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February Meeting: False Memory Syndrome

Bob Contadino, a social worker trained in rehabilitation and founder of a local false memory syndrome support group, brought A.R.T. members up to date on the false memory problem at the February meeting. Bob became interested in the topic when a friend told him about his experiences with the problem. Over time he became an expert and leader of the support group. Here is a summary of his remarks.

"False memory syndrome" is a term coined by the False Memory Syndrome Foundation, organized about three years ago by individuals falsely accused of molesting children on the basis of long-forgotten memories said to have been "recovered," often through therapy. The goal of the False Memory Syndrome Foundation is to help those accused on the basis of these unreliable "memories." As part of its work, the Foundation attempts to educate people about the possibility of false memories.

"Repressed" Memories

People who believe that they have recovered long-forgotten memories often refer to the memories as having been "repressed." The standard mental health term used to describe forgetting material is "amnesia." "Repression" is a term used by Freud to describe the act of forgetting memories that trouble the rememberer. In Freud's theory, individuals were thought to repress or hide from themselves memories of troubling feelings, fantasies, wishes, and so on.

Typical False Memory Patient

"False Memory Syndrome" is a cluster of symptoms whose cause is not well understood but is believed to be the product of therapist-patient interaction. Typically the patient is a white woman, college educated, and middle class who decides to try therapy to help with some common psychological problem, unhappy feelings due to a marital problem, or a problem with a job, a child, or other family members. During therapy the patient comes to believe that she was abused by a family member or friend or neighbor as many as 10 to 20 years ago. Although never troubled by these memories before, she comes to believe that her current unhappy feelings are due to this abuse.

Typically the "recovered memory" begins as a simple story which becomes more elaborate and bizarre as time, and therapy, go on. The consequences of "recovering" these "memories" can be disruptive and destructive, estranging the patient from members of her family and resulting in civil or criminal suits in which the only evidence of wrong doing is the "recovered memories."

False memories could be said to have been discovered by Sigmund Freud, although he never used that term. As he talked to his patients, many of them women, Freud discovered that they told him they had been abused as children. He believed them, because he had other evidence that child abuse occurred. Letters he wrote to his fiance when he was in France studying hypnosis and neurology refer to autopsies he observed of children killed by their parents.

But as his own patients' stories became longer and more elaborate, he realized that the things they were telling him were

very unlikely. So he checked some of their stories against other evidence and discovered that some of what they had told him could not be true. He found, for example, that a patient reported having been abused at a time when Freud knew at the alleged abuser was out of the country. In the light of this evidence, Freud revised his theory and came to believe that although there are cases in which abuse occurs there are also cases in which the abuse is a fantasy, although the memory seems real to the rememberer.

Today, however, many therapists are not as wary as Freud was of memories of child abuse. Instead, some believe that most adult emotional problems are caused by childhood abuse, and thus look for evidence of such abuse, and even suggest to their patients that most emotional illness is likely to be due to childhood abuse, often forgotten. As a result their patients are very likely to inadvertently "remember" childhood abuse.

Typically the abuse they remember is 10 to 20 years in the past. The account of the abuse may begin with accusations against a single parent, neighbor or sibling. As the story is elaborated, parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and neighbors are also accused. The story may also extend back even farther into the alleged victim's past, eventually producing "memories" of abuse in utero or at age 6 months. A close examination of such stories will usually show that it conflicts with evidence available from other sources. Another clue to whether the memory of abuse is false is whether the claimed abuse would have caused immediate death. Some children have reported rectal insertions that would have caused almost immediate death from bleeding. Typically the abuse "remembered" is believed to have been repeated and regular, perhaps even daily, over many years, and then later "repressed."

#### False Memories of Satanic Rituals

About 18% of patients who present such elaborated "memories" of past abuse believe that they have been abused as part of a Satanic ritual in which babies were sacrificed. A typical "recovered memory" in this group of patients may include having been impregnated as part of a Satanic ritual, giving birth to the infant, and being forced to kill and eat it. Kenneth Lanning, a retired FBI agent, became interested in cult activities in which homicides were said to occur. After investigating many such reported incidents, he concluded that there is no evidence of a satanic conspiracy coordinating satanic abuse nationwide. He found a few incidents in which teenagers had killed an animal and painted symbols interpreted as Satanic nearby, and also a few incidents in which a severely mentally ill person had done something similar. People who believe that they have been abused in the course of a satanic ritual believe that there is no evidence of a satanic conspiracy because those who would collect such evidence, including the police, judges, and so on, are members of the conspiracy themselves.

