

The Association For Rational Thought News
Practicing The Art Of Clear Thinking In All Walks Of Life
Vol. 1, No. 5
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The Association for Rational Thought is a new organization committed to encouraging clear thinking in all walks of life. ART encourages the investigation of paranormal and pseudo-scientific claims from a responsible, scientific viewpoint and the distribution of the results of such investigations to the public. You are cordially invited to become a charter member of ART.

Come to the February 15 Meeting at the Greenwich Tavern and Restaurant!
Round Table: What Does It Mean To Be Open-Minded?

On Saturday, February 15, at 10:00 AM, ART will meet at its new meeting place, the Greenwich Tavern and Restaurant on Gilbert Avenue (Driving instructions elsewhere in this issue). After a brief business meeting, ART members Bill Giles and Joe Gastright will discuss problems skeptics have in responding to paranormal claims. Their introduction will be followed by an open round table discussion.

Come prepared to present your views on such questions as: What are appropriate responses to paranormal claims? Is debunking always appropriate? Do all claims deserve the same attention? Here are some sources which will prepare you to contribute to the round table:

Hy Ruchlis. *Clear Thinking: A Practical Introduction*. Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books. 1990. According to a review in the *Skeptical Inquirer* (Spring, 1991, p. 308), "A former science teacher's lively introduction to the basic principles of critical analysis, illustrating how to evaluate evidence, isolate facts, and employ logical reasoning skills in everyday life. Many examples of how to identify and cut through bogus arguments, diversions, contradictions, and falsehoods found in conversation and in newspapers, magazines, and television."

Carole Wade and Carol Tavris. "Thinking Critically and Creatively." *Skeptical Inquirer*, Summer 1990, p. 372-377. Brief, clear presentation of eight general guidelines for learning to think critically, plus a useful bibliography.

John Aach. "Science and Commonsense Skepticism." *Skeptical Inquirer*, Fall, 1991, p. 51. "Informal, commonsense arguments to expose gaps in the evidence and the reasoning that are perceived as supporting unsubstantiated claims."

James Lett. "A Field Guide to Critical Thinking." *Skeptical Inquirer*, Winter, 1990, p. 153. A brief discussion of "six simple rules to follow in examining paranormal claims:" 1) It must be possible to conceive of evidence that would prove the claim false. 2) Any argument offered as evidence must be sound. 3) All of the available evidence must be considered. 4) The evidence offered in support of any claim must be evaluated without self-deception. 5) If the evidence is based upon an experimental result, or if the evidence offered in support of any claim could logically be explained as coincidental, then the evidence must be repeated in subsequent experiments. 6) The evidence offered must be adequate to establish the truth of that claim (evidence based upon authority and/or testimony is always inadequate for any paranormal claim).

January Meeting: Satanism Round Table

Business Meeting. The Association for Rational Thought met on Saturday, January 18, at the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History. Joe Gastright, President, opened the meeting with a discussion of where and how often to meet. There was general agreement that a place that charged no fee would be preferable, and that general membership meetings could include trips to nearby sites of interest as well as an annual picnic meeting. Peggy Borger reported on progress in recruiting members to help with a telephone membership drive which will take place before the February meeting. An opportunity for all members to review proposed by-laws before the February meeting will be provided by publishing a draft of the by-laws in the newsletter (the draft is included in this issue). There was also discussion of possible projects, including developing a panel of experts in paranormal phenomena, tracking and influencing media coverage of paranormal incidents, and reviewing and reporting on the accuracy of psychics' New Year's predictions. No decision about a project was made.

Satanism Round Table. After the business meeting, Virginia Jergens, ART charter member and sociologist, led a round table on satanism, beginning with an introduction to satanism in the U.S. today. Evidence collected over the last decade, she said, suggests increasing belief in an ancient, secret satanic conspiracy said to be attempting to destroy American society. This conspiracy is called satanism; believers in the conspiracy are called anti-satanists. Anti-satanists are now reaching a wide audience with their views. News stories about satanism, virtually nonexistent before the 60Os, are now common on network TV news, talk shows, and prime time TV. These stories attract readers, viewers, and profits, so news media often sensationalize these stories, and present them as though they could be accurate. There is, however, no verifiable evidence that there is a secret blood cult of satanists at work in the U.S.

