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Jim Lippard

James Joseph Lippard (born 1965) is an American skeptic, freethinker, and information security professional recognized for his foundational role in Arizona's organized skepticism movement and his critiques of pseudoscience, religion, and cults such as Scientology. [1] Lippard founded the Phoenix Skeptics in 1985, serving as its executive director until 1988, and co-founded the Phoenix Area Skeptics Society (PASS) in 2011 to promote critical thinking and rational inquiry. [2] He holds a B.A. in philosophy and has pursued graduate studies in epistemology and cognitive science at the University of Arizona, where he engaged in philosophical debates on topics including immortality and creationism. [3] Professionally, Lippard directs information security architecture and engineering, applying rigorous analytical approaches honed through his skeptical activism. [1] His notable contributions include co-authoring "Scientology vs. the Internet" for *Skeptic* magazine in 1995, analyzing the organization's conflicts with online criticism, and publishing "The Decline (and Probable Fall) of the Scientology Empire" in 2012, which examined its eroding membership and influence amid legal and technological challenges. [2] Lippard has also contributed chapters to edited volumes like Gordon Stein's *Encyclopedia of the Paranormal* and Joe Nickell's *Psychic Sleuths*, focusing on empirical scrutiny of paranormal claims. [2]

Early Life and Education

Birth and Family Background

James Joseph Lippard was born in 1965. [1] Limited public information exists regarding his early family background or parental influences, with no verifiable details on siblings, upbringing, or socioeconomic context emerging from available records associated with his skeptical and professional activities. [1]

Academic Pursuits

James J. Lippard earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in philosophy from Arizona State University

self-description as a doctoral candidate in philosophy majoring in that field during correspondence related to critiques of religious apologetics in the early 1990s. [4]

Following his M.A., Lippard enrolled as a Ph.D. student in the Human and Social Dimensions of Science and Technology program at Arizona State University, an interdisciplinary field examining the societal impacts of scientific and technological advancements. [1] Contemporary accounts from the late 1980s and early 1990s describe him as a philosophy graduate student engaging in debates on scientific skepticism and creationism, aligning with the program's emphasis on critical analysis of science-society interactions. [5] He did not complete the doctoral degree, transitioning instead to professional roles in information security while maintaining scholarly interests in epistemology and cognitive science. [1]

Professional Career

Employment in Information Security

Lippard began his career in information security with senior operations roles at American Express, where he contributed to private-sector perspectives on operational resilience and cyber threat intelligence sharing. [6] [7] In these capacities, he supported initiatives integrating threat intelligence into resilience planning and automated sharing standards, as documented in industry standards from 2017 and 2019. [6] [7]

He subsequently advanced to Director of Internet Security Operations at Primenet, a Phoenix-based internet service provider, later rebranded as GlobalCenter following acquisition. [8] By 1997, in this role, Lippard managed security responses to hacker intrusions and coordinated with law enforcement, including releasing account records in investigations. [9] [8]

Lippard later served as Director of Information Security Operations at Global Crossing, assuming responsibility for the company's worldwide security infrastructure. [10] His expertise in these positions is evidenced by professional certifications including Certified Information Security Manager (CISM), Certified Information Systems Security Professional (CISSP), Information Systems Security Management Professional (ISSMP), and Information Systems Security Architecture Professional (ISSAP). [10]

Entry into Freethought and Skepticism

Lippard's initial engagement with freethought and skepticism occurred during his undergraduate studies in the mid-1980s, when he encountered debates over pseudoscientific claims, including the "Mars effect" proposed by astrologer Michel Gauquelin, which alleged correlations between planetary positions at birth and athletic eminence.[11] This exposure to critical examination of unsubstantiated assertions marked his transition from passive interest to active involvement in applying rational inquiry to extraordinary claims, aligning with freethought principles of questioning dogma without deference to tradition or authority.

In 1985, at age 20, Lippard founded the Phoenix Skeptics, an organization dedicated to promoting scientific skepticism and investigating paranormal phenomena in the Phoenix, Arizona, area.[2] [12] He served as its executive director until 1988, organizing meetings, lectures, and investigations that emphasized evidence-based reasoning over anecdotal or faith-based explanations.[13] This early leadership role established him as a proponent of freethought, which in his context intertwined skepticism with challenges to religious apologetics and supernatural beliefs, fostering a community committed to empirical verification.

