

# The Arizona Skeptic

A Publication of the Phoenix Skeptics and the Tucson Skeptical Society (TUSKS)

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## Predictions for 1989 and Beyond

These predictions were made at our monthly meeting on 19 November 1988. While a formal disclaimer might be in order here, we cannot, in good faith, recommend someone consult a "real" psychic before choosing to act upon our predictions.

### Nature and Natural Disasters

- 1) A tornado in the midwest will destroy a trailer park, but will miss a nearby church in which refugees have gathered.
- 2) A pilot whale pod will beach itself on Cape Cod, attracting national attention.
- 3) In March or April an airliner with red on its tail or in its logo will go down with approximately 68 casualties.
- 4) Killer bees will be found in Arizona.

### Politics and Political Disasters

- 1) Dan Quayle
- 2) The failure of debtor nations to meet their obligations will cause a worldwide banking crisis and start a recession.
- 3) Rumania will have a new leader and a liberalization of its government.
- 4) Political unrest will continue in the Soviet Union, especially in the area of the Ukraine.
- 5) Despite worldwide efforts and urging, peace will not be established in the Middle East.
- 6) Mr. Gorbachev will face a serious challenge to his leadership.
- 7) The Soviet Union will complete its formal troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, but will maintain a presence in the area.
- 8) Jim Wright will be close to being President in 1989.
- 9) Oliver North will receive a pardon.
- 10) Japan will have a new Emperor.
- 11) Allegations will surface linking the President or members of the Executive branch with drug trafficking.
- 12) Allegations will surface suggesting the President has or has had a mistress.
- 13) The U.S. government will take steps to increase revenues.
- 14) Allegations will surface suggesting Princess Diana and Fergie are feuding.
- 15) Allegations will surface suggesting Princess Diana and Fergie have settled their differences and are good friends.
- 16) Neo-nazi and white supremacist activity will be on the rise.
- 17) The President's approval rating will drop.

### Arts and Entertainment

- 1) Elvis Presley will **not** go public with details about how he faked his death.
- 2) Rumors that Elvis Presley and Jim Morrison are working on an album in France will arise.
- 3) Whitley Strieber will release the third book in his UFO trilogy and admit the whole thing was a hoax.
- 4) Wedding Bells for Elizabeth Taylor. Her groom will be someone who gave her great support through her health crisis.

5) A female star will design and market a cosmetics line. (Inside bets are Joan Collins, Jessica Hahn and/or Madonna.)

6) 1989 will be a record year at the box office for movies, and a summer release will become the new top grossing film ever.

7) John Lennon will have a new album.

### Science

- 1) Black Holes will be shown to have polar opposites.
- 2) 1989 will be the hottest summer on record and Phoenix will have record high temperatures.
- 3) New fossils will be discovered which back evolution.
- 4) 1989 will see a breakthrough in superconductivity.
- 5) Problems will delay the construction of the superconducting supercollider.
- 6) Trouble will develop with the Soviet probe to Mars.
- 7) No human being will set foot on Mars in the next five years.
- 8) In 1989 scientists will see the furthest distant object ever seen in the universe.
- 9) Planets orbiting other stars will be seen in 1989.
- 10) A method for producing an image like the Shroud of Turin without photography will be discovered.
- 11) Monopoles will **not** be discovered in 1989.
- 12) A new, no calorie cooking oil will become available.

### Medicine

- 1) AIDS will become most prevalent among low income, minority males.
- 2) Rice bran will be touted as the new health food.
- 3) People flock to clinics in Mexico offering cures for AIDS.
- 4) Allegations of foot-dragging concerning an AIDS cure will center on the FDA.
- 5) Genetic manipulation will lead to cures for AIDS and some forms of cancer.

### Society

- 1) The term "conservative" will acquire pejorative overtones.
- 2) The illegitimacy rate will rise in the United States.
- 3) Traffic conditions in Phoenix will deteriorate.
- 4) Prices for Phoenix Cardinal tickets will **not** drop down into the range of reason.