When a person retains a firm belief in a memory in spite of contradictory evidence, that person is said to be delusional. Delusions generally become stronger in the face of contradictory evidence. Some false memory patients are truly delusional, others are not so sure of their "recovered memories." False memory syndrome is not a standard psychiatric diagnosis. Usually people who have "recovered memories" of abuse are diagnosed by their therapists as having either Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD), which is a disassociative disorder, or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). (The most recent version of the standard Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) used by mental health professionals has dropped MPD and replaced it with Identity Disorder).

In the case of therapists treating "recovered" memories, MPD and PTSD are preferred diagnoses because they appear in standard psychiatric manuals, and thus are more likely to be eligible for insurance reimbursement. In addition they are the only standard diagnoses that are said to result from trauma. So these diagnoses are used because no other DSM diagnoses meet these requirements. There is no standard diagnostic category for a post-abuse syndrome. In PTSD, however, the illness occurs soon after the traumatic event, war, concentration camp or whatever, unlike the typical "recovered" memory patient, who "remembers" the abuse years after it is said to have occurred.

#### How Memory Works

Understanding how false memories develop is easier if you understand a bit about how memory in general works. Typically a person who has false memory syndrome believes that she has recovered memories of events that happened very early in life and went on for years, then were forgotten for years before they were "recovered." Memory does not work in this way, however. Memory for specific events does not develop until the child is around 2 1/2 years old. There is a very solid body of memory research indicating that memory does not exist before that age. Further, early memories are often very distorted.

For example, in a case study of the distortion of memory, the physical exam of a young girl was videotaped. The exam was completely conventional, pleasant, and non-intrusive. After the exam was completed, the girl was asked what went on at the doctor's. At first, she reported only what had actually happened, but gradually when she was asked over and over what had happened, she developed a story that became more elaborate and more unpleasant with each retelling. The tape remained as evidence of what actually went on, but the process of being asked repeatedly about the exam had produced an elaborate, false memory.

Sometimes when children are asked about abuse in their past, they are handed anatomically detailed dolls to use to help explain what happened. Research has shown that the use of these dolls produces unreliable results, in part because children when handed a toy with holes in it just naturally put their fingers in every orifice available. Research also documents the tendency of children and adults to pick up very sensitively on any expectations the therapist or questioner has. Merely handing the doll to the child may suggest to the child that the questioner expects to be told about sexual abuse. The use of such dolls has been outlawed in California courts.

It has also been documented that persons who were in fact abused are not likely to forget the abuse, even though they wish they could. Persons who were imprisoned in concentration camps as children, for example, have not forgotten what happened to them. They may have lost details, but remember the main outlines of what happened to them, in spite of wishing greatly to forget. The American Psychiatric Association has concluded that amnesia is especially unlikely if the events in question continued over a long period of time. Some believe that repeated remembering of traumatic events may allow the rememberer to become somewhat desensitized to them, and thus less uncomfortable.

Physical trauma, for example, automobile accidents, or head injury commonly causes amnesia, but usually for events just preceding and during the accident and subsequent treatment. A psychological trauma may cause amnesia, but it is very rare, and does not seem to occur in the case of repeated abuse.

Amnesia can occur at any age, but memory becomes more reliable as the child becomes older. In summary, there is no scientific evidence to date to support the claim that repression exists, but there is lots of evidence that it is easy to create false memories.

#### Suggestibility Can Lead to MPD

Some people believe that Multiple Personality Disorder may not exist except when induced by suggestion, because it is very easy to induce in a suggestible person, especially a histrionic, suggestible person. If someone the suggestible person trusts says to her, "Did you ever notice how different you are with different people? Well, do you know what that suggests?" Disassociative experience can occur, however. Under extreme stress, the thread of memory from one experience to another can be broken. Mr. Contadino would not use MPD as a diagnosis unless he was certain the patient had never before been diagnosed as MPD, since the diagnostic process is so likely to induce the problem. Only a handful of verified MPD cases are recorded for the first 50 to 75 years of the twentieth century, but since about 1980, cases have multiplied. Seeing someone who believes she has multiple personalities is quite convincing, because seeing someone move from one personality to another very different one is very dramatic. But it is a talent we all have.