Through these foundational efforts, Lippard contributed to the local skeptical infrastructure, later editing *The Arizona Skeptic* newsletter from 1991 to 1993 to disseminate critiques of pseudoscience and irrationalism.[12] His entry thus reflected a deliberate shift toward organized activism, driven by a commitment to belief revision based on testable evidence rather than uncritical acceptance of prevailing cultural narratives.[14]

Key Organizational Involvement

Lippard founded the Phoenix Skeptics in 1985, serving as its executive director until 1988, during which time the group focused on investigating paranormal claims and promoting scientific inquiry in the Phoenix area.[15] [13] He later edited the organization's newsletter, *The Arizona Skeptic*, from 1991 to 1993, publishing critiques of pseudoscience and fringe beliefs.[16] [13]

In 2011, Lippard co-founded the Phoenix Area Skeptics Society (PASS) to promote critical thinking and rational inquiry.[2]

Beyond local efforts, Lippard engaged with national skeptical bodies, attending the 1984 CSICOP conference and reporting on the 1992 event for affiliated skeptic newsletters, highlighting organizational priorities in debunking extraordinary claims.[15] [11] In later years, he contributed to CSI (the successor to CSICOP) events, such as assisting with research for the 2016 CSICon in-memoriam segment honoring deceased skeptics.[17] These roles underscored his commitment to structured skeptical inquiry, though he occasionally critiqued the scope and methods of such groups in essays advocating for rigorous, evidence-based approaches over mere debunking.[18]

Philosophical and Critical Writings

Critiques of Religious Apologetics

Jim Lippard has critiqued Christian apologetics by targeting foundational arguments for theism, biblical prophecy, miracles, and the afterlife, emphasizing logical inconsistencies, historical inaccuracies, and insufficient evidence. In his 1990 review of J.P. Moreland's *Scaling the Secular City* (1987), Lippard challenged the kalam cosmological argument's premises, arguing that Moreland's rejection of an infinite past overlooks philosophical defenses like those in Quentin Smith's works and that quantum mechanics undermines the necessity of a caused universe beginning.[19] He further disputed Moreland's claims on miracles and the resurrection, noting inadequate engagement with hallucination hypotheses and recommending resources like *Anomalistic Psychology* by Zusne and Jones for psychological explanations of visionary experiences.[19]

Lippard's analysis of messianic prophecies, detailed in "The Fabulous Prophecies of the Messiah" (1993, updated 2004), systematically dismantles apologetic claims of predictive fulfillment in Jesus' life. He categorized failures into three types: verses not originally messianic, lack of actual fulfillment by Jesus, or excessive vagueness. For instance, Isaiah 7:14's "almah" translates to "young woman" rather than "virgin," referring to a contemporaneous sign for King Ahaz, not a future messiah, with fulfillment identified in Isaiah 8:3-4 as Maher-shalal-hash-baz.[20] Similarly, Micah 5:2's Bethlehem ruler prophecy remains unfulfilled in Jesus' lifetime, as he held no rulership, and genealogical claims in Matthew and Luke conflict with the virgin birth doctrine and internal contradictions, including a curse on

Zechariah's own events rather than prophesying Judas, with Matthew's attribution to Jeremiah erroneous and lacking external corroboration.[20]

In his 1993 critique of Moreland and Gary Habermas's *Immortality: The Other Side of Death*, Lippard questioned the "twelve historical facts" supporting the resurrection, proposing alternatives like body theft or relocation, as in Robert Sheaffer's analyses, and noting unaddressed fraud possibilities beyond outdated references to Schweitzer.[3] He criticized near-death experience (NDE) evidence for relying on credulous sources like Raymond Moody, linked to unsubstantiated claims, and overlooked physiological explanations such as temporal lobe epilepsy or Sylvian fissure stimulation, advocating Susan Blackmore's skeptical interpretations over apologetic veridicality assertions.[3] Philosophically, Lippard rejected dualist arguments for the soul, citing quantum fluctuations against annihilation-free science claims and critiquing unengaged works like Derek Parfit's on personal identity, arguing that consciousness emerges physically without necessitating substance dualism.[3]

These critiques, disseminated via skeptical outlets like Internet Infidels and *The Frontline*, underscore Lippard's emphasis on empirical scrutiny and contextual biblical interpretation over apologetic harmonization.[19][3][20]

Contributions to Epistemology and Cognitive Science

Jim Lippard pursued graduate studies in philosophy at the University of Arizona, majoring in epistemology and minoring in cognitive science.[3] This training emphasized naturalistic approaches to knowledge acquisition, integrating empirical evidence from cognitive processes into evaluations of belief justification.