### Religion

- 1) Despite a series of predictions backed by Scripture, the rapture, birth of the Anti-Christ and the end of the world will **not** occur.
- 2) Proof of the existence of Noah's Ark will be advanced but the Turkish government will not allow an expedition to Mount Ararat to recover the ship.
- 3) The Vatican will post its third consecutive deficit year.

### Finally

We predict that our predictions will have an accuracy rating equal to or better than those made by "real" psychics. We also predict that our predictions will have about as much validity as their predictions as well.

## Psychological Factors Conducive to Paranormal Belief

by Jim Lippard

In recent years there has been an increase of interest in so-called paranormal phenomena. Accompanying this increase in interest has been an increase in reports of such phenomena, and thus an increase in belief. In this article, I wish to address several psychological factors which can contribute to such beliefs.

I have divided the major factors which lead to paranormal beliefs into four categories: subjective validation, belief biases, memory failures, and coincidence. These categories are not mutually exclusive (i.e., predisposition towards a particular belief may be considered both a belief bias and a cause of memory failure) but have simply been adopted for expository purposes. For each of these four categories I will describe some relevant factors, giving examples and references to experimental studies.

It should be noted that this is not an exhaustive list of factors. I will ignore, for instance, cases in which character readers give their clients genuinely accurate and specific information which is obtained by "fishing" for information, cues of body language, or other more devious means. Summaries of such methods may be found in Hyman (1977) and Marks and Kammann (1980).

### Subjective Validation

The phenomenon of subjective validation was apparently first reported by Bertram Forer (1949) and called the "fallacy of personal validation." In Forer's study, he gave psychology students a personality test to fill out and told them they would later receive a personality evaluation based on the test. One week later, all students were given the same personality sketch consisting of 13 statements taken from an astrology book. Students were requested to mark each statement as true or false and rate the sketch as a whole for accuracy on a scale of zero to five. No statement received less than 31% true or more than 23% false responses and the sketch was given a mean ranking of 4.3.

Norman Sundberg (1955) conducted an experiment in which subjects were given a personality description (a "bona fide" sketch) written by a psychologist from results of a Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) and a generalized sketch (a "fake" sketch) constructed from the statements used by Forer (1949). The subjects, asked to choose which sketch was the more accurate, were just as likely to choose the fake sketch as they were to choose the bona fide sketch. (A similar result was obtained by Carlson (1985) in that subjects could not pick their own California Personality Inventory (CPI) from a set of three at a rate better than chance. This implies that either subjects cannot identify their own personalities, cannot properly read a CPI, or the CPI doesn't work. The second seems most likely.)

Geoffrey Dean (1987) demonstrated that the same effect occurs in people's ratings of astrological readings. In one of his experiments, he gave half of his test subjects

an "accurate" interpretation of their horoscope, while the other half was given an interpretation based on an astrological chart in which the planetary aspects were reversed. In this manner, indications of extroversion were replaced with introversion, stable for unstable, ability for inability, and so forth. Subjects were given a birth chart and written interpretation along with explanations and asked to rate each item as correct, uncertain, or incorrect. The result was that subjects rated 96% of the items in the genuine charts as accurate and 97% of the items in the reversed charts as accurate.

When people are given highly generalized personality sketches or character readings (such as those performed by psychics and astrologers) which they believe are specifically tailored for them, they tend to rank their accuracy as being very high. C.R. Snyder and R.J. Shenkel (1975) conducted experiments which showed that subjects will rate the same sketch (Forer's again) higher if told that it was written specifically for them than if told that it is "generally true for all people." Experiments by Ray Hyman (1977) at Harvard found that the most acceptable sketches were those which contained approximately 75% desirable statements which were viewed as specific and about 25% undesirable statements which were viewed as general.

Other factors which enhance the perceived accuracy of such sketches include the use of an assessment procedure which is viewed as plausible and perceived credibility of the source. The latter factor is illustrated by another experiment conducted by Hyman (1977). He gave students a fake personality sketch, telling half of them that it was the result of an astrology reading and the other half that it was the result of a new test, the Harvard Basic Personality Profile. While the two groups gave the same acceptability ratings to the individual statements, the sketch as a whole was given a significantly higher rating by the students who believed it was from a personality test.

