where they see themselves as having these abilities

before they come to an explicit development of this particular outcome of their ability. The other thing that we do is that we supply a number of safety nets if people get into trouble. We have a follow-up counseling service. We have not had anybody get into trouble so far, but what we have done is to attempt to help two individuals with particular problems that they had. One of them is not really very ethically relevant. We thought that somebody might be striving too hard, so we gave him some alpha biofeedback training which we ran concurrently with his doing PK, so he had to be in alpha while he did PK. We thought that would decrease his striving. I am not at all convinced that it did so and we do not have any formal data on that. The second participant we assisted was the lady who experienced large amounts of energy becoming trapped in her body. Kennedy is a very unusual university and on its faculty we have a doctor of movement psychology whose specific purview is to deal with human energy. I have a very schizophrenic attitude towards this because there is a little formal parapsychologist inside of me saying "Oh, I do not really believe in all of this," but on the other hand there is also the person who cannot but acknowledge the phenomenology. The phenomenology is real. So that we have this person who has had twenty years of experience of working on energy with people, so if people get into energy problems we have him and he helped this lady considerably. Then we have two clinical psychology programs within the university and we have counseling available for people to be referred to. We have a transpersonal counseling track and we have a clinical counseling group, both of which are open to do psychological counseling with our participants if that is needed. On the matter of star treatment, we swear everybody to secrecy. Before they start the experiment, we give them a rather large amount of data about what they will be expected to do, amongst which is that they must not mention anything about the experiment to anyone except of course to their wives or their husbands. We do not in any way encourage people to contact the media or to get star treatment. We are not going to release the names of our participants to anybody unless they agree and this certainly will not include the press because we are certainly not out to get publicity of that nature. Next, because at the moment all of our participants are in the same treatment group, we have group meetings in which they can generalize their experiences and in which they can get support for themselves. And finally we intend to have a long term follow-up program for our participants as well so that we can track them and make sure that they are okay. If you can suggest any other ways in which we could look after this group we would be very happy to do so. Our perspective is that we want people to work

with us for a number of years consecutively, so we want to form long and supportive relationships with them. That really looks as if it is happening. That process is helped because each individual has one individual experimenter who is his or her particular trainer, so it is very much on the athlete/coach model that we are working. I think this is very helpful because often they are able to confide things to the trainer that I as the chief experimenter certainly would not be told in a more formal study.

ARONS: Are they sure that they are not God?

ISAACS: Yes, quite sure, thank you.

TART: Rex, I am really glad that you asked that question because I think this is a very important issue in parapsychology. I think an awful lot of parapsychologists came into this area because they had an interest in spiritual questions. While parapsychology as a field of inquiry was much more restricted, by necessity, it was a way of somehow working scientifically in that area. I think most parapsychologists are also quite ethical. They do not want to hurt anybody as a result of what they do. The trouble is historically I think we have taken a funny turn to be ethical. One of the things I think we have done somehow is develop a conviction that psi is such an itty bitty little thing that it will not really make any difference to anybody, ignoring the crazy people who thought they were really involved in it. And I think we are now reaching a point where that protective mechanism will no longer work. We have got to seriously consider the possibility that we can make some big changes in people's lives. We are talking about power that is meaningful and that is going to change people's conceptualizations. We cannot just pretend that the mechanistic model is fine and some people can make infinitesimal deviations in a distribution and that is the end of it. And the other side of this is, as I have stated partly before, I think this is beginning to illustrate that in the long run as parapsychologists we cannot be just pure scientists in the mechanistic tradition who study small anomalies. We have got to face the implications of this in terms of what it means about the nature of man and people's spiritual paths. So the kind of precautions Julian is building into his program are excellent. And, of course, they are not only precautions; I think they are natural, excellent extensions of how to deal with the phenomena in the first place. I am really glad we are opening this up.

ROCKWELL: I was going to say that I think the kinds of resources that you are making available and the kinds of questions that you are facing are excellent. I think, though, it is also important for us to realize that there are very serious ethical questions in instructing people in how to deal with their transformations. You know we cannot take over

their lives either and I think that we have to be very careful in that direction.

ISAACS: Yes, I really agree and what we are doing is we leave the initiative to our participants in the sense that we do not press counseling or anything else on them. I have to make one small confession of sin in this regard, though. We found out, without realizing that it was going to happen, that independently a large number of our participants thought that they were capable of getting sodas out of the soda machine without putting money in it. And we found that we had five participants who bounced soda out of the machine down the hall for no money.

