

## CONFESSION OF A PSYCHIC

If one of the "world's leading psychics" confessed to being a hoax what would he or she say? Seldom do we find out because leading psychics don't reveal the tricks of their trade. In 1981, however, that very thing happened. The confession, unfortunately, took place during a television special which was aired only once. Southern California Skeptics (SCS) published for the first time, in vol. 2 #2, page 13 of "Laser", the newsletter of SCS, excerpts from that rare and fascinating television interview with confessed psychic James Hydrick. "BASIS" reprints (with editing for space) that article with kind permission from SCS.

First some background information on Hydrick. He rose to national fame after appearing on a Dec. 1980 taped broadcast of ABC's popular "That's Incredible" when he appeared to demonstrate very strong psychokinetic powers. These "powers" enabled him to flip the pages of a telephone book and cause a pencil to turn on a table merely by the power of his will. The tabloid "The Star" quickly ran an article on Hydrick labeling him "The world's Top Psychic" whose powers are "incredible and staggering." Other newspapers alleged that Hydrick could cure headaches and colds with a touch. An electrical engineer from the U. of Utah concluded that Hydrick's powers were indeed authentic.

Hydrick claimed that he had learned these powers from special training in the martial arts and that he could teach them to anyone. He opened a popular and successful school to teach psychokinetic powers.

While Hydrick was fooling the gullible he was not fooling magician and psychic investigator James Randi. Randi immediately offered Hydrick his prize of \$10,000 for proof of any paranormal demonstration under controlled observations. Hydrick accepted Randi's offer and agreed to be tested on the TV show "That's My Line."

Randi's simple but effective test involved emptying a small can of styrofoam particles around the open book to detect air blowing from Hydrick's mouth. If Hydrick claimed that his power could not differentiate between the pages of the book and the styrofoam particles, Randi was prepared to place a simple germ mask on his face. Hydrick refused the test. (The incident is recounted in detail in "The Skeptical Inquirer," Summer 1981.)

A few months later Hydrick again agreed to undergo testing of his psychic abilities. Again proper controls were used and again he failed to exhibit any psychic powers. He then confessed to magician Danny Korem, who was part of the team testing him. Hydrick began his confession by talking of his fascination with magicians at the age of nine.

HYDRICK: He [the magician] would show how easy it was to trick people: slight of hand, etc. Things like that impressed me, how close minded a lot of people really were. It was so fascinating to see how people would miss things just like that. The obvious thing they would miss. I was impressed by Houdini's trick of vanishing an elephant off a stage. I could figure out how it was done. I began to think, if people go crazy over that, maybe I should do something people go crazy over.

KOREM: Why did you feel that you had to tell people that you had powers that you didn't have?

H: Because I wanted attention. My parents would never give it to me. I would always be ignored or kicked around. I had to do this to make me feel good. It gave me confidence. Every time someone thought what I did was very good but I'd never tell them what it was. I'd tell them it was something else. Because if I told them what it was they would say, "Fine, it's just a trick." But I would always tell them it was something else so I would continue to get recognition.

K: You were on "That's Incredible" a few months ago and you really tricked them.

H: I tricked the whole world.

K: Yes. What did it make you feel like?

H: I did that to reach. It's like a hand reaching out for recognition. I don't know.... I just wanted to be known. I needed to be recognized. All my life I've been...I hate to keep going back to the past, but I don't know. I wanted to do that because it was different. I just wanted to see how open minded people were. I wanted to see if these people who were so-called intelligent and I was so-called dumb; I mean, surely I'm here for a reason. My whole idea behind this in the first place was to see how dumb America was. How dumb the world is.

K: How do you cause the objects to move?

H: People are looking at the object and waiting and so it moves, ok? Actually it didn't move from psychic powers, it moved from something else -- physical. It moves from air currents.

K: From where?

H: From my mouth. But you can't tell it because it took so many years of practicing to get this down pat to where you can't see it.

K: What you did, if I'm not mistaken, was to take somebody, hold their hand and get them to point at the leaf and then would make the leaf move?

H: Right. It's called the power of suggestion. Once you can get a person to believe that he can actually do something -- then perhaps he can do it.

K: What did you do? Can you show me?

H: First of all I'm not just puffing out the air because that can be seen. I am taking the air from my inside and making it come out in a way in which it doesn't show. I can direct the air in a way that it hits head-on every time. I spent one year and six months in solitary confinement. All that time I had been thinking and thinking...then that's it!