It is interesting to note that the nature of subjective validation can lead to a self-perpetuating system. Hyman (1977) relates how he used to supplement his income as a teenage mentalist magician by doing palm reading. When he began, he did not believe in palmistry, but after a few years of seeing people convinced how accurate it was, he became a believer. (He lost his belief when, at the suggestion of a professional mentalist, he deliberately gave readings opposite to what the palm lines indicated and found them to be as successful as ever.)

### Belief Biases

Another set of factors contributing to paranormal beliefs are biases involving belief. Some effects include predispositions altering perceptions, belief perseverance, illusory correlation, confirmation bias, and the illusion of control.

A predisposition towards or against a particular belief can affect what you think you perceive (Loftus 1979). This has been illustrated regarding paranormal phenomena in a number of experiments. Experiments by Susan Blackmore and Tom Troscianko (1985) found that believers in ESP are more susceptible to the illusion of

control (described below) than are nonbelievers. They also found that believers tended to significantly underestimate the number of "hits" that would be expected by chance, while nonbelievers were fairly accurate.

The phenomenon of belief perseverance (Nisbett & Ross 1980; Goldman 1986) contributes to the inertia of paranormal belief. An experiment by Barry Singer and Victor Benassi (1980-81) involved a demonstration by an amateur magician to six introductory psychology classes. In two classes he was presented as a psychic and in four classes he was presented as a magician. In two of the "magic" classes, explicit disclaimers about the magician using only tricks and not being a psychic were given. In all cases, belief that the magician was actually psychic did not fall below 50% (in the "psychic" condition, 77% believed he was psychic, in the "magic" condition 65% thought he was psychic, and in the "magic" condition with disclaimers 58% thought he was psychic). After the performance, students were asked whether magicians could duplicate his demonstration. Virtually all agreed that magicians could do so. They were then asked if they would like to revise their analysis of the magician's psychic abilities. Only a few did, reducing the percentage who believed in his psychic powers to 55%. The students were then asked how many people who perform such acts claiming to be psychics were actually fakes. The estimate was that 3 out of 4 "psychics" are frauds. Given another chance to revise their estimate, the percentage of students believing in the magician's psychic skills dropped to 52%.

Illusory correlation involves the perception of correlations that do not exist (Chapman & Chapman 1971; Marks & Kammann 1980). Studies by Loren and Jean Chapman (1971) found that people project their preconceptions into interpretations of the Draw-a-Person (DAP) test, which involves having a subject draw a picture of a person. According to the originator of the test, features of the drawings correlate with personality characteristics: those worried about intelligence draw big heads, suspicious individuals draw small eyes, etc. In Chapman & Chapman's experiments, subjects were given carefully measured drawings, each of which had attached to it a pair of diagnostic statements such as "The man who drew this (1) is suspicious of other people, and (2) has had problems of sexual impotence." Subjects given drawings which did not exhibit the DAP correlations found the expected correlations nonetheless. Even in extremely generous conditions, where subjects were given unlimited time, scratch paper, a pencil, a ruler, and an award for accuracy, 45% of the subjects found illusory correlations. In fact, even when the correlations were opposite the expected direction, 16% claimed to find a correlation between large heads and "He is worried about his intelligence" and 50% found a correlation between worrying about manliness and drawing muscular pictures.

A related factor is confirmation bias (Dean 1987; Nisbett & Ross 1980; Goldman 1986). People tend to look for things that confirm their beliefs rather than disconfirm them. Dean (1987) reports a study by Glick and Snyder in which 12 believers and 14 skeptics were asked to test the validity of a respondent's astrological

chart interpretation (which indicated that the person was highly extroverted.) Each subject chose and asked 12 questions from a list of 11 confirmatory, 12 disconfirmatory, and 5 neutral questions. The respondent was in fact a confederate of the experimenters who had been instructed to give predetermined answers matching the slant of the questions. Both skeptics and believers chose an average of 7 confirmatory, 3 disconfirmatory, and fewer than 2 neutral questions. For skeptics, there was a significant correlation between the number of confirmatory questions asked and the accuracy rating given the chart. For believers, on the other hand, there was no correlation—they always gave the chart a favorable rating.