MPD is a culturally determined psychiatric symptom. The therapist's expectations lead to the development of symptoms. In order to please the therapist, the patient develops symptoms to match the expectations of the therapist. The same thing happens with False Memory Syndrome. A patient goes to therapy with marital problems or depression, and tells her therapist she doesn't remember any abuse as a child. Then the therapist says something like, "I've had many patients who eventually remember childhood abuse." The patient experiences that statement as a demand that she remember abuse, and often comes to believe that to get well she must remember abuse. Although the memories of abuse "recovered" in this fashion are false, the patient suffers as though they were accurate memories. Such pressure to remember non-existent events can be exerted by a therapist, hypnotist, or a support group. A support group which includes individuals who were abused as children is likely to produce a strong expectation for each member to remember a story of abuse in order to get well.

Research has concluded that hypnotically refreshed memory is not more accurate than non-hypnotically refreshed memory. The patient, however, believes much more strongly in memories retrieved under hypnosis, than in

unrefreshed memories.

Another aspect of memory that most people do not understand is that forgetting is common, and in fact we must forget most of what goes on all day, so that we are not swamped with unnecessary detail. When children who had actually been abused were interviewed as adults, some had forgotten the abuse and some remembered it, evidence that most things are forgotten. But this evidence is not conclusive, since the study did not use a double blind method, in which neither interviewers nor those who interpreted the interviews knew which respondents had actually been abused. As a result, "demand characteristics," that is the experimenters' expectations, may have contaminated the results.

There are many sources for information on how to "retrieve" memory: books, TV shows, hypnosis, and numberless methods, including guided imagery, active imagination, and so on. Used properly such methods can be helpful, but they are very powerful tools, and can cause a lot of problems also.

About 20% of the population is estimated to be very suggestible, but few are truly delusional or suffer from a personality disorder. Contagion does seem to account for the spread of some apparently hysteric, that is, imitative, psychological illnesses.

In False Memory Syndrome, many patients move from merely remembering abuse to publicly accusing someone, and bringing civil or criminal cases against their families, neighbors and friends. The individuals who appear on TV recounting their stories of abuse are likely to be persons with a histrionic, or love of the dramatic, side to their personality. Individuals who have actually been abused rarely are willing to go public at all with their stories. Only very rarely has a patient, having decided the "recovered memories" were false, successfully sued a therapist for damages. It is very difficult for a family member of the patient to sue the therapist, because the law views the patient as the only one with an legitimate interest in any damage the therapist may have done.

The False Memory Syndrome Foundation now has recorded 15,000 to 16,000 cases of false memory syndrome. The recorded number is increasing over time, and is believed to be much smaller than the actual number of such cases.

#### Contributors to False Memory

Therapists, abuse reporting laws, revenge-seeking relatives, religious leaders, and child care workers all contribute to the development of False Memory Syndrome. The chief problem is really the therapist who inadvertently leads the patient into "remembering" false memories. It is believed that many therapists who inadvertently induce false memories were abused as children, and have a punitive form of feminist ideology that seeks to "get" men. But 80% of recovered memory patients are women, which tends to make women look unreliable, a distinctly nonfeminist outcome.

Another problem is laws requiring the report of suspected abuse. The Children's Protective Association in the early to mid '70's encouraged state legislatures to pass laws requiring that suspected abuse be reported, and protecting the accuser. Any professional, doctor, therapist, or child worker, who suspects child abuse is required to report their suspicions, and can lose their license if they do not report. The result is that those who are falsely accused are unable to defend themselves.

At one time revengeful relatives tried to probate their unwelcome family member into a mental hospital, but now they accuse that person of sexual abuse, since the accuser, even if the accusation is false, is safe from attack.