K: You had all the time you needed to learn how to breath and make things move?

H: I had spent hours and hours. I'd hold my breath. Different breathing controls. So many ways. I could make deputies think someone touched them on their neck because I could breath in a certain way on their neck. They would feel something and say, "That's a ghost!" They would piss on the floor and go running out of there! It was something that was fascinating to me and it got me recognition. I mean every deputy in that jail was so frightened of me. "That guy is possessed!"

I remember when I was in the Chaplin's office. He taught me how to read and write. And I would convert people from bad to good. He told me that you had to turn them onto Jesus, the Lord. And he gave me a Bible and I'd read it. Then I got an idea. Now, I've never told Brother Joe this, and I've never told anyone this, but I would convert twenty inmates a day. That was my limit. I'd get up there and start telling them about Jesus and stuff. And when I'd see that they were beginning to get turned off -- I'd stop and say, "You don't believe that it exists?" -- I'd take a Bible and open it up and say, "If the Lord is here with me make these pages move!" or I'd open the Bible and say, "Hold the Bible. Father in the name of Jesus Christ make these pages move." And the pages would move. And the guys are going "Oh my god!!" Every time it worked. Then I would say, "It's in you." Or I take a pencil and put it there and say I've got to call the Lord; but you are going to have the power to do this if you accept the Lord. The next thing you know you would see them with this big cross and handing Bibles out to people! [Note: Hydrick is now serving time in jail.]

# THE EVOLUTION OF SKEPTICISM

by H. Keith Henson

In reading the skeptical literature I often feel as if I am reading medical journals prior to the time of Pasteur. While there are valuable reports on fraud and debunking, there is no understanding and not much discussion about why we, as a species, are so susceptible to religious and parapsychological nonsense. (There is no obvious boundary between them.) It is clearly anti-survival to follow a Jim Jones into the grave in a remote clearing in the jungle, but similar events, such as the Children's Crusade (from which one in ten thousand returned), are well known from history. It is less obvious that following advice in an astrology column interferes with survival, but it can't help.

There are three books, which taken together shed a flood of light on this topic. Earliest is "The Selfish Gene" (1976) by Richard Dawkins. It is primarily a layman's discussion of evolution from a gene's viewpoint. It is also one of the more widely referenced works in recent times -- the "Science Citation Index" listing goes on for several columns.

Though the entire book is fascinating, it is the last chapter, "Memes, the New Replicators," that applies to this discussion. Much of this chapter and some related material was printed in Douglas Hofstadter's "Metamagical Themas" column in "Scientific American" (January 1983) and reprinted in his book of the same name. "Meme" is a word Dawkins coined in purposeful analogy to gene. A meme is an information pattern that is passed from mind to mind.

Meme is a similar concept to "idea," but the critical part of the "idea about memes" is that memes are subject to adaptive evolutionary forces very similar to those that select for genes. That is, memes are subject to variation and selection in the environment provided by human minds, communication channels, and the vast collection of cooperating and competing memes that make up human culture.

The analogy is remarkably close. Genes in cold viruses that cause sneezes by irritating noses spread themselves by this route to new hosts and become more common in the gene pool of the cold virus. Memes that cause those they have infected to spread the meme to other people become more common in the meme pool of human culture. (In a weird self-referential way, this "meme about memes" has influenced me to write this article.)

The use of words such as "infected" is purposeful. Memetics could be summed up as the "germ theory of ideas." Visible only through behavior or objects resulting from behavior, memes can replicate and infect even through the electronic media.

The power of this analogy is that it encourages us to use our well-developed tool box of models about living things and systems

to investigate the spread and persistence of cultural information patterns, from the height of doorknobs to belief in mediums. It turns out that the models of epidemic and endemic disease fit the data from historical social movements (such as the spread of religions) very well. An influenza virus that mutates to a more infectious form can cause a new epidemic. A meme that mutates to a more infectious form may signal the start a new social movement.

I have more than an intellectual curiosity about memes and social movements. I was a participant from 1975 on in a relatively mild social movement based on the space colony meme. This meme had a clear origin from a combination of new and older memes in the minds of Dr. Gerard K. O'Neill of Princeton University and his students in 1969. It spread out and gained its most visible expression as the L5 Society, peaking (much like an epidemic) at about 10,000 members. As memes go, it has been relatively harmless -- no fatalities that I know of, though several have lost fortunes. While it has not accomplished much, it certainly has been a "successful" meme in that it has spread out to perhaps half a million people.