Another factor is the illusion of control (Ayeroff & Abelson 1976; Blackmore & Troscianko 1985; Langer 1975; Langer & Roth 1975). Fred Ayeroff and Robert Abelson (1976) performed experiments testing for ESB—"extrasensible belief." Subjects took part in a telepathy experiment in which they attempted to transmit items on cards to receiver subjects. Subject pairs were divided into four groups, testing all combinations of two independent variables. The two variables were choice and involvement (CI) and communicative experience (EX). Subjects in the CI conditions were permitted to jointly choose which set of five cards (from 120) they would attempt to communicate telepathically. Those in the no-CI conditions had a set of five cards randomly assigned. Subjects in the EX conditions began with a practice session in which an intercom between the sender and receiver was enabled. The sender would name the card he was trying to transmit over the intercom in this practice session. In the no-EX conditions, there were also practice sessions but the card being transmitted was not named. While the experiments found no evidence for ESP, they did find evidence for ESB. Subjects in CI and EX conditions believed their performance was significantly better than those who were not. Further, senders had greater confidence in their abilities than receivers (except in the both CI and EX condition). This indicates that those who felt greater control over what they were doing had greater confidence in their success. Another experiment (Blackmore & Troscianko 1985) found that ESP believers felt they exerted more control over a coin-flipping game than did nonbelievers.

#### Memory Failures

A variety of memory failures can lead to paranormal belief. The susceptibility to error of human memory in the three stages of acquisition, retention, and recall has been well documented (Coover 1927; Loftus 1979). Failures in acquisition are commonly exploited by magicians, and these failures can contribute to paranormal belief. An example is found in the late nineteenth-century seances of Richard Hodgson and S.J. Davey (reported in Coover 1927). Hodgson was an investigator of mediums who despaired of obtaining full and complete descriptions of what occurred at seances, so he arranged with Davey to put on carefully staged seances. They then obtained written reports from the witnesses present. The results were total deception of the participants and acceptance of

Davey as one of the greatest mediums. When Hodgson and Davey exposed their hoax in the *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, Alfred Russell Wallace stated that their results could not be accepted until it was proved that Davey was not a genuine medium simply pretending to be a fake. One example of witness memory failure involved a slate substitution trick. One witness, a "Mrs. Y," incorrectly reported that "This test seemed to me *perfect*. The slate was under my own eye, on top of the table, the whole time, and either my daughter's hand or my own was placed firmly upon it without the intermission of even a second; moreover, we closed and opened it ourselves." (Coover 1927)

A failure of memory similar to confirmation bias is selective memory for success, or "hindsight bias." (Dean 1987; Marks & Kammann 1980). In a study by Russell and Jones (reported by Dean 1987), a group of 50 students equally divided among skeptics and believers about ESP were asked to read articles about ESP and later tested on their ability to recall them. Skeptics had 90% accuracy in memory for articles that were either favorable or unfavorable toward ESP, while believers had 100% accuracy for the favorable article but less than 40% accuracy for the unfavorable article. In fact, 16% of the believers remembered the unfavorable article as being favorable.

#### Coincidence

A final factor I will describe leading to paranormal belief is that of coincidence. People tend to underestimate the probability of coincidences, leading them to adopt further explanations when coincidences occur. Ruma Falk (1981-82), a former student of Amos Tversky, conducted an experiment to determine how people who hear stories about coincidences interpret them. A group of subjects was asked to rate a set of four coincidences (an unexpected meeting, a fortunate hitchhike, a convergence of birthdays, and a peculiar numerical combination) for their degree of surprisingness, and then write and rate coincidences which had happened to them. They rated these as more surprising than the stories from the experiment. These coincidences, along with the original four stories, were then given to 146 new subjects to rate. The new subjects found the previous subjects' coincidences to be less surprising than the experimenter's stories.

