

**Shrink Rap Radio #392, February 27, 2014, On Time, Trauma and Heroism**  
**David Van Nuys, Ph.D., aka “Dr. Dave” interviews Philip Zimbardo, PhD**  
(Transcribed from [www.ShrinkRapRadio.com](http://www.ShrinkRapRadio.com) by Nancy Wicker)

**Introduction:** My guest today is world famous psychologist, Dr. Philip Zimbardo, and among other topics relevant to his work we'll be discussing his latest book, “The Time Cure”, which focuses on a new treatment for PTSD. Be sure to go to our website for more detail on Dr. Zimbardo's very distinguished background. Now, here's the interview.

**Dr. Dave:** Dr. Phil Zimbardo, welcome back to Shrink Rap Radio.

**Philip Zimbardo:** Thank you for having me back David.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, it's a pleasure to have you back on the show. Way back in the early days of this show you were on #87, “Understanding How Good People Turn Evil”. Now this will be episode #392.

**Philip Zimbardo:** Wow!

**Dr. Dave:** I'm sure many of my listeners will be unaware, as I was unaware, that you've also have a research interest in time going all the way back to your famous Stanford Prison Experiment days and you've documented that research now in two books, “The Time Paradox” and your more recent, “The Time Cure”.

**Philip Zimbardo:** I'd like to talk about that to your listeners, also, my newest mission in life is reversing the orientation, and my focus on how and why good people turn evil to how ordinary people can be inspired to be everyday heroes.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh, Good.

**Philip Zimbardo:** So those are the two things I'm doing. The second one is my new mission in life. The research on time perspective actually began at around the time of the Stanford Prison Study and it's continued up to date. We have a wonderful website, [thetimeparadox.com](http://thetimeparadox.com) and [thetimecure.com](http://thetimecure.com). So let me tell you a little bit about time perspective. In contrast to objective or clock time, there is subjective or psychological time; it's the time we construct in our minds. The thing that people are most aware of is your perception of duration - how long do events seem to take. They seem to take longer when you're in a boring or painful situation, shorter when you're in an exciting, wonderful situation. We also have a sense of rhythm; we have a sense of feeling time pressed, time crunched; time perspective is slightly different. It is the way each of us

partitions the flow of our personal experiences into time zones. The obviously big things are past, present and future. What I've done with my colleague, Sean Boyd, in writing "The Time Paradox", is to bring together all the available research up to a few years ago and now there's much more on trying to understand the causes, correlates and consequences of people developing a particular time perspective zone. In addition to the big three, past present and future, each of them can be dichotomized into pairs, so there's some people who, whenever they have to make a decision, whenever they have to make and action, whenever they make a judgment, they always begin by thinking back to the past. What does this remind me of and there are two ways to be past oriented, obviously, positive and negative. The positive is, you always think of the good old time, nostalgia, your successes. The negative is you think of the bad old times, your failures, your regrets, the trauma. There are two ways to be present oriented. There's present hedonistic, enjoying pleasures of life, avoiding pain. It's really the thing we all do as babies, some people never quite outgrow that. A different way of being present oriented we call present fatalistic. It doesn't pay to plan for the future. You believe that your life is fated, fated by your poverty, fated by your view of religion, fated by your circumstances - if you live in a city or immigrant camp. There's two ways of the future: the main one is focus on settling goals, achieving goals, living in an optimistic world, but there are some people who are future oriented who always worry - are you going to be able to achieve? So future can be associated with optimism or anxiety. I have developed a scale called the Zimbardo Time Perspective Inventory, ZTPI, which, if you go on our website your listeners can take and get an instant score on five of the factors. This one only has the positive future. Then you can compare it to what we think is the ideal score. Most people have what I call, a biased time perspective, we over use one of these zones, and we under-use the others. We can think of people as future oriented - they're always making plans, always passing up the pleasures of the moment for the anticipated gains of the future. There are people who live in the present - they never think of the consequences of their behavior. Other people think in the past, even in the past positive, these are people who don't want anything -, no new friends, no new food, no new neighbors, for example. What we try to show in our book is that really the paradox, the reason we use that title is - I argue that time perspective is the most central foundation of human thought and action. The paradox is that we are unaware of it. Most people aren't unaware that they have this imbedded time frame that guides their actions. The reason we're unaware is that it starts when we're little kids. Everything influences it: your parents model it, your religion - Protestants are more future-oriented than Catholics - your social class - middle class people are more future--oriented than lower class people. If you grow up in a culture which is closer to the equator you'll be more present-oriented than future-oriented. As you become more educated, you become more future-oriented.