Sometimes memories are "recovered" in a revival setting. Here solicitous clergy take the role of the therapist. This appears to be what happened in the Ingram case, in which a daughter accused her father of sexual abuse. The family's minister visited the father in jail and when the father told him he had not committed abuse, the minister told him to pray about it and that he would come back the next day and he would ask again about the abuse. The next day Mr. Ingram told his minister he had committed abuse. Richard Offshe, a social psychologist concerned with persuasion and group pressure, having heard about the encounter with the minister, undertook a field experiment. He visited Mr. Ingram in jail, told Mr. Ingram a lie, that his sons had also accused him of abuse, and asked Mr. Ingram if he had abused them. Mr. Ingram told him he had not, but by the next day, was telling Offshe that he had indeed sexually abused his sons. With that Offshe had good evidence that Mr. Ingram was exceptionally suggestible, but Ingram is still in prison. He is generally believed not to have committed abuse, but since he confessed to abuse, he can't be released.

Part of the problem with "recovered memories" is the tendency of those who work with children to believe that most symptoms of psychological distress in children are caused by sexual abuse.

Recanters

False Memory Syndrome Foundation is now reporting a few recanters -- those who have decided that their recovered memories are false. In addition a few lawyers have begun to specialize in defending those falsely accused. Contadino believes that no accusation of sexual abuse should be made in the absence of evidence corroborating the "recovered memories." He believes that an unknown percent of real abuse cases exist, but that most are delusional, and there is no way to know with certainty how many. One problem is that if you challenge an accusation, you are likely to be accused yourself. He would not be surprised to find himself accused of sexual abuse.

Some recanters are now suing their therapists. Some patients became depressed, and even suicidal because of the false memories in them by unwitting therapists. Patients and their families are severely damaged when the "story" expands. Contadino knows of a psychiatrist who practices in Georgia who treats people who developed false memories and as a result developed depression and anxiety.

Mr. Contadino concluded his talk by saying that there are no benefits to inducing false memories. It is helpful to know oneself, and one's own history, and the way we are and our beliefs and how that affects our life. But false accusers are encouraged to go beyond exploring their fantasies to accuse the innocent, doing irreparable harm to themselves and their families.

-- Ed.

April Meeting

New Officers

The annual election of officers, followed by reports on the Bermuda Triangle and a "psychic archeologist." constituted the April 8 meeting of A.R.T. at Raymond Walters College.

Investigations Chairman Joe Gastright opened the meeting with a report that creationists are becoming increasingly active in Cincinnati. A creationist organization called Answers in Genesis has moved its headquarters from the West Coast to Cincinnati. The Cincinnati Enquirer recently ran a pro-creationism guest editorial by Gary Parker, head of the science department at Clearwater Christian College, Florida. To promote its beliefs Answers in Genesis sponsored a two-day program of seminars and exhibits at the Albert B. Sabin Convention Center in Cincinnati in March.

To prevent creationism's being banned from public schools on the grounds that it is a religion, Joe reported, creationists are trying to establish it as a science as valid as evolution while also claiming that evolution is not scientific.

The following officers and committee chairpersons were elected unanimously: President, Roy Auerbach; Vice-President, Bob Riehemann; Treasurer, Dick McGrath; Secretaries: Membership, Donna Loughry; Meeting Reminder Cards, Brad Bonham; Meeting Minutes: Bob Riehemann, coordinator, and Porter Henry, assistant; Newsletter Editor, Virginia Jergens; Meeting Organizer, Mary Pacinda; Investigations Officer, Joe Gastright; Publicity Coordinator, Mary Pacinda; Media Resources Coordinator, Wolf Roder.

Committee members are:

Membership: Donna Loughry, chair; Brad Bonham, Porter Henry, and Ruthann West.

Newsletter: Virginia Jergens, chair; Peter Jergens, layout; Donna Loughry, mailing labels; Brad Bonham, production.

Investigations: Joe Gastright, chair, Everett Dejager and Brad Bonham.

Publicity: Mary Pacinda, chair and Dayton area; Virginia Jergens, Cincinnati, and Bob Riehemann, Northern Kentucky.

Program: Mary Pacinda, chair; Nurit Bowman and Bob Riehemann.

Scientific and Technical Consulting: Wolf Roder, chair, and Andrew Lutes.

Bermuda Triangle

A highlight of the meeting was a BBC-TV film on the Bermuda Triangle, in which skeptical author Barry Kusher

demonstrated that many of the "mysterious" disappearances of ships and planes in the Caribbean had rational explanations that could be uncovered with a little honest investigation.