Two other illusions regarding coincidence described by Marks and Kammann (1980) are the "clustering illusion" and the "gremlin illusion." The first says that things come in clusters: a doctor gets a run of the same rare problem after he hasn't seen it for months. Emergency room personnel note more activity during full moons (experimental surveys show this doesn't really occur, see Kelly, Rotton, and Culver 1985-86). The second says that things happen at the wrong times: you get a flat tire on the way to an important meeting, the phone rings while you're in the shower.

#### Conclusion

In many cases, I suspect errors can be avoided through training (e.g., a method can be acquired which, when used

in conjunction with processes which can lead to illusory correlation, prevents the illusory correlation from being believed). The fact that these error-prone factors can be identified is testimony to this conclusion. It is doubtful that all errors can be avoided, but it seems that the situation could be improved. A large part of the problem is general ignorance of the existence of these factors themselves. Knowledge of these factors could be used to watch for their appearance and avoid error. It seems likely that education could significantly reduce the number of spurious reports of paranormal phenomena.

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*This article was originally written (in slightly different form) as a paper for Alvin Goldman's Knowledge & Cognition course at the University of Arizona.*

## Book Review

*The Art of Deception*

by Nicholas Capaldi

1987, Prometheus Books, Buffalo, New York

Reviewed by Ted Karren

The book's subtitle is, "An Introduction to Critical Thinking." A more appropriate title would have been, "The Art of Debate", but Capaldi's main assumption is that zealous proponents of one side of an argument are liable to use deceptive tactics. The book was written to aid the reader in recognizing deception rather than in employing deception in an argument. It is the kind of book a law student might read as a basic study in argumentation.

The book contains three areas of emphasis: presenting our case, attacking an argument, and defending our case. In presenting our case, Capaldi instructs us to appeal to such things as authority, pity, tradition, or precedent. A lawyer is likely to appeal to pity or precedent. A writer of an article appeals to authority by citing those who command respect in a particular field.

In attacking an argument, we must look for holes in our opponent's logic. Are they over-generalizing, making simplistic statements, distorting statistics, or fabricating definitions and evidence? Capaldi goes through a nice logic tutorial to expose the reader to the types of logic errors often made. He shows how much easier it is to attack an argument than to present or defend one.

Assuming the opposition will also attack our argument, we want to be in a position to defend it. This means defending our given definitions, use of statistics, generalizations, and line of thought. We have a choice of deceiving the audience into favoring our position or to appeal to what are the cold hard facts and let the audience decide the more desirable alternative. He points out that

winning the argument at this point is the coup de grace to our opponent. We win by showing the other side has ignored the facts, provided no proof, and the like. He also suggests there are times when both sides may want to concede a draw.

My favorite part is a section with which Capaldi concludes on reasoning. He describes here how to spot fallacies in arguments. The reader learns terms for the different ploys used in a deceptive argument such as red herrings, inconsistency, circular arguments, and complex questions, not to mention some Latin terms like *ad hominem* (attack on a person's character), *ad baculum* (appeal to fear), and *ad populum* (appeal to the public). The first portion of the book also presents a heuristic method for determining if a syllogism (e.g. All A's are B's; C is an A; thus, C is a B) is valid or invalid. The results are surprising. Some syllogisms that appear valid are shown to be invalid through this method.

We as investigators can take a lesson from Capaldi's book. We must not assume our audience is aware of both sides of any controversial topic. We must research the facts and defer comments to those with the proper background or knowledge of a subject. Since it is easier to question the claims of proponents of pseudoscience and the paranormal, we must concentrate on that effort and avoid making claims of our own that we would need to defend unless we have undaunted evidence to support our position.

## Book Review

*Hypnosis, Imagination, and Human Potentialities*

by Theodore X. Barber, Nicholas P. Spanos, and John F. Chaves

1974, Pergamon Press, 189pp.

Reviewed by Jim Lippard

Because my interest in hypnosis was piqued by Dr. Michael Preston's talk at the August 1988 Phoenix Skeptics meeting, I've been seeking out and reading material on hypnosis. The book I've most recently read on the subject is *Hypnosis, Imagination, and Human Potentialities*. While the book is somewhat out of date (and may be supplanted by *Hypnotism: The Cognitive-Behavioral Perspective* edited by Spanos and Chaves now being offered by Prometheus), it offers a concise and easy-to-read overview of the cognitive-behavioral theory of hypnosis developed by its authors.