Nevertheless, because of rumor panics about satanic threats, children have been needlessly kept home from school, police with guns drawn have approached college students practicing a medieval play in the woods, and heavy metal rock concert sites have been vandalized. The satanic conspiracy may be a contemporary legend, but the vigilante efforts, malicious gossip, and vandalism the belief has inspired are real, and have attracted the attention of social scientists to this new resurgence of an old social phenomenon.

Two major ways of understanding satanism now exist in American society, the fundamentalist Christian perspective and the social scientific perspective. The fundamentalist Christian perspective focuses on perceptions of rising rates of violent crime, divorce, drug use, child abuse, and sexual abuse, and increasing economic insecurity, and looks for an explanation. The explanation offered by this perspective is based on the assumption that the world consists of good and evil. Good things come from God; evil comes from God's adversary, the Devil.

The hypothesis presented by the fundamentalist Christian perspective is this: the Devil controls a vast conspiracy of powerful people (doctors, lawyers, other professionals) who infiltrate society, secretly causing chaos and committing crime (for example, killing animals and infants in satanic rites). The Devil is said to lure others into his conspiracy through drugs, rock music, and role playing games like Dungeons and Dragons.

According to the fundamentalist Christian perspective there are two main sources of evidence to support this hypothesis: cult survivor accounts and stories of satanic ritual abuse told by children. In addition, objects, symbols or behavior which can be attributed to the all-pervasive hand of the Devil, for example, wearing hoods, burning candles, animal carcasses, many written symbols, or anything that seems strange from a fundamentalist Christian perspective may be cited as evidence.

From the point of view of the fundamentalist Christian, society is disintegrating into chaos around us, there is a great deal in the world to be afraid of, and the cause of this chaos and terror is the Devil, who works secretly and continuously around us, through his conspiracy of satanists. The solution to this problem is the conversion to Christianity of those who do Satan's will. Satanists, drug abusers, rock and rollers, D&D players, and satanic murderers must reject Satan and accept Christ to be saved from Satan and end the evil.

The social scientific perspective on the problem of satanism is somewhat different. Sociologists, anthropologists, and folklorists focus on the causes of the belief in satanism and on the spread of that belief. Operating on the assumption that what human beings consider good and evil is determined by social processes, not by supernatural entities, social scientists use several hypotheses to study the belief in satanism. Social scientists hypothesize that rapid social change (including changes in women's roles, changes in sexual behavior, and increasing ethnic diversity), economic insecurity (including job loss, and fear of job loss) and social disorder (violent crime, divorce and child abuse rates seen as "skyrocketing") cause strong, widespread, but not clearly focused anxiety--there is no obvious villain. This deep anxiety leads to a search for an explanation. Survey research has found that particularly among people who are less-educated, rural, and who belong to fundamentalist Christian groups, this explanation for social chaos is found in satanism.

Other hypotheses offer ways to explain how antisatanism spreads. The contemporary legend hypothesis suggests that people make sense out of their lives by telling stories about them. To less-educated, rural, fundamentalist Christians, a belief in satanism makes sense, so they tell stories about it, thus spreading the belief. The rumor panic hypothesis suggests that ignorance, economic insecurity, perception of social disorder, deep anxiety, and fundamentalist Christian beliefs lead to the rapid acceptance and spread of any satanistic story that appears. The groupthink hypothesis is also

used to explain the spread of belief in a satanic conspiracy. Social psychologist Irving Janis developed this hypothesis to explain the extraordinarily poor planning Kennedy and his advisors did for the Bay of Pigs episode. A group under pressure has a problem to solve. The group must maintain unity, and therefore cannot tolerate much dissent. In an effort to maintain solidarity, the group inadvertently squelches minority opinion, and encourages conformity to the majority opinion. The majority thus loses any possibility of being corrected by new information. When the majority is wrong, this process can lead to disaster, as it did at the Bay of Pigs. This hypothesis has been used to explain the spread of belief in satanism among psychotherapists who treat MPD patients. It is believed that the therapists, not the patients, do the spreading. MPD patients are exceptionally suggestible, easily hypnotizable, and inadvertently mislead their therapists by readily coming up with stories they really believe are memories but are actually only inventions to please the therapists. The therapists, who are not research psychologists, and not aware of recent research in the area, do not realize they are being misled, and desperate for answers, find an answer in satanism.

