

The Arizona Skeptic

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Hipe-nosis

by Jim Lippard

On August 27, members of the Phoenix Skeptics were audience to a presentation by Dr. Michael Preston on the subject of "Hypnosis: how and why it works." Preston, who runs the local Institute of Medical Hypnosis, began by sketching his theory of consciousness. His view is a dualistic one, in which the mind is a spiritual substance which controls the brain and thereby controls the body. Such a view is at odds with the prevailing paradigm in neuroscience and philosophy of mind (e.g., Beyerstein 1987-88; Campbell 1984; Churchland 1986; Churchland 1988; Dennett 1978; Rose 1976; Stillings 1987), though still has its defenders (e.g., Nagel 1974; Popper and Eccles 1977). Preston's argument for mind being a spiritual substance was to enumerate various mental things which cannot be "put on the table" — such as love. This is a feeble argument, for its premises are readily accepted by materialist philosophers and neuroscientists. On the materialist account, the mental state of being in love is identified with a particular brain state (or, more precisely, any of a set of functionally equivalent brain states). Such a functional state is simply not the sort of thing that can be placed on a table. (At least not by itself — a person in love could be placed on the table. Analogously, a computer program could not be placed by itself on a table, but only when instantiated in some recording medium such as a disk or stack of paper.)

Preston's theory of hypnosis is that a hypnotic state occurs when the conscious mind's level of activity is reduced and the subconscious mind is correspondingly increased. Whatever is input (in the form of oral or written suggestions from the hypnotist) to the subject's subconscious is accepted as true unless it conflicts with the subject's moral principles or self-preservation. Such subconsciously accepted beliefs dominate consciously accepted ones, and this is a major cause of life's problems. Preston gave examples of self-fulfilling prophecies such as a parent telling a child that he is no good.

Through hypnosis, Preston says, such undesirable beliefs which are the causes of addiction to cigarettes, overeating, and other problems may be eliminated. Among these other problems are physical illnesses. Since, according to Preston, the brain controls every cell in your body¹, you need only convince it to take corrective action. He stated that experimentation is going on at Phoenix Baptist Hospital into the use of hypnosis to cure AIDS and that "we are able to increase the T-helper cells [of the immune system] by suggestion." This raises a confusion regarding Preston's theory of hypnosis, as he also claimed that he cannot (or will not) use hypnosis to cure a migraine headache without first identifying the cause. His rationale was that otherwise killing the pain might simply mask the true cause, resulting in more damage. The question this raises is: at what level of

description does a hypnotic suggestion need to be given? On the one hand, Preston says that he can stimulate T-cell production by suggesting it (without giving the subject a detailed biological description of the process by which such cells are generated by the body). On the other hand, he cannot simply suggest that a migraine headache be eliminated. The first view seems to presuppose that the subconscious has in its possession complete information on how bodily processes work (without first being trained in biology) while the second seems to deny this.

While Preston noted that he has never treated any AIDS cases himself, he claims a 97% success rate for smoking, 98% for weight loss, and 72% for cancer. (When pressed on this last figure, he stated that he had cured 4 of 160 cases (3%), improved longevity in 80% of the cases, and improved quality of life in 90%.)

Another useful feature of hypnosis which Preston described was its use in place of an anesthetic. He told of a case of a patient named Joe with an inoperable brain tumor. The patient was treated with hypnosis, and ended up dying — but of a "broken heart," not cancer, said Preston. In the autopsy, Preston claimed that the tumor was found to be "like a busted, shrivelled balloon" and that it was "totally gone." In case we wanted to check up on this case, Preston invited the Skeptics to contact the doctor, Barry Kriegsfeld. (I have not done so due to my location. This might be an interesting case for the Phoenix Skeptics to investigate.)

In another anecdote, Preston claimed that when he underwent surgery to have a prosthetic device inserted in his knee, he used self-hypnosis and thus required only one tenth of the normal amount of anesthetic. He failed to explain why he didn't simply correct his knee problem with hypnosis in the first place.