The book begins with a list of five traditional assumptions about hypnosis:

1. There exists a state of consciousness that is fundamentally different from the waking state and the deep sleep state. This distinct state is labeled "hypnosis," "the hypnotic state," or "trance."
2. Hypnosis may occasionally occur spontaneously, but it is usually induced by certain kinds of procedures that are labeled "hypnotic inductions" or "trance inductions."
3. Hypnosis is not a momentary condition that lasts only for a few seconds. On the contrary, when a person has been placed in a hypnotic state, he remains in it for a period of time and he is typically brought out of it by a command from the hypnotist, such as "Wake up!"

4. There are levels or depths of hypnosis; that is, hypnosis can vary from light to medium to very deep.

5. As the person goes deeper into hypnosis, he becomes increasingly responsive to a wide variety of suggestions, including suggestions for anesthesia, age regression, hallucination, and amnesia. (p. vii)

The authors reject all five of these assumptions. In the first section of the book, "Introduction and Analogies," they give various analogies for hypnosis. They reject the comparison of a hypnotized person to a sleepwalker—hypnotized subjects have normal EEGs, are attentive to stimuli (suggestions), and remember what occurred while hypnotized in the absence of contrary suggestions. Instead, an alternative analogy—that of reading a book—is offered. A person reading becomes involved in imaginings and (usually) does not keep having thoughts such as "This is only a novel." Similarly, a hypnotized person is one who thinks and imagines along with the suggestions being received.

The second section of the book, "The Art of 'Hypnotizing'", describes experiments designed to find variables which enhance responses to suggestions. Contrary to the assumption of the traditional model, hypnotic induction procedure is not necessary. "Task motivational instructions" actually worked better than a standardized induction procedure involving suggestions of relaxation, drowsiness, and sleep. These instructions told subjects several things: 1. that their performance depended on their willingness to try to imagine vividly and experience the things that would be described; 2. that previous subjects were able to do these things when they put aside notions that it would be difficult or silly; and 3. if they tried to imagine to the best of their ability they would have interesting and valuable experiences.

In all, the authors identify eight variables which positively affect responsiveness to suggestions:

1. defining the situation as hypnosis;
2. removing fears and misconceptions;
3. securing cooperation;
4. asking the subject to keep his eyes closed;
5. suggesting relaxation, sleep, and hypnosis;
6. elaborating and varying the wording and tone of suggestions;
7. coupling suggestions with actual events;
8. preventing or reinterpreting the subject's failure to act in accordance with suggestions.

The fourth of these variables, asking the subject to keep his eyes closed, also apparently accounts for some other features associated with hypnosis such as a "hypnotic appearance" and changes in body feelings. Experiments with a Close-Your-Eyes control group, hypnotic induction group, and

Place-Yourself-in-Hypnosis group found that subjects who merely closed their eyes experienced changes in perceived size of body parts, changes in equilibrium, and changes in experienced temperature that did not differ

significantly in quantity from those experienced by the other two groups.

The next section of the book, "Mediating Variables," describes how attitudes, motivations, and expectancies affect hypnosis. Positive attitude, motivation, and expectancy all contribute to the likelihood of experiencing hypnotic effects. Further, subjects who think and imagine with the themes of suggestions by using goal-directed imagining are more likely to respond to suggestions. For example, a subject who passed a test suggestion for arm heaviness imagined "that there were all kinds of rocks tied to my arm. It felt heavy and I could feel it going down." (p. 62) Subjects who use goal-directed imagining tend to perceive their resulting movements as partially or totally involuntary.