Social scientists, although they have found no verifiable evidence of the satanic conspiracy, have found evidence which supports all of these hypotheses. A good collection of studies is found in *The Satanist Scare*, edited by three sociologists, James T. Richardson, Joel Best, and David G. Bromley. It is available in paperback from Aldine de Bruyter, 200 Saw Mill River Road, Hawthorne, New York 10532.

In conclusion, Dr. Jergens said, from the social scientific point of view, the satanic conspiracy does not exist. Belief in a satanic conspiracy is a social phenomenon which occurs among vulnerable people of fundamentalist Christian background when there is widespread anxiety. Anti-satanists raise fears of non-existent terrors, which result in hysteria, rumor panics, malicious gossip, violence, vandalism, and vigilante efforts. The current upsurge has been exacerbated by unscrupulous use of sensational material by the news media, by fundamentalist Christian leaders who have found they can raise money by promoting satanism, by psychotherapists treating MPD patients, and by law enforcement workers who believe in the satanic conspiracy and are well-positioned to spread the belief. Most social scientists believe that the belief in a satanic conspiracy cannot be changed, although their hypotheses suggest that higher levels of education, less economic insecurity and lower commitment to fundamentalist Christianity might reduce the problem.

Dr. Jergens's remarks were followed by a lively round table discussion, during which the meeting adjourned to an informal lunch and continued conversation at a nearby restaurant. The round table, which included anti-satanists as well as skeptical ART members, continued vigorously well into the afternoon. Special thanks go to Richard Davis and the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History, who generously made the museum available for our meeting.

Satanism: A Brief Vocabulary

This glossary will provide you with basic ideas you need to understand and discuss satanism as a social phenomenon.

Anti-satanist.

A term used by social scientists to describe those who believe that a dangerous satan-inspired conspiracy is active in society.

Contemporary Legend.

A term used by social scientists, especially folklorists, to describe a story which has developed in recent years and is regarded by the teller as true, but for which no corroborative evidence exists. A contemporary legend typically has a fairly consistent plot, but the place names, names of the characters and local details vary as it is retold from one area to another.

Cult.

From the point of view of an anti-satanist, a group of secret, conspiratorial satanists. Social scientists use 'cult' to describe social units in which religious rituals are performed and which provide a common group for those who share religious beliefs.

Cult-survivor.

A term used by anti-satanists to describe a person said to have been brought up in a traditional satanic cult, endured ritual torture and abuse and to have escaped from the cult. Typically a woman of middle age who in the process of psychotherapy is diagnosed as having Multiple Personality Disorder and produces voluminous memories of a childhood of satanic abuse. These memories seem real to her, but do not jibe with verifiable fact. Research psychologists have found that such women typically are exceptionally susceptible to hypnosis, have a high eye roll, are very trusting, and will make every effort to produce elaborate and internally consistent stories in response to a therapist's questions.

Fundamentalist Christians.

Religious groups characterized by a belief that the world is a battleground between good and evil in which each person can be saved from eternal damnation only by a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. Also characterized by a belief in biblical inerrancy.

Groupthink.

A social process described by Irving Janis in which a relatively isolated group facing severe stress inadvertently makes poor use of the information available to it by emphasizing group solidarity and conformity, refusing to tolerate dissenting opinions or to hear information which does not agree with the position of the majority. Janis did his original work in analyzing poor decision making in the Kennedy cabinet at the time of the Bay of Pigs incident. The same process has been used to analyze the adoption by psychotherapists of real ritual satanic abuse as the explanation for Multiple Personality Disorder patient's tales of satanic abuse.

Legend-Tripping.