In critiques of philosophical arguments for theism and immortality, Lippard applied epistemological standards requiring robust evidential support, rejecting claims reliant on unverified testimony or introspection without corroboration.[3] He argued that such positions fail under naturalistic epistemology, which prioritizes testable mechanisms over a priori reasoning detached from scientific findings.[21]

Lippard addressed the epistemology of testimony in a letter to *The Skeptical Review*, scrutinizing how testimonial accounts underpin arguments for divine morality and existence, advocating skepticism toward uncorroborated reports absent independent verification.[22] His

Through these writings, Lippard promoted an evidence-centric framework bridging epistemology and cognitive science, influencing skeptical methodologies by underscoring fallible human cognition in knowledge claims.[23]

Debates and Controversies

Exchanges with Creationists

Lippard engaged in written critiques of creationist arguments, notably reviewing Duane Gish's 1993 book *Creation Scientists Answer Their Critics*, where he highlighted Gish's reliance on outdated references—only 6% of 428 citations from the prior eight years—and selective omission of sources like the *Creation/Evolution* journal and works by old-earth creationists.[24] He accused Gish of misrepresenting critics' responses, such as claiming no rebuttal to the bombardier beetle argument despite contrary evidence, while conceding that Gish validly exposed some sloppy errors by anti-creationists.[24] Lippard argued the book failed to substantively defend young-earth tenets central to the Institute for Creation Research, mirroring the flaws Gish attributed to evolutionists.[24]

A prominent exchange occurred with Walter Brown, whom Lippard critiqued in 1989 and 1990 articles in *Creation/Evolution Journal* for flaws in Brown's *In the Beginning: Compelling Evidence for Creation and the Flood*, including misquotations, unsupported conclusions, and reliance on an unverified speed-of-light decay hypothesis tied to Barry Setterfield's discredited work.[25] Lippard challenged Brown's categorization of evidence, such as dismissing Lamarckian inheritance critiques as irrelevant to modern evolution and arguing that claims like the absence of 2- to 20-celled animals overlooked examples like Mesozoa.[5] He contested Brown's treatment of fossils, including Archaeopteryx as potentially ancestral and human evolution evidence like *Australopithecus afarensis* (Lucy), accusing Brown of overstating hoaxes and ignoring contextual data.[5]

Brown responded in the journal, defending his hydroplate theory for global flood features, clarifying debate conditions allowing non-Ph.D. participants under team formats, and rebutting Lippard's cDK critique by citing his own analysis of 164 measurements and independent Soviet data supporting decay.[5] In a second response, Brown accused Lippard of bias and misrepresentation, such as ignoring revisions to Brown's book and failing to engage detailed

systems like the bombardier beetle.[25] Brown advocated joint scientific publications to minimize heat in the debate, noting Lippard's philosophy background limited empirical depth.[5]

Lippard also analyzed broader debate tactics in his 1990-91 *Creation/Evolution* article "How Not to Argue with Creationists," critiquing anti-creationist errors in exchanges like Ian Plimer's 1988 debate with Gish, where Plimer misrepresented Michael Denton's views and issued unchallenged demands on unclaimed creationist assertions, such as fossil gold chains in Australian coal.[26] He warned against ad hominem attacks, unsupported fraud allegations against groups like the Creation Science Foundation, and poor conduct that mirrored creationist flaws, advocating evidence-based rebuttals to enhance skeptic credibility.[26] These exchanges underscored Lippard's emphasis on rigorous, honest argumentation over rhetorical shortcuts in confronting creationist claims.[26]

Responses to Near-Death Experience Claims

Jim Lippard critiqued near-death experience (NDE) claims as purported evidence for an afterlife in his 1993 review of *Immortality: The Other Side of Death* by J.P. Moreland and Gary R. Habermas, arguing that such experiences lack reliable support for supernatural interpretations.[3] He challenged the credibility of key NDE proponents cited by the authors, including Raymond Moody, whose involvement in New Age topics like *Elvis After Life* indicated a lack of rigorous skepticism, and Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, whose interests in past lives aligned with figures like Shirley MacLaine.[3] Lippard also dismissed Erlendur Haraldsson's contributions due to his credulous stance on psychic phenomena associated with Sathya Sai Baba, later exposed as fraudulent through evidence of sleight-of-hand in videotapes, as detailed in Dale Beyerstein's 1992 analysis.[3]

Lippard emphasized naturalistic explanations for NDE phenomena, noting that electroencephalograms (EEGs) measure only surface brain activity and fail to detect deeper functions, allowing for residual neural processes during clinical death that could produce reported sensations.[3] He highlighted experimental evidence of out-of-body experiences (OBEs), a core NDE element, induced by electrical stimulation of the Sylvian fissure, and suggested links to temporal lobe epilepsy (TLE), which may be underdiagnosed and capable of generating similar visions.[3] In correspondence dated June 26, 1993, he questioned Habermas

contamination of reports through post-experience discussions among experiencers, medical staff, and relatives, rendering many accounts unreliable.[3]