The fourth section of the book, "The Wonders of Hypnotism," describes such perceptual effects as deafness, blindness, and colorblindness; physiological effects such as heart acceleration and curing warts; age regression; visual hallucination; trance logic; the suppression of surgical pain; and stage hypnosis. In most cases the actual effects are less than impressive, and in all cases it appears that hypnosis is not necessary to achieve the desired effect. The chapter on stage hypnosis is particularly interesting; it seems that there are a number of "tricks" involved in putting on such a show. Some tricks include whispered instructions to subjects, the "failure to challenge technique," and "amazing feats" which have nothing to do with hypnosis. An example of a whispered instruction is to tell an uncooperative subject (one who is not responding to suggestions) to "Please sit down and then close your eyes," followed by making hand motions over him and saying for the audience "You are going into a deep hypnotic trance." (p. 102) An example of the "failure to challenge technique" is to suggest to a subject that he cannot bend his arm or unclasp his hands without challenging him to attempt to do so. When the hypnotist tells the subject after several seconds that he can now bend his arm or unclasp his hands, the audience assumes that the suggestions were effective. An example of a feat which has nothing to do with hypnosis is the "human plank feat" in which a subject is placed between two chairs, one beneath his head and shoulders and the other beneath his calves. Another person then stands upon his chest. In fact, the average person can support as much as 300 pounds in such a position—though both hypnotized and unhypnotized individuals will tire within 2-3 minutes (p. 103).

Finally, in a section titled "Implications and Prospects," the authors describe how hypnotic effects can be used in everyday life (without any hypnotic induction procedure) to control pain, dreaming, skin temperature, and so forth. Various areas for future research are also outlined.

In all, the book is recommended as an antidote to the traditional and popular view of hypnosis as a special state of mind.



## 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).

**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.

**February 25.** Normal PS meeting time and place. Speaker and topic unknown at press time.

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.

## November PS Meeting

Our November meeting was great fun. We spent the time coming up with our predictions for the coming year "and beyond." Many of them are reproduced elsewhere in this newsletter. We hope to show how easy it is to make predictions without any psychic ability.

## December PS Meeting

by **Judy Sawyer**

Over forty people showed up at the Phoenix Public Library to hear David Alexander. This meeting was billed as "Why people believe in miracles," but the talk was about faith healers and some of Mr. Alexander's investigations. He has experience as a magician and a private investigator. Currently doing investigations on behalf of the Committee for the Scientific Examination of Religion (CSER), he is also starting his own publishing firm. He has appeared on numerous talk shows and newscasts, and writes articles for publication.

Mr. Alexander made it clear that CSER does not debate a person's right to hold religious beliefs. What they challenge are the fraudulent methods used in faith healing and the ethics of using such methods to take advantage of ignorance or desperation.

Faith healing practices can be put into three groups:

- Use of electronic/memory devices to deceive audiences into believing that the healer has supernatural abilities (e.g. Peter Popoff)
- Display of non-specific "knowledge" of the healer. For example, a healer announces that a woman in Ohio is being cured of cancer and that she should call in and speak to a helper (and be prompted for a donation).
- Local charismatic churches that do not make big claims, as they have the same audience every week.

During a faith healing session, the division of speaker and audience ceases to exist. The audience participates in the program, becomes excited, and a quasi-religious "psychodrama" takes place. To an objective onlooker, it seems almost comic until one realizes that this is a real-life audience full of people with cancer, handicaps, diseases, and false hopes. What emotions must come to those who receive an unsuccessful healing session? Attendees of faith healing sessions are often told that their disease was caused by Satan, and only people who really

want to be healed can be healed. In some cases, a trip to a regular doctor is considered to be a "breach of faith."

Mr. Alexander concentrated much of his lecture on the Hunters, a "down-home" couple who have been working the faith-healing circuit for several years. The Hunters are self-ordained "healers" who use the "laying on of hands" method. They are also involved with the selling of books and tapes and the passing of the collection plate. Although the Hunters welcome examinations of their profit statements, no one has actually been able to see them. Also, the "cured" always seem to vanish after the program (i.e. they are unavailable for questioning). No pre/post diagnosis from M.D.s are ever furnished. There was a videotape that Mr. Alexander talked along with. Most of it was footage of the Hunters in action.