MINTZ: Psi paranormal ability does not seem to me necessarily related to high ethical and spiritual standards. Certainly in many, many individuals it is, but evil does exist and I think that sometimes psi ability is found among evil people. Here we are branching off perhaps into science fiction, but I was very grateful to Charley Tart for making that point, which I think we cannot ignore and can ignore less and less as our body of evidence accumulates and as our techniques, such as the horrifyingly brilliant techniques which we have just heard described, begin to grow, as they will.

ISAACS: I do not understand why they are horrifying to you.

NEPPE: I also want to get in my little pound of flesh, so to say. We really are talking about the potential psychopathology in people who are involved in paranormal experimentation of one kind or another. I alluded a little to this this morning when I said that there is a small subgroup of subjective paranormal experients who presented to me with psychotic features. I think that what is important here is the early recognition of any kind of decompensation. As I see it, there are two levels of subjective paranormal experients who are at risk. One is the group who are entirely rejected by the subculture because they have these experiences. As a consequence, there is no way of being able in any way to validate these experiences. In fact they encounter hostility from their family and their friends because of this. For that group, who probably are not very commonly the group who will volunteer for experimentation, I would think that validation of the fact that something is happening to them which others cannot easily perform would be therapeutic in general. The second group is those who are developing ideas pertaining to some kind of grandiose system as a consequence of being able to demonstrate abilities which most can not demonstrate. I think that we have to some degree to dichotomize and recognize that there probably is an interplay in between and just begin to recognize that psychopathology cannot very easily be handled by saying, well, we will refer them off somewhere. Very often a lot of the

initial management is a management right directly at that moment in time. The most common kind of symptom I find with people with subjective paranormal experiences in fact is anxiety. They are really anxious either because they are concerned about some kind of feeling they have or anxious about whether or not they ought to be communicating information of one kind or another.

COLLINS: I am getting a bit puzzled about what is going on, because a little while ago we were talking about the immense difficulty of improving the signal to noise ratio and now suddenly we appear to have the same ethical problems as the atomic bomb scientists, who did not seem to have any problems with signal to noise ratio. Are you sure it is not turning into a prayer meeting?

ISAACS: I want to make two comments about that. First of all the ethical problems are ones which are shared by any psychologist who works with participants in his studies and who may or may not have an impact on their belief system and that is really independent of the question of the signal to noise ratio of the effect. In terms of the real bottom line reality-based issue of signal to noise ratio I am making a number of claims with the piezo stuff that I have done, but as yet I have not published what I would regard as a definitive proof-of-principle study showing that the effect is real. I have published a study which claims the learning effect, but I would not say that I had definitely established that. What is very important is for other people to replicate these effects. For that reason, since the piezo effect is difficult to handle technically, I hope to develop the infrared effect and the electrical conductivity effects so that they can be used in other laboratories than my own. And at that point I hope that we will then have replication to prove that the effects are real and that they do have a good signal to noise ratio. What you are running across is the fact that we are in a frontier area where results are discussed on an informal level that have not yet been ground through the treadmill of widespread replication and for a few minutes we allowed ourselves to look at the problems of "what if" those results were to be really fully replicable.

ARONS: Well, I am very happy with where things have gone and this is because the title of this program is "Parapsychology and Human Nature." Unless human nature is defined in experimental terms and only appears in the laboratory, then I believe we have another side of that topic which we have not really dealt with yet. It is very interesting how that split between our laboratory and our theoretical and experimental views seem to differ from a much larger question of human nature, which is obviously the reason why we started to investigate this stuff in the first place, to see what it is to be human. So I intentionally

threw in that idea of God because that is a good starting point as far as I am concerned. If you are going to be dealing with human nature, at least it gets us out of the jargon. There are an awful lot of things happening in Charley Tart's laboratory, Deikman's laboratory, our school, a lot of transpersonal psychology all over the place that does not make this purely an academic question. I think that it is time that I know what you are talking about, Rex. Of course, we get these kids who go out there after one or two experiences and feel that they can walk on air or water. Of course, but then why start out with a presupposition that we are dealing with something that is so delicate that it is an unmentionable. We have to be ethically very, very careful that people never get the impression that they are God, either for Freudian reasons because they are still immature and see themselves as omnipotent or for the reasons that you dare not talk about those things. I am hoping at this conference that we can talk about those things, too.