Some of Preston's claims for hypnosis are obviously quite controversial. On the other hand, they are anything but new. Hypnosis has been claimed as a panacea for centuries, perhaps beginning with the "mineral magnetizers" such as Paracelsus and certainly including the "animal magnetizers" who followed the theories of Mesmer (Mackay 1852/1932). While there are reports of many wondrous effects of hypnosis in the current literature from improved memory to breast enlargement (Erickson 1960; Staib and Logan 1977; White et al. 1940; Willard 1977), the field suffers from a great deal of poorly conducted research. Further, there is an interpretation of hypnosis in competition with the "trance state" theory which is gaining in acceptance and experimental support. This view, the "social-psychological interpretation" developed by T.X. Barber and Nicholas Spanos (e.g., Barber 1961, 1962, 1963; Barber and Calverley 1964; Spanos 1986), notes that effects produced by subjects under hypnosis can also be produced without hypnosis and attributes them to suggestion and the particular demands of the social situation the subject is placed in. This view has much to support it, including the fact that hypnotic

subjects tend to react as they expect hypnotic subjects are supposed to react — a feature which readily explains the fact that the characteristic features of a hypnotized subject have changed over the centuries. (An account of this interpretation's advantages over the "trance state" theory in explaining such things as hypnotic amnesia and analgesia may be found in Spanos 1986.)

Among the controversial effects of hypnosis is the use of hypnosis as an anesthetic. Recent research seems to indicate that hypnotic subjects feel just as much pain as un hypnotized subjects, but that they simply repress pain responses and deny feeling pain (Barber 1963; Kaplan 1960; Spanos 1986). In an ingenious early experiment on this effect (Pattie 1937) subjects were given the suggestion that they cease to have sensation in one hand. The subjects are then instructed to put their arms in the position of the "Japanese Illusion" — where the wrists are crossed, hands clasped with thumbs downward, and then brought up towards the body until the thumbs point upward. If the "anesthetized" hand was really anesthetized, only touches to the "good" hand should be felt and the subject should be able to make an accurate count (unlike un hypnotized unanesthetized subjects in the same situation). In fact, hypnotized subjects are no better than un hypnotized ones at identifying touches to the "good" hand.

Experiments by Spanos and others (cited in Spanos 1986) indicate that un hypnotized subjects given instructions to repress pain are just as capable of doing so as hypnotized subjects. Similar results have been obtained in studies of hypnotic amnesia, blindness, deafness, formation of weals on the skin, and change of blood flow and body temperature of limbs (Barber 1961; Barber and Calverley 1964; Paul 1963; Spanos 1986).

There is clearly much to be discovered and learned about hypnosis and the mind. But it is likewise clear that many claims of benefits of hypnosis have been exaggerated by its proponents throughout the centuries. Such claims are simply hype-nosis.

¹According to Barry Beyerstein (1988) of the Brain Behavior Laboratory at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, this claim is not true in the sense Preston implies. It is not the case that thinking something makes it happen in whatever cell you choose. On the other hand, the brain does exert influence over other cells in the body by means of controlling regional blood flow, effects by the nervous system on the immune system, and so forth.

Beyerstein also notes that while people do have more control over autonomic processes than originally thought, it is still only indirect control falling far short of what was being claimed by promoters of biofeedback.]

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Recipe for Successful Local Group

By Kent Harker

The year 1982 saw the formation of the Bay Area Skeptics by four remarkable individuals: Bob Steiner, magician; Wallace Sampson, physician; Lawrence Jerome, engineer; and Robert Sheaffer, writer and computer programmer. The group has grown and gathered momentum over the years, attracted new talent, and even made mistakes. Experience has shown that the following ingredients are important for the success of a skeptics' group:

- An important element in the formation of a successful group is the "point man." This person must have the ability to make media contacts and to deliver a good public presentation. In our case, we have had two point men, the inimitable Roberts, Steiner and Sheaffer.