There are many things that influence it and therefore, we develop a biased time perspective without even knowing that it's operating within us.

**Dr. Dave:** Let me ask a couple questions here if I may. Given that we have this bias - you've done a lot of research and cited research that shows that this time bias correlates with a lot of other personality variables as measured on a variety of inventories and it correlates in the expected directions.

**Philip Zimbardo:** Yes

**Dr. Dave:** So given that, it sounds like it would be pretty stable and difficult to change, so what evidence is there that it's changeable?

**Philip Zimbardo:** It's relatively stable; it's not inflexible. I think of it not as a personality trait, but as a response style. It's a way of responding to information. In fact, it changes over time with development, so we all begin in life as present hedonists, at the bottle, at the breast, seeking pleasure, avoiding pain. As we go through life, what education teaches us is to delay gratification – not to live for the present, to plan for the future. The more educated you become, the more future oriented you become, so it changes. As we get older there is evidence that the future is death in extreme, so that we tend then, as Laura Carstensen, my colleague at Stanford says, we selectively chose. We don't want a lot of friends, we want a few friends, we don't plan for the distant future, we plan how to enjoy today, how to enjoy today and tomorrow. It is modifiable. The other thing I'm arguing is, in my recent book, "The Time Cure", that I did with clinicians in Maui, Hawaii, Richard Sword and his wife Rosemary Sword, we show that we develop a new time therapy that, when applied to people who have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, and we've worked with 32 American Vets of many, many wars - that it works equally well with women who have been traumatized with sexual abuse, with people who have been in fatal car accidents and now the biggest contributor to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder are people who've been in extreme natural disasters where they lost everything. With global climate change this is going to be more and more frequent around the world. To put it simply, people who have PTSD are in quote, "stuck in the past" with no anticipation of a positive future and there is no existing treatment that really works well, so they developed also present fatalism. They go to treatment, if you're a Vet you go to the VA. Most treatments keep it from getting worse. They don't really make it significantly better. You take drugs to decrease anxiety, you take drugs to help you sleep, you do cognitive behavior therapy, which makes it more manageable. Our therapy the "Time Cure", that I developed with the Swords, we demonstrate that within eight sessions, every single one of the thirty-two vets who work with show significant "cures". Psychologists don't like to talk about cures, but we're talking about as a cure that there depression symptoms go

away, or are reduced significantly, their anxiety symptoms are reduced significantly and their PTSD symptoms are reduced significantly. We measure these vets over four years and the effects we get in year one endure for a full four years. Out treatment is really getting these people to give up that negative past orientation and to begin to adopt a more future orientation, a more selected present hedonism which is family, friends, fun, nature, hobbies, connecting with the good things in life.

**Dr. Dave:** That all sounds all so common sense and thirty-two is a pretty small sample. The need is so great in terms of all these guys and women who've returned from service traumatized. What's it gonna take to kick this up to a larger scale?

**Philip Zimbardo:** You hit right on the mark, Dave. Thirty-two is really a big pilot study. The reason we wrote a book is that we've been unable to get support from the VA or the military to do a major clinical trial. For your listeners, what this would mean is, we have let's say, several hundred veterans diagnosed with PTSD and half of them are assigned with whatever the best standard treatment is, let's say cognitive behavior therapy with experts in that domain. Half of them are assigned to Time Cure Therapy and we train a number of clinicians to do our treatment, not the Swords, they are too close to it. Then we evaluate systematically, quarterly and annually at least for one year follow-up. Do either of these make a difference? Does one have a bigger impact than the other? In order for us to really talk about the "Time Cure", we really need that kind of clinical sample, and for some unknown reason the VA has been unwilling to help us do this.

**Dr. Dave:** I am shocked to hear that, I mean, you are one of the world's premier psychologists with a wonderful research career and reputation; and the need is so great. What in the world is blocking that process?