A term used by social scientists to describe a recreational activity undertaken by teenagers, especially in rural areas, in which the participants take the roles of the characters in a local ghost story and reenact the story at the site at which it is said to have occurred, with a skeptic taking the role of the ghost, squeals of fright from the girls, and bravado from the boys. The sites are typically used repeatedly, and show the graffiti and trash associated with teenage partying. Adults, unaware of the practice of legend tripping, have attributed the evidence at the sites to satanic rites.

Ritual.

A term used by social scientists to describe stereotyped, routinized behaviors directed toward the sacred and supernatural.

Ritual abuse.

A term used by anti-satanists to describe the experiences of "cult-survivors" who report abuse by satanists and children who report satanic abuse by daycare workers. Such abuse is considered by anti-satanists to occur in the course of the worship of Satan, and to include sadistic sexual, physical, and psychological abuse. Social scientists have not yet been able to verify any instances of ritual abuse.

Ritual slaughter.

A term used by anti-satanists to indicate that animal carcasses are the product of satanic sacrifices. Usually described as having been killed with "surgical precision." and drained of blood. Social scientists have found no instances in which animals have been killed with surgical skill or drained of blood. Carcasses given the 'ritual slaughter' label have been found to be roadkill or natural predation. They appear to be drained of blood because after death blood flows to the lower part of the body and decomposed rapidly. Wounds appear to be "surgically precise" to the untrained eye because cuts and tears in the skin tend to become smooth as the skin decomposes.

Rumor panic.

From the point of view of social scientists, a rumor is a story told repeatedly which has no verifiable basis in fact. A rumor panic is the rapid spread of a rumor in a given geographical area. Rumor panics of satanic conspiracies were common in the U.S. in the 1980's, particularly in rural areas.

Satanism.

From the fundamentalist Christian perspective, satanism is a powerful, pervasive conspiracy which has persisted in secret since ancient times, passed down from one generation to the next. It includes doctors, lawyers, and other professionals. Its aim is to destroy society by infiltrating institutions and organizations and causing chaos from within. Its members worship Satan, a supernatural being who is the enemy of God and entirely evil, in rituals that include sexual abuse, torture, and human sacrifice. From a social scientific perspective, satanism is a contemporary legend.

Satanists.

From a fundamentalist Christian perspective, those who practice satanism, divided into four groups:

At the center of the conspiracy, traditional satanists who pass satanism's evil customs from generation to generation in secret; evidence of their activity is found in the memories of "cult survivors." and of children who report ritual abuse by daycare personnel.

Publicly organized groups of satanists, such as the Church of Satan or the Temple of Set, evidence for which is found in these organizations' published writings.

Self-styled satanists such as mass murderers John Wayne Gacey and Henry Lee Lucas, whose acts satanists believe to be devil-worship.

"Dabblers," those in an outer circle of cult involvement, consist of children, teenagers and young adults who listen to heavy metal rock and roll, play role-playing games like Dungeons and Dragons and thereby are sucked into more evil

forms of satanism. From a social scientific perspective, the traditional satanists are a contemporary legend, the publicly organized satanists are religious groups, the mass murderers are criminals whose motivation is attributable to social and psychological causes, and the "dabblers" are teenagers working toward adult independence by participating in activities that seem strange and offensive to their parents.

Calendar

Change in meeting place: ART's new meeting place is the Greenwich Tavern and Restaurant, 2440 Gilbert Avenue, Cincinnati (Driving instructions elsewhere in this issue). Come to the meeting and stay for an informal and inexpensive lunch afterwards.

Change in monthly meeting day: The day for the regular monthly meeting has been changed from the second Saturday of the month to the third Saturday of the month, beginning in January, 1992.

February 15, Saturday, 10:00 AM. Monthly Meeting. Greenwich Tavern and Restaurant, 2440 Gilbert Avenue, Cincinnati. "What Does It Mean to Be Open-Minded?" Round Table Discussion led by Bill Giles and Joe Gastright. Executive Committee Meeting following lunch.