STANFORD: Dr. Aron's remark is the first of those that I want to respond to. I want it to be clear what I was referring to when I made the remark about people thinking they were God. I have some firsthand experience with these kinds of things from a number of sources and I know that people have had a lot of damage done to themselves psychologically, spiritually, and in other respects because of the ways in which they have reacted to the adulation that comes to them as the result of being perceived as being psychic. That is specifically the kind of thing that I am referring to and which I really think we have to be very concerned about. I do not think it is just a matter of a few people here and there who might be harmed. I think this is a universal problem that we have to deal with. We live in a society where, when people are manifesting and talking about certain experiences, there is a societal reaction to that and it is not necessarily always a healthy reaction. I can tell you one example where someone who went through a psi experiment and started seemingly to have some success, went home and talked to her roommate about it. The roommate subsequently would not let her cook for her, she would not let her do this and that. Her roommate thought she was a witch or in league with Satan. There were, then, some untoward consequences. As another possibility, when a person is seen as very talented by some people, he or she is treated like a god and may come to think of himself or herself as having no need to improve or to change. I am not opposed to developing psychic phenomena or to using them if we have them. However, I really believe—even if I cannot prove it by any scientific means—and would like to urge all of you to believe that if we are going to have at our individual disposal what might be regarded in some sense as personal

psychic powers, maybe the first thing we need is a little work upon ourselves. Maybe we need a prayer meeting or a meditation or something to help us to work on ourselves individually before we as scientists lead people like high priests of society into a realm such as personal utilization of the paranormal.

ARONS: Yes, of course, I could not disagree with what you are saying, Rex, but then take Dr. Neppe's subjects who are some sort of psychosomatics. These are people who have all kinds of problems that we cannot locate, but they also have great psi abilities. Some of these people are suffering without understanding at all where their discomfort is coming from. They have been given every kind of materialistic success. They have been given every social basis, they have been given everything else and none of that is working. At some level they are strong enough to keep maintaining at least the symptoms of things, so that they do not just fall into the world. So I said phenomenology there seems appropriate. Now some of these people may need to know that what they are doing is more toward the divine than toward behavioristic or toward the psychopathological. I think we have to look also in terms of reinforcement. I am not talking about false reinforcement, I am talking about the strength it takes to resist. To have these abilities and to be treated the way that these people are treated and to have to live out a life like that, perhaps we do need a sense that there is something more than we usually talk about and that while you may not be aware of all of this, you have that transcendental sense, that possibility that you are not crazy and that maybe you are really holding up and then you may get some transformations in that direction. I am not disputing I know the kind of person you are talking about, but I also know the other kind of people who need to have a little dose of the divine in them.

TART: I want to make one final comment relevant to Harry Collins remark. In terms of arguing with the scientific community about whether certain phenomena exist, generally speaking the phenomena are unreliable and on a low level. But most of us here who have actually worked in the field have seen very strong flashes of psi sometimes. Whether they can be produced reliably or not, we know psi can work strongly. I think it is imperative for us to be concerned about the ethics of what happens when it works strongly and not just depend on the fact that it will stay so tiny that the problems will not arise.

COLLINS: I am sorry, that seems a good answer. What worries me in a sense, I suppose, sitting here as an outsider, is that it seems to me that there is a certain amount of temptation to get too involved in ethical problems rather than technical problems. You, as it were, tacitly

admit the existence of the phenomena in talking of their ethical problems and I think that can give you a warm feeling. You know there is something really there and we can talk about the ethical problems of it and we do not have to think too much about the technical problems. May I say again, as an outsider, is this really an insider group because I thought anybody could come? But you see I would be a bit worried about the end of Julian Isaacs' talk if it was being presented to an outside audience. All this looking forward to what is going to happen, how it is going to affect everyday things and all the other things you said. It is really too early for that. It tends to reduce the credibility of what you are saying.

ISAACS: I do not think we are as distant from that future as you do. If you really believe as I do that psychokinesis occurs on a macro level and that what you believe happens, then by choosing that future, I could help bring it about by getting other people to believe it too. I am attempting to act consistently with my ideology to generate that future.

COLLINS: You should employ the advertising firm of Satchi and Satchi.

ISAACS: I have not got the money, so I have to do it myself.

NEPPE: I just wanted to make one point in relation to this. I do not hear a debate about whether or not certain of these subjective paranormal experients can in fact induce these phenomena. I do not think that is the central issue in relation to the ethics of it all. It is like saying the central issue is whether or not a schizophrenic's hallucinations are genuine. The central issue relates to a belief system and a modification or alteration of personality as a consequence. Whether or not these phenomena are actually coming about one still has to be fully aware of the ethics of it all.