**Philip Zimbardo:** That is the paradigm. I gave a presentation in Hawaii at Tripler Medical Center which deals with thousands of vets and everybody in the audience said, "Wow, this is really impressive". Then I said, "Ok, then give me the green light and some money and we'll go ahead." The money is not any money to me and my colleagues, it's really money to hire and train a set of clinicians and do systematic assessments and it never came through. I agree, I don't understand, I'm willing to do this for free because the need is so great. I don't want to be going around saying, "Hey, I got a cure, I got a cure", until we can really demonstrate it really works - that anyone that we train in our program, and the training is simple, it's really didactic narrative therapy, virtually anyone can do it. The other thing is you don't even need a PhD or you certainly don't need to be a psychiatrist to do this kind of training. If it were put on a large scale, it would be relatively easy and inexpensive to scale up.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, boy, well, I'm hoping that someday, somehow that's gonna happen or maybe it'll just take a lot of individual practitioners moving in this direction to kind of build up enough of a wave of interest for something to move. Let me just back you up a little bit. One of the things that I was intrigued by, that you go into in one of your presentations, is the marshmallow experiment. Take us through that because it feeds into everything you've been saying.

**Philip Zimbardo:** Yeah, way back, I guess in the 1960's my colleague at Stanford University, Walter Mischel, did a very simple study that has enormous significance. He got children in the pre-school at Stanford in Bing Nursery, I guess they were 4-5 year olds. He played a game with them and of course, they won the game. The prize was a marshmallow, a great big juicy marshmallow. The experimenter then said, you can have the marshmallow now, here it is right in front of you, or if you wait until I come back you can have 2 of them. So that is really a temptation. He leaves for 15 minutes, the kids don't know when he is coming back but there is the thing they like – a delicious marshmallow right in front of them. The question is which kids delay gratification, wait till he comes back to get two and which kids cannot resist temptation and eat it before he comes back. At the age of 4-5 about half the kids wait and half don't. At a younger age none of them can resist. As you get older more and more kids learn how to resist. The interesting thing about the study is he and his team go back 14 years later when the kids are graduating high school or getting into college and there are enormous differences between kids who delayed and kids who didn't. Just to summarize very quickly, kids who somehow had the ability to delay gratification at this young age, which really means they were doing future planning - in their mind they say, this is delicious, if I wait, and they can visualize – I can have two of this good thing. They are able to resist the pressure of the immediate present by forming in their mind a more desirable future. We think of these kids as budding future oriented kids. Those kids scored 250 points higher on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). They were much more successful in school, they got into less problems, they had more friends. Everything about the quality of their life was better than those kids who were “more present oriented” and could not resist. The more interesting thing is he's followed these kids up for forty years – they're adults. The same thing endures, they've had more successful marriages, stable jobs and so the simple decision – this marshmallow decision – to delay or not has enormous impact. I believe the impact is through this future orientation. If you have a future orientation, in general, you learn how to resist the temptations of the immediate present. You learn how to resist drugs, smoking, gambling, eating junk food. You eat more healthy foods, you live a more healthy life, you exercise, etc., etc. The quality of your physical life and your psychological life is simply much better. I would tell your listeners, if you have kids,

play the marshmallow game with them and if they can't resist then this is something you can train. You can build-in, you can teach them how to resist temptation.

**Dr. Dave:** Wow, I was struck by the fact that delay of gratification, which that experiment was about, that concept is also a major building block in Freud's whole theory. His whole theory of thinking is built on delay of gratification, of mental images substituting for immediate gratification.

**Philip Zimbardo:** Again, the problem is we are surrounded by temptation, in fact, every Christian child, I was going to say Catholic, but every Christian child in the Lord's prayer says, "Deliver us from evil, lead us not into temptation." As an aside, I want to mention that is actually an error. The second part, you're praying to God, "Deliver us from evil", but it's not God's job to lead you into temptation, that's the Devil's job. That's Lucifer's job. So, when I was writing my book, "The Lucifer Effect" (Why Good People Become Evil) I became aware of that and every religious scholar I talked to about that, had to agree, reluctantly, that this was a mistake somehow over the generations, and over eons, in an earlier translation. Still, my point is, that temptations are always with us. Temptations lead us to sin, lead us to transgression, lead us into, at the corporate level, fraudulent behavior.

**Dr. Dave:** Yeah, another thing I found myself thinking about was Zen Buddhism and its emphasis on the present. How do you deal with that?