Mr. Alexander opened the floor for questions and was asked why conventional religions were not policing the faith healers, especially since it is the Christians who suffer the most from bogus healing claims. Mr. Alexander said that he has asked religious leaders that same question and has not received an answer. What causes people to believe in faith healing? Mr. Alexander suggested that culture, how someone was raised and coming to wrong conclusions could lead people to become easy targets for exploitation. One of Mr. Alexander's goals is to promote critical thinking skills.

Our meeting ended with Mr. Alexander urging support of local groups such as the Phoenix Skeptics. These groups help make the community aware of issues such as bogus faith healing.

## TUSKS lecture

by **Ken Morse**

The Tusks December lecturer was Conrad Goeringer, who spoke on "Bimbo's for Satan." The following is from the meeting announcement:

Are Satanic cults conducting ritual murders, kidnappings, and cattle mutilations... or are organized bands of Satanists recruiting teenagers, sacrificing animals, inserting messages in Rock 'n' Roll music? Is "Heavy Metal" music Satan's Underground?

This talk is a skeptical look at these and other claims being made today by television talk show hosts, self-appointed "experts on the occult", so-called "ex-Satanists" and certain religious leaders. Is all this the work of the "Devil", or a media creation? Is "Satan's Underground" a reality; or a projection of

fears, wild imagination, and poor reporting by certain media?

Mr. Goeringer examined the history of "Satan Worship" and found that it is rooted in conventional religion with origins in Mithric religion and Zoroastrianism, through Greek and Roman cults and early Christianity. Much of the modern formalisms of Satan were evolved by Inquisitors, "creating" imaginative and bizarre confessions for heretics to admit to. During the Age of Reason, most belief in the Devil and the practice of Satan worship waned. Within the last few years, New Age mysticism, anti-scientific sentiment, and the sensationalist press have begun to exploit the myth that there are large bands of well-organized Satanists, seeking to overthrow modern society.

Goeringer has tracked some of these so-called organizations. In one instance, the source was a single, isolated "Minneapolis bookkeeper whose imagination had created these ephemeral plots." While it is evident that Satanist trappings, symbols, and rituals can occasionally be seen, these are, in many instances, after-the-fact responses to the Satanist media myth. After some suicides on an Indian reservation, following attribution of the deaths to Satanism, the media showed clearly its tendency to "create" sensational news supporting the bizarre, occult, and mystical notions; notions that are already rather widely held. It was noted that many kids probably use satanist symbols to shock their parents.

Goeringer said that Anton LaVey and the "Church of Satan" are just "earny"-money schemes, with a lot of phoney theatrics and dress-up parties, dispensing a sort of "me-generation" philosophy, but otherwise harmless.

He summarized by saying that far more misery has been caused in the name of organized religion, and by

secular types in suits and ties, than all of the satanists mumbling over pentagrams and goats heads in all of history. Questions from the floor were answered.

A video of the lecture was made and it will be shown on Channel 62 of Tucson Community Cable for the next several weeks. It runs 98 minutes, and is available for use by skeptics groups for nominal postal charges. For details write to TUSKS, 2508 E 23, Tucson, Arizona 85713

### Editor's Ramblings

After the December meeting, David Alexander was whisked away by Mike Stackpole to the studios of KFYI 910 AM in Phoenix. They appeared with Revs. Helen and Franklin Hall of the International Healing Cathedral. One of the Halls' tracts recounts the cure of a case of AIDS through their method of fasting and prayer. The doctor that attested to the claim, however, only made a phone call from Canada to Rev. Hall. Research by Mike Stackpole failed to uncover this doctor. It was suggested that the Halls should discontinue distribution of the tract until the claim could be documented. Unfortunately, the Halls didn't stay on the show to talk much about this, instead choosing to use a commercial break as a chance to escape.

Mike had previously been on KFYI to talk about hypnotic regression while it was being done in the studio to a couple of volunteers. Both cases were unconvincing and were shown to have a simple explanation.

Mike and I spent an hour during New Year's Eve on KFYI talking about our predictions for the year. We had been invited to stay for two hours; but the second hour's host, the hypnotist talked about previously, suggested that perhaps we could join her on some later show.

We thank Victoria Jones of KFYI for the airtime.

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. Editor is Ron Harvey.

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