- The weak excuse, "I just don't have time," is the most common one given for inaction. Anyone who looks at the BAS founders' schedules will wilt. If there is the desire, things will happen. If the resolve required to accomplish something of value is lacking, whatever starts will fizzle to a few isolated voices.

- We often hear the complaint that the press gives short shrift to the skeptical side. However, it is mostly the skeptics who are at blame. We lose by default. BAS has become well enough known that local television and radio stations call us when they want a counter to some story on the paranormal they are running. The best-known paranormalists in the Bay Area are so well acquainted with BAS that many will not appear on the same program! The media thrive on controversy. UFO stories are eye-catching and fascinating. A skeptic on a television show with a UFO abductee is the stuff great shows are made of. If the media are aware of skeptics groups, *and know that the group's spokespersons have expertise and good delivery*, they will call on them regularly. Hence, there is a need for a cadre of seasoned experts on the successful team. One bomb on the radio or television takes a long time to recover from. Steiner, Shaeffer, Sampson and Jerome are all consummate experts in their own fields, are always well prepared, and give masterful presentations.

- But, a few capable, active individuals won't sustain an organization for long. There is too much work and too many obstacles to tempt us to throw up our hands in discouragement. Without the resources and vigor of an ever-expanding network of interested people, the skeptics' effort will dwindle. For example, BAS was fortunate in recruiting Don Henvick, who has received national attention for his efforts in helping expose faith-healers. Don's dedication and imagination have been an important spark plug in keeping our commitment going. He is usually in the thick of whatever nest he has stirred up. Physicist Shawn Carlson, who has developed a weeping statue to show how such claims may be the result of fraud, came to BAS a couple of years ago and combined the thrust of some of his graduate studies with the aims of BAS. Each time he has a major article of television appearance, he gives BAS and CSICOP national recognition. We are justly proud of these and many other

BAS members who have invested their means, both time and money.

- When skeptics look at the sea of irrationality in which we swim there is a natural tendency to become discouraged and feel a sense of hopelessness because that swim is against the current--indeed, against the tide. So there is good reason to have monthly meetings and direct contact with other skeptics: It helps us remember that we are not alone, and it helps the public understand that there is, in fact, some counter to the drivel that daily assaults us. For much of the public, the information disseminated by skeptics' groups is the only pointed counter to which they are ever likely to be exposed. That is enormously important, and something that should give us pause and serious consideration to the import of our accomplishments.

- The U.S. public education system has largely failed because it has taken the role of a supplier of facts. A heap of facts does not translate into wisdom. Few people know how to think critically. Skeptics' groups can fill this vacuum, because skepticism is the ability to think critically. The time will be when noted members of skeptics' groups will be invited into their school systems to make presentations if they prepare the way. This should be one of our primary goals, because adults are not going to change substantially. Reaching students is our real goal.

- One of the most important activities of a successful group is publishing. For most groups, the newsletter is 90 percent of their budget and effort. Since it is that significant in terms of time and money, the newsletter should excel in appearance and content. *Laser* and *The Skeptic*, to name but two, are quality examples of the effort that must be expended to establish credibility. A book is judged by its cover. Like any business venture, if money is not spent to get a good product, people won't buy it and then there will not be money available to make another good product. The commitment to spend the money at the outset is a test of the commitment of individuals. If we are going to do something, we should do it right. In addition, a newsletter allows many receptive individuals who, for one reason or another, don't want to be in the public limelight to make regular and substantial contributions of time and effort. We have many in our group who like to help quietly.

- And finally, there is the support and encouragement of CSICOP. If there weren't a national journal, and an international base of like-minded people banded together, loosely though we may be, our local efforts would soon dissipate. Don't we all personally feel a sense of surging pride when we read or see the efforts of Paul Kurtz, James Randi, and all the rest of the concerned experts at CSICOP? Don't we all feel great when we can (even indirectly) rub shoulders with individuals like Carl Sagan, Murray Gell-Mann, and Stephen Gould?