**Philip Zimbardo:** That's slightly different than what we're talking about. That is, in Zen Buddhism, the focus is on the immediate present, immediate moment. It has no component of hedonism, in fact, if anything, it enables you to rise above personal pleasure, personal focus. It's communing with yourself, communing with nature. It's "being in the moment". One way to achieve it is obviously through meditation, through breath, so that focusing on the breath, not the meaning of the breath, the rhythmic process of breathing in and breathing out. Now, we are in the process of developing a scale to supplement our two present passive and present hedonistic scale - the third one which we are going to call, "Zen Expanded Holistic Present". In fact, we have a scale, we just finished administering it to two-hundred students at Brown University and we're gonna analyze it, and if it holds up; holds up means that people who respond to that differently than the other present scale, then we would add that as a third kind of present orientation.

**Dr. Dave:** OK. Perhaps you'd like to take a little bit of time to tell us about this future direction, speaking of the future. You seem to be very good at having developed a future orientation. So, tell us about this hero research that you're .....

**Philip Zimbardo:** Let me do the transition picking up David, on what you said. I seem to be pretty good at that. Just to tell your audience, they might be interested in my autobiographical reason for studying time perspective. I grew up in poverty. I was born in 1933. That means in the middle of the great depression, in New York City, in the South Bronx in New York City which was/is a ghetto. I grew up in poverty. My family was on welfare for many, many years. My parents were from a Sicilian background and uneducated. My father, whom I loved, who was a genius in many ways, an uneducated genius could play all string instruments without lessons, including violin. He built a television set from a wiring diagram in 1947, never having gone to school. Television was invented in 1946, so the year after that we had a television. We charged kids 50 cents to watch the Yankee/Dodger World Series. On the other hand, he was totally present hedonistic – he lived in the moment. He loved to gamble, he loved to go to the bar, he loved to be a big spender even though he had no money. He never minded being out of work though we had a family of six who were often hungry. As a kid I realized that the fault of being present oriented - I could admire his joie de vivre. He took joy in life but it was at a great cost to our family, so very young, I realized the only way to get out of poverty is through education - by becoming educated, by learning to delay gratification, setting goals, working hard, living by the protestant ethic even though you were a Catholic. Over time I became very well educated, very successful, even financially successful. If I use that as an example to say, every family has – the parents can set a tone but each of us is able to recreate a lifestyle, a psychological response style that, if we think about it, is really the best for us in the long run. That’s what I tried to do, that’s what I tried to do with my kids, my students, and now the general public.

Just to switch very quickly, in the remaining time we have – when I wrote the “Lucifer Effect” book, back in 2008, I guess, the first 15 of 16 chapters are all about grim stuff – the “Stanford Prison Study – in excruciating detail. I go into to Rwanda, I go into several chapters on the abuses by American Military Police in Abu Ghraib Prison. I became an expert witness for one of those guards, Jim Frederick, so I got to know everything about that situation. There are two chapters in my book - in great detail - about that situation. Then I have several chapters summarizing all the available literature in social psychology, cognitive psychology and some in sociology on research showing how easy it is for ordinary people to be seduced, corrupted and recruited into doing bad things. By the end of fifteen chapters I’m overwhelmed with negativity, and I’m an optimistic person. The last chapter – I need as well as my reader – if they’re still there, something positive. The last chapter is focused on, how can people resist these powerful pressures to do bad? Again, growing up in the South Bronx, I had friends who gave into those temptations. There were always hustlers, wheeler dealers, men, who get good kids to do bad things for money. If you’re poor you do things for money. If you’re rich, you don’t

do things for money, you do things 'cause your parents give it to you if you whine enough or for chores or something. There were also some kids like me and a few of my buddies who didn't give in. So the question is: "How do you learn to resist?" So the first part of the chapter is, "Dr. Z's 10 Recipes for Resisting Unwanted Influence". I reflected to say, maybe the small percentage of people can resist – 10, 20, 30 percent when the majority gives in. Maybe we could think of them as heroes, so I started checking out the research on heroism, and parenthetically there is almost no research on heroes and heroism of any systematic nature, which is astounding to me. The terms do not exist in any psychology text-book, do not exist in the positive psychology lexicon started by Marty Seligman because they're not human virtues. Compassion is a human virtue, empathy is a human virtue, heroism is an action. I debated this with Marty Seligman – my argument is: compassion, empathy without action is really meaningless. It doesn't change anything. It makes you feel good but it doesn't change the world. So essentially, I developed a twelve item taxonomy of different kinds of heroes with different examples and I presented this at the TED Conference (some of it) at TED.com. The TED Conference is an annual conference held in different places around the country. It's going to be in Vancouver soon. If you listeners don't know, just go to TED.com. They have online thousands of the most powerful videos imaginable on many topics.