"Psychic Archeologist"

Members also listened to a tape of a credulous National Public Radio news piece describing the work of George McMullen, a "psychic archeologist." McMullen, a native American with no training in history or archeology, claims that he can stand on an archeological site, or hold a stone from the site, and "see" in his mind the people, buildings, and culture of its vanished civilization. The tape quoted one professional archeologist as saying that McMullen was 80% accurate.

-- A.R.T. member, Porter Henry, Cincinnati, Ohio.

May Meeting

Safety Engineer Takes Chances Facing Audience of Skeptics

It was billed as a talk by a believer, but turned out to be a 90-minute running debate between Richard Strong, who believes in just about every paranormal phenomenon imaginable, and an audience of polite but firmly skeptical A.R.T. members and guests.

Mr. Strong is a safety engineer at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base and a member of a Mensa Special Interest Group called PSI-SIG, the "PSI" standing for "Psychic Science International."

His announced subject, "Psychic Science," might lead one to expect that he would define the protocols, methods and procedures of such a science. Instead, he presented a grab bag of claims and experiments, many of them well known, that purported to demonstrate psychic powers.

He triggered a prolonged debate with Joe Gastright by citing the experiments of Dr. Robert Jahn at his Princeton Engineering Anomalies Laboratory. Jahn's subjects try to guess whether a signal produced by a random generator will be plus or minus. He reported that his subjects guessed correctly more often than mere chance would predict.

Joe pointed out that Dr. Jahn's single outstanding performer was his wife, that subjects were not supervised and could have been hitting the apparatus or using a magnet.

To prove that brain functions are not localized, Mr. Strong cited a professor at the University of Indiana who removed the brain of a salamander, ground it up, and reinserted it. The salamander behaved normally. When minced salamander brain was put into a frog's skull, the frog ate like a salamander, Mr. Strong reported.

The fluid in which the brain rests, he said, may "ground" all mental activities in the way an auto chassis grounds the car's electrical circuits. This fluid, he postulated, may be the source of psychic abilities.

As a test of our ability to visualize, he asked us to imagine a cube being cut in several directions, and then described one of the resulting chunks. Some people can't visualize the results, which may explain why they can't visualize psychically. To the disappointment of the entire audience, he failed to offer any theory explaining the influence of brain fluid on the ability to visualize chopped up cubes.

A firm believer in dowsing, he said he can locate objects by holding a pendulum over a map. From the audience: "Then why hasn't some psychic used that method to help the FBI locate the John Doe 2 of the Oklahoma City bombing?" There's just no established pool of psychics you can phone for information like that, Mr. Strong averred.

Asked where he has used his psychic gifts in safety engineering, Mr. Strong said he had once predicted that a refueling boom would break apart (it did) and another time became deathly ill while starting an airplane and got out, learning later that it had a dangerous fuel leak.

"Many people have had such experiences," a doubtful member of the audience noted. Mr. Strong countered, "But after a couple of thousand times you begin to see how it works."

Asked for examples of psychic science being used in engineering, he said he knew of none because he didn't read engineering journals. A helpful member of the audience suggested, "If you found such examples, wouldn't that increase your credibility with skeptics?" To which our doughty speaker replied, "What would credibility among skeptics do for me?"

"You point to the failures in some Psi tests," he commented, "but how about the failures of the physical sciences? You say the auto industry is so great, but what about that half a million people slaughtered by autos and 10 times that number in hospitals?"

An unrepentant skeptic in the audience muttered, "They still work better than flying carpets."

-- Porter Henry, A.R.T. member, Cincinnati.

Research Update: Physicists Say Power Lines Do Not Cause Cancer

Public concern over the possibility that the electro-magnetic fields surrounding power lines may cause cancer has grown since 1980, according to the New York Times. Belief in the cancer-inducing effects of power lines has led to spending an estimated \$1 to \$3 billion a year in the United States to move or shield power lines. Plans for power plant expansions have been canceled. Eleven families of child cancer patients have sued Houston Lighting and Power Company, claiming that the company knew its power line fields were carcinogenic and concealed its knowledge.