March 21, Saturday, 10:00 AM. Monthly Meeting. Greenwich Tavern and Restaurant, 2440 Gilbert Avenue, Cincinnati. Robert Baker, University of Kentucky professor emeritus of psychology and chair of the Kentucky Association of Science Teachers and Skeptics on "Not All Kentucky Spirits are in Bottles." Prof. Baker, champion ghostbuster, will discuss ghost theory, famous Kentucky ghosts. Executive Committee Meeting following lunch.

April 18, Saturday, 10:00 AM. First Annual Meeting: Election and installation of officers for 1992-93, Adoption of By-Laws. Oren Dent, stage magician and ART charter member, will present "Similarities Between Military Deception and Stage Magic," illustrated with magic tricks. Greenwich Tavern and Restaurant, 2440 Gilbert Ave., Cincinnati. Executive Committee Meeting following lunch.

Membership Drive Underway--Volunteers Needed

Peggy Borger, Treasurer and Telephone Tree Chair, has added to her generous efforts for ART a telephone membership drive first urged by Porter Henry, Publicity Chair. Under Peggy's leadership, ART volunteers are calling tri-state subscribers to the Skeptical Inquirer and others whose names were suggested by members to invite them to join ART and come to the February meeting. Peggy, in addition to recruiting volunteers to make telephone calls, looked up phone numbers for all the names, and is also calling prospective members.

John Hubbard, Richard A. Bozian, Judy Findsen, John Fischer, Richard Hildebrand, John Kennedy Mary Pacinda, and Ruthann West will be making phone calls. Porter Henry devised the procedure being used in calling prospective members and a form for recording information gathered. Virginia Jergens revised and distributed Porter's materials and typed the lists of names to be called. Volunteer callers will send their completed forms to President Joe Gastright, who will record, summarize, and report on the results of the telephone efforts.

Current Officers (Term of Office Ends April, 1992)

President: Joe Gastright

Secretary : Mary Pacinda

Treasurer: Peggy Borger

Program Committee Chair: Joe Gastright

Newsletter Editor: Virginia Jergens

Publicity Committee Chair: Porter Henry

Telephone Tree Committee Chair: Peggy Borger (Members: Chuck Rodway, Virginia Jergens, Carolyn Hunt, Bill Giles)

Membership Telephone Project Chair: Peggy Borger (Project volunteers: Porter Henry, Virginia Jergens, John Hubbard, Richard A. Bozian, Judy Findsen, John Fischer, Richard Hildebrand, John Kennedy, Mary Pacinda, and Ruthann West)

By-Laws Committee Chair: Holly Norton (Members: Mary Pacinda, Chuck Rodway, Virginia Jergens)

Media Resources Chair: Richard A. Bozian (Members: Chuck Rodway, Carl Bunde)

Rules for Skeptics

From the Kentucky Association of Science Educators and Skeptics, courtesy of Joe Gastright

The burden of proof is on the person making the claim.

Extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence./

The simplest explanation is usually the best.

The explanation requiring the fewest assumptions is usually the correct one.

Nothing is impossible for the person who doesn't have to do it.

Never argue with a fool; observers might not know the difference.

No matter how often a lie is shown to be false, there will always be some who will continue to believe it's true.

An ounce of application is worth a ton of abstraction.

If at first you don't succeed, destroy all evidence that you failed.

The Eleventh Commandment: Thou shalt not committee.

Never attribute to malice that which is adequately attributable to stupidity.

The progress of science varies inversely with the number of journals published.

Asking a group of scientists to change their theory is like asking a group of cops to revise the law.

Two of the most abundant things in the universe are hydrogen and stupidity.

The Sagan fallacy: To say a human being is nothing but molecules is like saying a Shakespearean play is nothing but words.

A handy guide to modern science: 1) If it's green or wiggles, it's biology. 2) If it stinks, it's chemistry. 3) If it's incomprehensible, it's mathematics. 4) If it doesn't make sense, it's economics.

Executive Committee Meetings

Attention Officers: Regular Executive Committee Meetings will be held after each regular monthly meeting. Please come to the meetings prepared to report on your work. [an error occurred while processing this directive]