Unfortunately, a successful meme has no more direct (that is short term) concern with the well being of its host than a virus. In the long run, of course, memes that kill the people they infect, or prevent them from breeding, tend to die out. An example of this latter type of meme would be the one which infested the Shakers. (Shakers were a sect that forbade having children -- in this they were similar to the recent Rajneesh cult, which encouraged the sterilization of the barely pubescent female children of its devotees.)

All memes can be placed somewhere along the parasite-to-symbiote spectrum. The vast majority of our culturally transmitted information is either useful or at least harmless. Some memes may even protect us from other memes. Unless a parasite kills all of its hosts, the normal evolutionary adjustment is for parasites to become symbiotes. The first step in this direction is for a parasite to protect its host from similar parasites. The progression from cults to established religions is clearly analogous. It is certainly safer to be an indoctrinated member of some long-established religion than to be susceptible to infection by a cult that may prove fatal. I have come to sincerely appreciate this positive aspect of religions.

Even if we understand that memes parasitize our minds, the question still remains as to the mechanism -- why are we susceptible? Two other books, "The Society of Mind", by Marvin Minsky, co-founder of the MIT Artificial Intelligence Laboratory, and "The Social Brain", by Michael S. Gazzaniga, a principal split-brain researcher, explain our susceptibility as a side effect of an adaptive evolutionary advantage. Minsky discusses the mind as emerging from a vast confederation of mental agents. Gazzaniga starts his book with "Believing is what we humans do best..." and reports on the mental modules that contribute to the

process of forming and maintaining beliefs. The books are strongly complementary and lead to remarkably similar views of the mind despite starting from very different places and using very different methods.

What relations do memes have to mental modules or agents? I suspect that memes are the information patterns used to construct some of Minsky's agents or to fill some of Gazzaniga's modules. It is Gazzaniga's contention that certain mental modules, physically embodied in small areas of the brain, are ready receptor sites for the information that makes up certain beliefs. It is known that destruction of a very small area of the brain makes a person's belief systems so unstable that they can change religions as often as underwear.

He makes a strong case that the capacity for belief is due to the hardware organization of the brain. The ability to form beliefs and the ability to learn them from others evolved from simpler mental skills because it greatly improved survival. But once the capacity for forming and passing on beliefs existed, an entirely new type of non-biological evolution took off, that of pure information or memes that could get themselves copied from mind to mind and from generation to generation. The collective minds of the human race became a new "primal soup" for a wide variety of competing beliefs.

Any student of evolution would expect that the long-term survivors of this process (such as astrology) are well adapted to get their hosts to spread and defend them. It would also be plausible to them that in the tens of millennia since memetic evolution became a major factor there has been biological evolution in brain hardware. The parts of our brains that hold our belief systems have probably undergone biological adaptation to be less susceptible (that is more skeptical) to memes that result in death or seriously interfere with reproductive success. The People's Temple episode of a few years ago shows that the selection for this type of skepticism is far from universal. As skeptics, we are normally concerned with more common and less drastic beliefs such as UFOs, psychic healers, spoon benders, etc., and with attempts to subvert the education system with creation "science."

## EDITOR'S CORNER

A friend of mine is a doctor. We take lunch together occasionally and I probably abuse our friendship when I ask him about some annoying malady.

On a recent occasion I mentioned a running injury that has been the bane of my morning excursions, so he told me to come back to his office to have a look-see. His genuine concern relieved my anxiety about the friendship abuse so I went. After examination he suggested cortisone, but cautioned that chances were high the

condition was chronic and I would only realize temporary relief. I thought about that because one of my business associates had just recently told me about the wonders of chiropractic from his visit following some allergy problems. He said the good bone cruncher ASSURED him relief if he would follow the treatment all the way through. (There was probably a HIDDEN caveat in the chiropractor's statement somewhere.)

It occurred to me that this is one of the significant differences between "standard" and fringe medicine (or pseudoscience in general): the fringe promises the world for whatever ails. No disease or condition is bigger than the nostrums they offer.