Power lines produce both electric and magnetic fields. Unlike electric fields, magnetic fields penetrate human tissue, and thus are the focus of concern. Early studies concluded that exposure to a magnetic field of 3 or 4 milligauss could cause cancer. These studies, which some investigators have found flawed and inconclusive, have not been corroborated by most of the many later studies, but the contention has only intensified.

The American Physical Society, the largest professional association of physicists in the world, after studying the issue since 1989, has now taken a firm position on this long-standing controversy. Pointing out that as public concern has increased, evidence supporting the claim that power line fields are carcinogenic has diminished, and that vast amounts of money are spent every year to fix a problem that isn't there, the society has issued a statement that it can find no evidence to support the claim that electro-magnetic fields produced by power lines are carcinogenic.

The physicists point out that human beings are always exposed to the magnetic field of the earth, 500 milligauss, much larger than the 3 to 4 milligauss thought to be at fault in early studies. Home appliances produce magnetic fields between 1 to 280 milligauss when the user is within one foot of the appliance, much less when the user is farther away.

Physicist David Hafemeister, California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo, led a study which reviewed theory and research in the area for the society. Hefemeister reviewed over 1,000 studies and interviewed physicists who specialized in electromagnetic fields. He concluded that the studies completed to date "show no consistent, significant link between cancer and power line fields."

In addition to no data, there is no good theory which could provide an explanation for a power line field - cancer link. The study stated that "[t]he conjectures relating cancer to power line fields have not been scientifically substantiated."

-- Ed.

Reference:

William J. Broad. "Cancer Fear Is Unfounded, Physicists Say: Power Line Concern is Called Needless." New York Times 14 May 1995, natl. ed.: 14.

Update: Mary, or Someone, Relocates Cold Spring Sighting

The annual Cold Spring KY Mary sighting vigil on Aug. 31 has been relocated. The Cincinnati Enquirer reports that Mary has thoughtfully told a visionary in Batavia who stays in touch with the Queen of Heaven that it would be perfectly all right to move the event to accommodate construction on U.S. 27 near St. Joseph Church in Cold Spring,

and that Norwood would certainly be fine.

The same article also reports that organizers from Our Lady of the Holy Spirit Center on Moeller Avenue in Norwood decided the construction would make the trip "too difficult," so the vigil will be held noon to midnight at the former St. Mary Seminary in Norwood. Fortunately, Mary appears, so to speak, to agree with the organizers.

-- Ed.

Reference:

Walt Schaefer. "Pilgrimage Rerouted to Norwood." Cincinnati Enquirer 22 July 1995. B1.

Book Reviews

Madame Blavatsky's Baboon: A History of the Mystics, Mediums, and Misfits Who Brought Spiritualism to America

Peter Washington

New York: Schocken Books, 1995

This book is really neither about Madame Blavatsky, nor about her stuffed baboon, but it is about Theosophy, the spiritualist religion Blavatsky founded. It does not focus on America either, but it is a history of mystics, mediums, and misfits. The author recounts the story of the founders of Theosophy and then proceeds to examine their metaphysical progeny and descendants. The entire history is set within the intellectual ambiance of the past two centuries. This is a period when science and war alienated persons from their religion, and many searched for a new connection to the masters, spirits, and gods.

I am tempted to parody the "begats" in the Bible. First there was Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, who borrowed her ideas from the novelist Edward George Bulwer-Lytton. With Colonel Henry Olcott she founded the Theosophical Society. Until she died she produced written missives she claimed were from the "masters" Morya, Mahachohan, Manu, Maitreya, and Koot Hoomi. The masters also include the Buddha and Jesus. The letters were in her handwriting, of course, since she was the instrument the masters used to produce physical evidence.

The founders recruited Charles Webster Leadbeater, who embraced Buddhism and became the bishop of the Liberal Catholic Church. Yes, both at the same time. He also found the child Krishnamurti, who was groomed to become the new Jesus of the Theosophists. Well, that was until he quit and went into business as a Master on his own. Rudolf Steiner recruited himself as the chairman of the German section, until he went off on his own to forge Anthroposophy. He didn't like all that Hindu emphasis and wanted to introduce more Christian ideas. He warned against Lucifer, who seduces us to overestimate the powers of spirit, and against Ahriman, who tempts us to rely on reason and logic.