**Dr. Dave:** Oh, yes, I'm a big fan.

**Philip Zimbardo:** The quality of the information is incredible, but the more unique thing is the quality of the video production. When you are talking they have three video crews; one on you, one on the audience, one on the slides and they keep moving around. They spend days to edit each lecture. They are also short – they reduce the old hour-long lecture down to 15 or 20 minutes. After I gave my talk I got a standing ovation, which is very rare there. Many people came up to me say, "Hey, you gotta develop this hero idea, we never heard anything like this", so I started a non-profit foundation in San Francisco called, "The Heroic Imagination Project" or HIP for short. Essentially, we have developed wonderful educational modules. We have a half-dozen of them, each around a central psychological theme, like the bystander effect. How do you transform passive bystanders into action oriented heroes, prejudice discrimination, the power of groups that do good or bad, the power of obedience to authority (for better or for worse). We have a mindset that Carol Dweck's idea that most people have a fixed mindset believing that their attributes are fixed by birth, by genes and everything is fine until you fail. The growth mindset is everything is modifiable through practice, through exercise, through modeling, etc. We have developed these six modules over three years, tested them in many afterschool programs and now we're ready to deliver them to educators around the world for a licensing fee. In addition, we have a great website with many videos on it with many inspiring things. We have exercises - things you can do every day. The enemy



of heroism is egocentrism. Heroism is sociocentric; heroes do things for others. My definition of heroes is, heroes take action on behalf of others in need and/or to defend a moral cause, a moral principle. The key, the reason heroism is different than altruism, you're aware there's a potential risk, an extreme risk to life and limb. If you're a hero whistleblower it could be a loss of a job or loss of promotion. There is a risk involved. Heroes, despite awareness of that risk, are willing to go ahead and take that action. We are also developing a corporate program which is going to be headed by Michael Winston. He was the major whistleblower in the Countrywide mortgage scandal where he lost his job and they tried to buy him out and he resisted and just took the coming down. This was the company that really triggered the economic disaster of 2008 because they were giving thousands and thousands of mortgages to people with no collateral – who were unemployed and they knew that. They gave them low interest for two or three years and in three years they foreclosed on everything. Meanwhile they would sell those mortgage packages to other banks. This went around the world. He's heading our corporate program – how do you develop integrity in corporations – integrity from the top down. How do you develop heroic leadership so that leaders are as concerned for their employees, for their customers, and for the environment as they are for making profits. If you focus on those three, profits will follow. If you have employees that love working there, that feel respected, feel rewarded, where there's no value clash, they don't burn out. The same thing Chip Conley who started "Joie de Vivre" hotels - he had that same principle – people keep coming back to your business when you show them personal respect. You put in the little extra time to humanize business and it pays off in the long run.

**Dr. Dave:** Well, that all sounds really great. Now I know your time is limited this morning, that you had only a half hour or so. I'm gonna let you go and move on to all the wonderful work that you're doing that you've just described.

**Philip Zimbardo:** Your listeners can go to [Zimbardo.com](http://Zimbardo.com) – my website – Heroic imagination. I think its [.com](http://.com). I never know if it's [.com](http://.com) or [.org](http://.org). [thetimeparadox.com](http://thetimeparadox.com) and [thetimecure.com](http://thetimecure.com). It's wonderful free resources for all your listeners. Also, if any your listeners are interested in making a tax deductible contribution we would definitely welcome it. On our website is a place to donate.

**Dr. Dave:** Ok, that's out there and my listeners will be responsive. Dr. Phil Zimbardo, it's great to speak to you again. I want to thank you for being my guest again today on Shrink Rap Radio.

**Philip Zimbardo:** Thank you, David, anytime in the future.

**Dr. Dave:** Ok, I'll take you up on that. Goodbye.