The backing is there. Skeptics can make a difference. *Kent Harker is the editor of the Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet (BASIS). This article originally appeared in the March 1988 Skeptical Briefs (vol. 4, no. 1), p. 3. Reprinted with permission.*

Book Review

Nostradamus and His Prophecies by Edgar Leoni
1982, Bell Publishing Company, 823 pp.

Reviewed by Jim Lippard

Perhaps the most famous prophet who ever lived (with the possible exception of some of the Old Testament prophets) was the 16th century French astrologer Michel de Nostredame, better known as Nostradamus. His most famous prophecies are four-line verses ("quatrains") collected in groups of one hundred ("Centuries").

Edgar Leoni's book, *Nostradamus and His Prophecies* (originally published in 1961 as *Nostradamus: Life and Literature*, like many other such books, collects Nostradamus' prophecies and offers commentaries interpreting them. Unlike most of the others, Leoni's book contains a careful English translation (with the original French on facing pages) and critical commentaries. He also makes note of several forged prophecies which were inserted in later editions of Nostradamus' work.

The result of research while pursuing history degrees at Harvard and Columbia Universities, Leoni's book also gives a great deal of information besides simply a collection of the prophecies. The book begins with a biography of Nostradamus and a bibliography of works by the prophet himself and his commentators and critics. He describes how the prophecies came to be written, their historical background, a chronology of significant dates in Nostradamus' time, and genealogical charts of French, German, and Spanish leaders of the time. In Leoni's analysis of the prophecies, all of these are important factors.

Leoni states in his introduction that "there is no particular design in this work for either the glorification or debunking of Nostradamus. Indications of his seeming successes and his apparent failures in the prophetic field are dealt with, incidentally, in their places, as they arise." And this indeed is the case. Leoni's commentaries generally appear skeptical, but he does make note of famous interpretations given by other commentators. For example, one of the most famous of Nostradamus' prophecies is Century I, #35, which Leoni translates:

The young lion will overcome the old one
On the field of battle in single combat:
He will put out his eyes in a cage of gold:
Two fleets¹ one, then to die a cruel death.

This is almost always interpreted as applying to the death of Henry II in battle with the Count of Montgomery, Captain of the Scottish Guard, in 1559. Leoni, in his commentary, states:

The standard interpretation has Montgomery as the young lion and Henry II as the old lion, because both used lions as their emblems. But ... Henry II (age forty) was probably only six years older than his adversary (whose exact age is uncertain), ... neither one actually used a lion as an emblem, and ... the helmet of the King was neither

of gold nor gilded. One might further add that with *classe* meaning "fleet" everywhere else in its many occurrences in the Centuries, it is rather suspicious to use a Greek derivation here. And certainly there was no union of fleets in 1559. And, in fact, a tournament is not "the field of battle." ... The most important of all reasons for rejecting this interpretation is ... that Nostradamus had big things in store for Henry II as the new Charlemagne.

An example of one of the "seeming successes" is Century VI, #2:

In the year five hundred eighty² more or less,
One will await a very strange century:
In the year seven hundred and three² the heavens witness thereof,
That several kingdoms one to five will make a change.

Leoni's commentary states that 1580 marked the "Seventh War" in France, which began and ended that year. France's future looked gloomy, but in 1703 Louis XIV defied Europe in the War of the Spanish Succession. Describing a "very ingenious interpretation" for the fourth line, Leoni says, "The Kingdom of Spain, as inherited by Louis XIV's grandson Philip V ('to five') actually consisted of several states beyond Spain, such as the Two Sicilies, the Netherlands, the Milanese and many kingdoms in Asia and America."

Another extremely useful feature of Leoni's book is his extensive index to the prophecies. It is not just an index to individual words that appear in the quatrains — if you are interested in earthquakes, for example, the index includes reference to all quatrains which contain phrases such as "trembling of land and sea." I used this to try to find the prophecy which was being interpreted as predicting a major earthquake in California on May 10, 1988. The closest one I could find was Century IX, #83:

Sun twentieth of Taurus³ the earth will tremble very mightily,
It will ruin the great theater filled:
To darken and trouble air, sky and land,
Then the infidel will call upon God and saints.