In fact, the medical quack cannot lose under a plan that was unfolded at the London CSICOP conference. Since every disease, no matter how serious, has periods of amelioration and deterioration, the sure-fire program works like this. First, the treatment must be administered only when the client is on a deterioration phase, and second, the treatment or substance must be perfectly innocuous. The outcome will be one of four things: (1) The patient improves. In this case you CUT BACK on the dosage or treatment, explaining that it is working (Win). (2) The patient stabilizes. Here, you tell the victim that we just need a little more time, but the treatment is working (Win). (3) The customer continues to get worse. Well, the dosage apparently isn't high enough, so we'll just increase it a little and see you next month (Win). (4) The unfortunate soul dies. "If only she had come to me sooner." (She is not around to tell how bad you are -- win.)

Now, with each of these four cases the patient gets better or worse; again, treating only on the deterioration phase one of four things will happen. (1) The one who got better is now deteriorating; we tell him we decreased the treatment too soon, and now must return to the original Rx (Win). (2) The stabilized gets worse and we offer that the dosage must be increased a little (Win). (3) The worse gets "worse." This is probably a very serious case that will require massive doses and more time (Win). (4) Poor client dies. "If only he had come to me sooner." (Win, as above). This whole thing repeats until you have only the "cured" and the deceased. Win, win.

After all, the patrons of the quack are patient and forbearing. If a highly trained MD doesn't deliver what the customer expects he/she will never hear the end of it. The quack, however, seems to slip criticism while he bathes in the warmth of his patients' praise. (The same escape clause is afforded shysters of other metier: Uri Geller can botch a trick and be forgiven because the "vibes are bad," while a legitimate illusionist would get the stage hook for the same bungling.)

So guarantees are often a test for pseudoscience; another give away is secrecy. Barring competitive trade secrets and national security, science is open. In fact, when a new discovery is announced there is almost a rush to get peer review and

confirmation. Books and notes are opened for inspection because the honest researcher eagerly wishes to establish his/her idea. When original data must be pried and researchers cajoled to release information, we want to ask, "What is there to hide?"

The pseudoscience contrast is that months and often years pass before hard or original data are released. An excellent example is Dr.s' Hal Putoff and Russell Targ's "remote viewing" research. David Marks and Richard Kammann spent over THREE YEARS trying to pry the raw data from Putoff. The excuses and promises flowed like flattery from a riverboat gambler. When finally the material was released, it was clear that the papers were incomplete and that there had been some editing. Putoff seemed to have been putting on. (See "The Psychology of the Psychic," Prometheus Books (1980) p. 12-43 for a complete account.)

Science continually seeks to clean house: ideas and theories are in a constant state of flux, undergoing modifications and refinements as new information is considered. No person or idea is above criticism -- a hero today could be obscure tomorrow. When hoaxes and charlatans -- usually revealed from within the ranks -- are discovered they are exposed and denounced.

Compare all of this with pseudoscience. The heros are eternal heros and "theories" are cast in granite. Ideas that dangle in thin air are pressed into service almost no matter how inane if they carry the party line. Crackpot notions and hoaxes are usually discovered by outsiders, and when the insiders finally accept the reality, the purveyor of the wacky idea is still afforded company in the ranks (e.g., Immanuel Velikovsky). In short, there is little criticism from within, and external criticism is usually just ignored.

Those who attack the scientific method (as in the pejorative "western linear thinking") would undermine one of the single most powerful tools of intellectual advancement in history. Science does not offer the comfort of absolute certainty and answers to all mysteries. Science can only offer an uncertain and incomplete reality. Pseudoscience sells certainty and hope; and that, I think, is the enduring power of its grip -- for many, hope is better than the reality they wish to ignore or pretend doesn't exist.

## RAMPARTS

[Ramparts is a regular feature of "BASIS", and your participation is urged. Clip, snip and tear bits of irrationality from your local scene and send them to the EDITOR. If you want to add some comment, please do so.]

From the "Toronto Star" we learn that the TM movement is having to ante up for some of its vaunted (and totally unfounded) claims. "Two Transcendental Meditation organizations have been ordered to

pay a former member almost \$138,000 for not fulfilling a promise to teach him to fly." (Presumably, not in a Cessna 150).

The Executive Council of TM in the US was found guilty of fraud and negligence by a federal court jury, "and ordered to pay the judgement to the plaintiff, Robert Kropinski, a former instructor. Kropinski had sought \$9 million in punitive damages, alleging that TM had made false scientific claims" (reduce stress, improve memory, reverse aging, and promote world peace), but maybe the jury, after meditation, thought that was too harsh and turned him down on that score. The bottom line may be that the courts are an avenue to make paranormal peddlers more sensitive to the brash claims they make. Let's send a free, one-year subscription of "BASIS" to Kropinski.