To counter apologetic interpretations, Lippard recommended skeptical analyses, including Gerd H. Hövelmann's 1985 critical appraisal of NDE survival evidence in *A Skeptic's Handbook of Parapsychology*, which surveyed literature up to that year and found insufficient proof of afterlife glimpses, and Susan Blackmore's physiological models in *Beyond the Body* (1982), attributing tunnel visions to retinal effects from oxygen deprivation.[3] Barry Beyerstein's *Skeptical Inquirer* articles (1987–1988) further supported brain-based origins for consciousness alterations in NDEs.[3] Lippard concluded that NDEs, while vivid, align with physicalist accounts and do not necessitate dualism or immortality, urging scrutiny of methodological flaws in pro-afterlife arguments.[3]

Reception and Legacy

Impact on Skeptical Community

Lippard's establishment of the Phoenix Skeptics in 1985 marked an early effort to organize local skeptical inquiry in Arizona, providing a platform for investigating paranormal claims and pseudoscience through meetings, lectures, and publications that fostered critical thinking among members and the public.[2] As executive director until 1988, he helped build a network that influenced subsequent groups, including his co-founding of the Phoenix Area Skeptics Society in 2011, which continued promoting evidence-based discourse in the region.[2]

Contributions to national outlets, such as regular pieces in *Skeptic* magazine and *Creation/Evolution Journal*, extended his reach, where he dissected flawed arguments in religious apologetics and pseudoscientific assertions, aiding skeptics in refining debate tactics against proponents of intelligent design and biblical literalism.[27] For instance, his exchanges with creationists, including detailed rebuttals to claims about fossil evidence like Lucy, highlighted methodological shortcomings in anti-evolution advocacy, encouraging the community to prioritize empirical rigor over rhetorical concessions.[28]

Lippard's investigations into groups like Scientology, documented in writings on their internal declines and internet-era exposures starting in the mid-1990s, demonstrated skepticism's

efforts underscored a commitment to transparency and evidence, helping solidify skepticism as a proactive stance against institutional deception rather than mere reaction, though some within the community noted risks of dogmatism in prolonged disputes.[11] Overall, his organizational and intellectual outputs reinforced the skeptical movement's emphasis on falsifiability and social critique, leaving a legacy of localized activism that paralleled national trends in freethought expansion during the late 20th century.

Criticisms and Counterarguments

Creationists responding to Lippard's critiques have accused him of methodological flaws and selective engagement. In replies to Lippard's 1989 and 1990 examinations of the hydroplate theory, Walter Brown contended that Lippard critiqued an outdated 1986 reproduction of *In the Beginning: Compelling Evidence for Creation and the Flood*, ignoring revisions in the 1989 edition and failing to request supporting articles like "The Fountains of the Great Deep."[25] Brown further alleged Lippard misrepresented his positions—such as on *Archaeopteryx* hoaxes and design arguments—relied on unverified anonymous sources with factual errors, and asserted "strong evidence" for common ancestry (e.g., pseudogenes) without elaboration, reflecting bias and shallow research rather than rigorous analysis.[5] Lippard rebutted these charges by demonstrating that Brown's fundamental claims, including flood features and ocean residence times, persisted unchanged, and he detailed errors in Brown's sourcing, such as fabricated quotations and misattributions, underscoring persistent pseudoscientific issues in Brown's framework.[30]

Lippard's internal critiques of organized skepticism elicited pushback from targeted groups. Following his 1990 article "Some Failures of Organized Skepticism," which highlighted misrepresentations in an Australian Skeptics' summary of the 1988 Gish-Plimer debate (e.g., inaccurate quotes on Michael Denton's views and Noah's Ark), Australian Skeptics officials like Mark Plummer and Barry Williams admitted select factual discrepancies but faulted Lippard for "rushing into print" without grasping the debate's rowdy Australian context, labeling his piece sensationalist and akin to *National Enquirer*-style reporting.[31] They defended their original piece as an on-the-spot news account, not a verbatim transcript, and noted no further ICR debates in Australia as evidence of tactical success. Lippard countered that obligations for accuracy and corrections applied irrespective of event dynamics or outcomes, emphasizing skeptics' need for self-correction to maintain credibility.[31]

In critiquing Ian Plimer's anti-creationist strategies, Lippard faced defenses framing them as pragmatically effective despite documented issues like false challenges (e.g., non-existent fossil gold chains in coal) and unsubstantiated fraud allegations against creationist groups, which prompted media apologies. [26] Associates like Barry Price, with Plimer's input, argued such tactics deterred creationist activity, downplaying misrepresentations (e.g., of Denton's fossil knowledge) as minor or contextually justified, while disputing Lippard's verification of sources like *Ex Nihilo* articles. Lippard maintained these approaches undermined skepticism by prioritizing rhetoric over evidence, risking backlash and eroding public trust in substantive critiques. [26]

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