Leoni provides no such interpretation, of course, but simply notes that this quatrain seems to contain "a somewhat apocalyptic flavor" besides its references to an earthquake and apparently to an eclipse.

In all, I highly recommend this book for those interested in Nostradamus' prophecies.

¹ Or, according to the popular interpretation, "two fractures," hence "two wounds."

² 1580 and 1703, of course.

³ The Sun enters Taurus on April 20. The "twentieth" may be to confirm this, or signify twenty days later, i.e., May 10.

Upcoming Meetings

This section contains listings for Phoenix Skeptics and TUSKS meetings.

Phoenix Skeptics meetings are normally held on a Saturday near the end of the month. Meetings start at 12:30 p.m. and are held at the Jerry's restaurant at 1750 N. Scottsdale Rd. in Tempe (south of McKellips).

December 17. SPECIAL TIME AND PLACE: Phoenix main library auditorium, Central Ave & McDowell at 1pm. David Alexander will speak on "Why people choose to believe in miracles." Mr. Alexander has done many investigations of faith healing and is a consultant to the Committee for the Scientific Examination of Religion on the topic. Mr. Alexander has been a professional magician, a private investigator, and is currently a publisher.

January 28. Normal PS meeting time and place. Erv Theobald, a Phoenix Skeptics member, will present the theory of consciousness from the behavioral psychology point of view.

If you have a suggestion for a meeting topic or a guest speaker for the Phoenix Skeptics, contact Ted Karren at the PS address or 993-2600. If you have a suggestion for a TUSKS lecture, contact Ken Morse at 881-4910.

August PS Meeting

See the article "Hipe-nosis" elsewhere in this issue for Jim Lippard's review of this meeting.

September meeting

by Michael Stackpole

Gary Mechler, an astronomer with the Kitt Peak Observatory and Pima College in Tucson, spoke at our September meeting on the subject of Astrology. His presentation focused on two specific areas: the scientific basis for Astrology and the reasons why people are susceptible to belief in Astrology.

The scientific basis for Astrology, as was pointed out, is non-existent. Astrology and Astronomy both had their beginning in the work of Ptolemy (150 CE), and many astrologers cling to this origin for the validity that they suggest it gives to their work. Gary noted that since the time of Ptolemy, the procession of the equinox means that our sun-signs — determined by the constellation in which the sun is found at our birth — are actually off by approximately 30 days. He also explained that constellations do not take up a uniform 30 degrees in the sky and that Ophiuchus is a 13th constellation in which the sun appears, but that this sign is not accounted for by most astrologers. Astrologers practicing before the discovery of Uranus, Neptune and Pluto managed to reckon without accounting for their presence, though those worlds, and their position within the Zodiac is now counted as very important. (They were discovered in 1781, 1846 and 1930 respectively.) Another point that was not mentioned, but is equally troublesome is the fact that the position of the planets within the zodiac has an effect on people *regardless of the planet's actual distance from the earth* at the time it has this effect. (Venus can be anywhere from .28 to 1.72 AU from the Earth, yet its effect does not vary at all as far as astrologers are concerned.)

Gary noted, when turning to the reasons why astrology seems to work, that it is easy for people to remember the "hits" — times when the horoscope

published in the paper is correct — than for them to catalog all the times it has been invalid. He further asserted that astrologers provide a less expensive alternative to psychological counseling. They are able to provide the feedback and validation needed to help their clients through difficult times and choices. Many of the astrologers are quite earnest in their work and, if ever skeptical at all, come to believe in the veracity of astrology if for no other reason than their string of successes in helping their clients.