BAS subscribers are involved people. They DO something. EUGENIE SCOTT, a subscriber in Berkeley, sent notice that the "Oakland Tribune" has cancelled its science page which ran once a week. It is sobering that the only link the average person has to the world of science has not found sufficient ground to warrant its continuity. Dr. Scott heads the National Center for Science Education and rightly urges us to write the "Trib" to encourage the reinstatement of the feature. Send a barrage of mail to "Robert Maynard, Oakland Tribune, Box 24424, Oakland, CA 94623." Thank you, Genie.

If you've ever wondered why Uri Geller doesn't make a try for our \$11,000 and just embarrass the heck out of us consider. His new book, "The Geller Effect," has reportedly netted him a nice million. He has contracted with Australian and Japanese mining companies for over \$1 million to help them find precious metals "psychically," and of course, his work on tours brings a phenomenal amount. Geller is a millionaire several times over. He has his bank balance, his library of press clippings and his photograph album to demonstrate his achievements. "I do not have to challenge, confront, argue with or even defend myself against anybody." he said in an interview. Indeed.

Someone sent us the front page of the "Psychic News," "Britain's Only Independent Spiritualist Weekly" in which the lead story concerns a break in at the paper's headquarters in London. Usually it is best to hear something from the horse's mouth, and this article is certainly a case in point: "[the break in]... has left us with a headache. For a day's mail was stolen -- and we have NO IDEA what it contained."(!)

Usually the cops call the psychics, but the tables were turned here when the psychics called the cops to find the felons. In a rare candid admission coming from a gaggle of psychics, "But the big problem is we know FROM THE POST OFFICE that letters were delivered on Saturday, Jan. 17. OBVIOUSLY we don't know what the post contained. [emphasis added]" None of the "psychics" foresaw the burglary, nor were any able to come up with a psychic composite drawing of the perpetrator. Probably is easier to

discern what is happening to someone else would be their excuse. That report ought to be on "That's Incredible."

## FROM THE CHAIR

by Robert Sheaffer

Those of you who were in Pasadena for the 1987 CSICOP Conference, "Controversies in Science and Fringe Science", don't need me to tell you how great it was. CSICOP ventured somewhat afield from its usual fare of refuting psychic spoon-bending, telepathy, and UFOs, to discuss certain subjects that while superficially bizarre, have at least some degree of scientific plausibility: the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI); "Animal Language" (which might be termed "Communications with Simian Intelligence," or CWSI); and hypnosis. Other sessions dealt with the more typical CSICOP concerns: Chiropractic & Holistic medical claims, "Spontaneous Human Combustion," Psychic Fraud, and Astrology.

Space and time do not permit me to give you a detailed account of the conference; that will appear in a forthcoming issue of "The Skeptical Inquirer". So let me just touch on some of the things that, for me, made the conference unique and valuable.

In the session discussing the possibilities of detecting ETI astronomers Frank Drake and Jill Tartar (who is a BAS Advisor) argued why they believe extraterrestrial intelligence is a relatively common occurrence in the universe, and why there is a good chance we could someday detect radio signals from one of them. Astronomer Robert Rood presented a far more pessimistic estimate, suggesting that intelligent life (or, indeed, ANY life) is quite rare, perhaps even unique. He teased the SETI optimists by drawing parallels between the radio search for ETI and the attempt in previous centuries to lure unicorns from the woods with the lap of a virgin to nestle its head. When such attempts did not succeed one could speculate that perhaps the unicorns are far away, or we did not wait long enough, or even that our supposed virgin ISN'T; but we avoid facing up to the possibility that the unicorns we seek do not exist! A lively discussion followed this session.

The following session, titled "Animal Language: Fact or Illusion," was notable primarily for who was NOT in attendance: specifically, any of the major researchers or experimenters in Communications With (Alleged) Simian Intelligence (CW(A)SI). It was not that they were not invited; indeed, CSICOP worked very hard to include at least one of several well-known researchers who are known to be on good terms with certain clever apes. However, not one of them would come! (Perhaps the apes dissuaded them from consorting with those skeptical of simian intellects.) Thomas Seboek delivered a somewhat hard-hitting criticism of alleged communications with apes, drawing parallels with the "Clever Hans" incident (the horse that could allegedly do arithmetic, but only if his trainer was present to subconsciously cue him).