Summing up, Gary mentioned scientific testing of Astrology. In all tests, the predictive and analytical value of horoscopes proved to be no better than random chance. In studies where subjects are asked to choose from among personality profiles of themselves, including one generated from their horoscope, the number of "hits" — correct selection of the horoscope-derived profile — is no better than random chance. In other studies, where profiles are prepared using the exact opposite of what is indicated in the actual horoscope, subjects rate the profile as highly accurate. With horoscopes producing profiles that are very broad in their definition, everyone can find something in the description that makes them believe that the document has actually been tailored to and fits them exactly.

October meeting

by Judy Sawyer

The topic was out-of-body experiences (OBEs). The speaker was Janet Lee Mitchell, PhD, a parapsychologist currently involved in researching gross phenomenon (large-scale psi results as opposed to searching for statistical anomalies). She is the author of the book "Out-of-Body Experiences."

Dr. Mitchell presented slides and details regarding Mr. Ingo Swann, who claims to have had many OBEs. During the discussion, Dr. Mitchell agreed that the controls on the experiments done with Mr. Swann were possibly lax and that he was not visually observed during the testing to rule out possible duplicity.

One point of Dr. Mitchell's talk was about the need for funding of such research, and the necessity of being

able to use "high-tech" equipment. This would be used to discover how OBEs effect the physical world (i.e. photographic film, energy detectors), working, of course, on the assumption that such experiences do indeed occur. Most of the members of the audience did not accept this assumption, on the basis of a lack of reliable proof.

Dr. Mitchell also remarked that whenever parapsychologists make initial suggested (positive) findings, money runs out or further experiments are not conducted.

Editor's Ramblings

This is a very late newsletter. But it is here.

Time flies when you're falling through the sky. I've taken up skydiving — it seemed like a good way to keep from having to do another newsletter. Seriously, though, this is a smaller issue than normal, because I need to save material for the next issue, which may be even smaller. Please contribute! Letters to the editor, book reviews, whatever.

I was disappointed by the tone set by some members of our group during the October meeting. There was an impasse at which it was clear we could not reach agreement. Some felt that any further discussion or audition was futile, except to try to reach such an agreement. This would clearly have been nothing but a waste of time. When the suggestion was made that we let Dr. Mitchell carry on with her presentation, I was happy to see that most of us settled down and continued in the

exchange of ideas and information. This, after all, is the purpose of our meetings. I hope that, in the future, more of us will notice such situations earlier and help get the meeting back onto track.

Michael Stackpole was on KFYI to present the skeptical side of hypnotic regression to past lives. The show came off very well, and the alternative explanation was made to sound very reasonable. Mike was helped by several glaring factual errors (found by his careful research and some background info) and the amenable position of the person causing the trances.

There was another Focus on You expo this year. I missed it again, this time because I was in Chicago attending the CSICOP conference. More about that in a future issue.

About your mailing label — if it says v2n1, it means either that you haven't renewed or that we haven't updated our database — and the previous issue was to be your last.

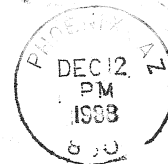
If it says v2n2, then, well, this is your last issue unless you've renewed. You with v2n3 should know what that means.

Expect the next newsletter early in January — unless I spend too much time between now and then by jumping out of perfectly good airplanes...

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The Arizona Skeptic is the official publication of the Phoenix Skeptics. Phoenix Skeptics is a non-profit scientific and educational organization with the following goals: 1. to subject claims of the paranormal, occult, and fringe sciences to the test of science, logic, and common sense; 2. to act as a clearinghouse for factual and scientific information about the paranormal; and 3. to promote critical thinking and the scientific method. Subscription rate is \$10 per year. All manuscripts become the property of Phoenix Skeptics, which retains the right to edit them. Address all correspondence to Phoenix Skeptics, P.O. Box 62792, Phoenix, AZ 85082-2792. CSICOP-recognized skeptic groups may reprint articles in entirety by crediting the author, The Arizona Skeptic, and Phoenix Skeptics. All others must receive Phoenix Skeptics' permission. Copyright © 1988 by Phoenix Skeptics. Opinions expressed in articles are those of the authors.

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