He noted that, for some odd reason, clever apes fail to communicate in the presence of skeptics. Seboek also wryly noted that Washoe, one of the clever apes which allegedly has a big vocabulary, bit off three fingers of a scientific colleague who went to investigate his alleged abilities! (This can hardly be called intelligent behavior; in any case, it proves that the ape is NOT the legendary Noble Savage of romantic myth).

Professors Gerd Hovelmann and Robert Rosenthal discussed animal communications in more general and abstract terms. Rosenthal had much to say about the "experimenter effect" in such undertakings. (Martin Gardner's excellent skeptical book "Science: Good, Bad, and Bogus" contains a chapter debunking the claims of communications with Clever Apes such as Koko, Washoe, etc.)

Carl Sagan's Friday evening Keynote Address was well-attended. It was a strange mix of excellent skepticism with blatant political harangue. Sagan argued that schools and parents ought to encourage children to become more skeptical, suggesting that if skepticism were more widespread, people would become more skeptical of the national leaders he mistrusts. What he apparently does not realize is that there are a good many people in CSICOP and the local groups for whom skepticism is indeed deeply ingrained, and who for precisely this reason have become highly skeptical of the very faction he would have us trust!

BAS's own Dr. Wallace Sampson moderated a fascinating symposium on "Medical Controversies." William Jarvis gave a very fair talk on Chiropractic claims (indeed almost overly fair, in my judgement, giving them the benefit of every doubt). A Chiropractor representing their national organization was present, and was given a few minutes to present his side; he looked and talked like a truck driver, which did not help him impress the crowd.

Philosopher Austen G. Clark defined the word "Holistic" (as in "Holistic Medicine") down to the tiniest nuance, proving conclusively that it doesn't mean anything, or perhaps he said that it means whatever you want it to mean, which probably works out to the same thing. Dr. Jerry P. Lewis, a Davis physician very active in battling cancer quackery, presented what might be called the "seven warning signs" of cancer quackery. Dismissing the claims of "nutrition as a cure," he made the point that a proper diet can HELP PREVENT cancer, but diet CANNOT CURE cancer for those who already have it, and other treatments should be pursued.

I found especially valuable the session on alleged "spontaneous human combustion" (SHC) by Joe Nickell. In recent years, a number of claims have been made about people allegedly bursting into flame for no reason. In "UFOs Explained", Philip J. Klass investigated three such cases reported by Brad Steiger, and found them to be wild misrepresentations of the facts. But other than that, nobody had done any in-depth investigation of the more "respectable" claims of alleged SHC: until, that is, Joe Nickell.

He found, going back to original sources, that prosaic sources of ignition were generally present -- a nearby lit pipe, or a fireplace -- but these sources of fire are not mentioned in subsequent accounts. In a nutshell, alleged SHC seems to occur when a person is incapacitated by alcohol, drugs or medical infirmity, and accidentally sets his clothes on fire. Furthermore (this is not a pleasant subject), as human flesh burns, it exudes a greasy fat which can sometimes effectively turn the body into a candle, thereby consuming it almost completely. A gruesome subject, but a persistent claim in pseudoscience.

The Saturday evening Banquet featured more speeches by CSICOP officers (yawn). (I'm just kidding -- I really enjoy hearing what they have to say!) The highlight of the evening was a condensed version of the famed Penn and Teller magic act, which has been wowing 'em in The Big Apple and elsewhere. For those of you who haven't yet seen them, their style of magic might not exactly be described as refined or effete; their humor is more in the vein of the late John Belushi, and their effects are not for the squeamish. But if you're not put off by a little fake blood being spilled, you'll have a great time at their show, and their tricks will leave you mystified. Both Penn and Teller are big supporters of CSICOP, and attended the conference sessions, not just the banquet. Penn closed the act by telling CSICOP to go out and "kick @\$\$."

A year ago, after the CSICOP Conference in Boulder, I mentioned that participation in those conferences seemed to be growing at a compound rate of about 25% a year. Well, it happened again. I guessed (hoped) at that time that as many as 1250 people might participate in one way or another at Los Angeles; I understand it was about 1400. Please excuse my pessimism!

Now, that rate of growth is going to be very hard to keep up, unless everyone in the U.S. is to be attending in 10 years or so, then everyone in the world, after which we start enrolling extraterrestrials from the Galactic Federation. However, it is an extremely good sign. At a time when UFO groups are crumbling, and interest in other goofy things has fallen so low that Erich Von Daniken cannot even get his new books about the "Gods from Outer Space" published, there is one organization dealing with the paranormal that is growing very rapidly, and that group is CSICOP. Maybe the world isn't as bad off as some of us may have thought!

## GELLER HITS TOWN

Famed "psychic" Uri Geller came to the Bay Area during IRS week, so he was scheduled on KGO radio and channel 5's "AM San Francisco".

On the 14th he was on KGO talk show with host Michael Krasne. Michael has had BAS founder and magician Bob Steiner on his show

numerous times, so Bob helped prepare him for the Geller visit. Since BAS had adequate advance notice of the program the word went out, and as a result, all but three call-ins to the program were skeptics!

Geller bent a spoon as host Krasne described the event to the listening audience. Although he claims he bent it with his mind he held it in his hands, averring "it would take hours if I didn't hold it." I remember when Geller performed in S.F. over a year ago at a stage show in which he told people to take keys from their pockets and they would find them bent: "things like this always happen when I am around," he declared. So, a heavy key shank can be bent by his mere presence, but a thin spoon shank "will take hours." Hands, especially those of a deft manipulator can bend spoons. Of course a mind MIGHT be capable of doing the same thing, but so long as the utensil is in the former, we cannot know that the latter was the sole cause.

Geller refused a test to "psychically" reproduce a picture Steiner had drawn in advance and left in a sealed envelope with Krasne -- it was a drawing of a light bulb -- but Uri urged Krasne to draw something which he would then reproduce. Well, Uri was back in control with this proposition. He had no control over Bob's pre-drawn, sealed target. Michael's physical presence and emotional involvement are potentially powerful factors in a "test" of this nature. The untutored Krasne drew a circle and a triangle, which, along with boats, houses (with a sun in the corner) and trees are what 95% of the populace will draw. Even with those odds heavily in Geller's favor Krasne declared Uri's efforts "inconclusive." Given the vagaries and subjectivity of a few abstract lines that Geller can sketch, it is very difficult to lose.

Steiner called in and asked Geller, "Why won't you be tested by James Randi?" Never-to-be-on-the-defensive Geller, as though butter wouldn't melt in his mouth, quickly retorted, "Bob, do you believe in God?" (!!)

Geller doesn't have to catch bullets in his teeth like Superman, he just adroitly dodges 'em.

## BAS CHALLENGE!

May's BAS meeting will feature an individual who claims he will demonstrate truly remarkable powers. He is reportedly able to add, subtract, multiply, divide, do square roots and algebra -- you say no big deal, I can do that. Ah, but you are not a Dalmatian, are you! Sunny, along with his owner Jim Todd has appeared in schools and on TV's "Mac and Muttly" show. Now they are ready to meet skeptics. Our own Bob Steiner will be on hand to oversee this informal test and tell us the checkered history about claims of animal genius.

If you can speak Spanish, Portuguese, or Yiddish, Sonny will answer math question in those languages. If you are a math whiz Sonny will match wits with you. What are the limits of animal intelligence? Can we really communicate with other species? Is there something else going on here? Find out on Thursday, May 17th at 7:30 p.m. in the Campbell public library.

## "CRYSTAL POWER" CLAIMS VERSUS PHYSICAL PROPERTIES OF CRYSTALS (Continued from Lawrence Jerome's "CRYSTAL POWER," April issue)

### CLAIMS:

- Crystals have an "energy" field extending 3 feet around the crystal.
- Crystals held in the hand produce an "energy" that can be felt as a tingling sensation. Crystals can pick up "vibrations" from thought patterns which are then "locked in" crystal.
- Prayers, thoughts, and feelings can be transmitted to a crystal several feet away.

### REALITY:

- Piezoelectricity: mechanical strain produces a minute electric field within quartz and other asymmetric crystals.
- Pyroelectricity: heated quartz and tourmaline crystals produce a small electric field; however, the heat of one's hand would be far too low (tourmaline heated in a fire will attract ashes).
- Crystal oscillation: thin slices of quartz are used as oscillators at million cycles per second range; brain waves are in the hundred cycles per second range.
- Brain wave electrical patterns are barely detectable on the surface of the skull, much less at several feet.

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