Eventually Blavatsky passed the torch in apostolic succession to Anna Kingsford in the United States, and to Annie Besant in India. Anna never could get along with others and retreated with her group to Point Loma outside San Diego, while Annie reigned supreme until her death at 84 in 1931. Peter Damien Ouspensky came from upper middle class Moscow to search for the occult in fourth-dimension mathematics, Nietzschean theories, and mystical Islam until he found Theosophy. George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff was another son of a carpenter in a remote Middle Eastern village, with doubtful stories about his early life. The meaning of his route to spiritual enlightenment remains obscure.

Krishnamurti lived on to become a guru to the California college scene in the sixties, and to be overtaken by the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and Swami Prabhavananda. With the full blown New Age it was not one teacher who appeared from the East, but they came in dozens. Theosophy lives on in a thoroughly dignified way, though the thrilling, scandalous days of Blavatsky, Besant, and Leadbeater are gone.

-- Wolf Roder, A.R.T. member, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Tainted Truth: The Manipulation of Fact in America

Cynthia Crossen

New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994

In a general way most people already know what the author of this book tells us: the science reported in the media, in newspapers, on TV and radio is not to be trusted. Especially untrustworthy and tainted by special interests are numbers

based on surveys and polls and generally on human responses of all kinds. Yet, percentages often given to two decimal points seem accurate and convincing. In contrast, scientists know a lone study is but a small step, a single rung on a long ladder which may eventually lead to some truth. Cynthia Crossen is well qualified to know media hype as she is a science reporter for the Wall Street Journal.

The six substantive chapters of the volume represent a slow escalation from a discussion of commercial hype through the lies of advertising, to the horrors of drug research and the worthlessness of courtroom testimony. On the way she examines public opinion polling and environmental research. Let's be clear about one thing, really good and accurate research using human respondents is possible, whether this involves opinion polling or drug reactions. Such work is done daily, but much of it is proprietary to firms, to politicians, or to lawyers who will not publicize it if it does not agree with their interests. On the other hand they will publicize shoddy, biased, poor or otherwise bent work if it does agree with their needs. And, they will promote, pay for, and generally further research which does agree with their commercial, political, or legal interests, regardless of its truth value. This sort of thing is not science, social or otherwise, but merely make believe borrowing the regard and reputation of science. It is the equivalent of the actor in a white lab coat advertising any nostrum on TV.

One of the villains in Crossen's book is the communications media, which will report and sensationalize any "scientific" claim no matter how shoddy, preliminary, tentative, or superficial. She discusses in detail the alar on apples scare, which nearly wrecked a farming industry for nothing more than the hype of the Natural Resources Defense Council. She also discusses the oat bran is good for the heart hype, which for a time threatened the supply of oats for horses merely to improve the Quaker Oats Company bottom line. In both cases very small effects were hyped to the point of a national mania.

The major drug manufacturing companies come in for a great deal of criticism. These have the money and reputation to buy compliant scientists, who will carry out research according to the company's protocol, to find the results the company wants. Crossen discusses several cases where worthless or dangerous drugs were foisted on the FDA and the market or kept there long after dangerous side effects made themselves known.

Her last and heaviest criticism is reserved for the courts. Here opposing lawyers are neither encouraged to look for objective knowledge nor obligated to present facts. On the contrary in the adversary system of American jurisprudence any argument is acceptable. Lawyers have no difficulty finding compliant scientific experts or may even qualify quacks, who will testify to anything wanted for the case at hand.

Starting with deceptively simple strictures on hype and the media, Crossen ends with a powerful indictment of corruptible science. The present shortage of research funds has lead research centers, universities, and individual scientists into the selfish embrace of commercial and political interests. Biological and social scientific work is sufficiently ambiguous, that even the honest worker can be led to deceive himself by the siren call of one more lucrative grant.

-- Wolf Roder, Media Resources Coordinator, ART, Cincinnati.  
New Blurbs

Written by Andrew Lutes.

The Bermuda Triangle  
Facilitated Communication  
Faith Healers  
Firewalking  
The Hundredth Monkey Phenomenon  
Hypnotherapy  
Is Moon Dust Proof of Recent Creation?  
Nebraska Man  
The Velikovsky Phenomenon

## Local Creationism

A report on a new Creationist organization in Cincinnati

To a physicist, my title might suggest a reference to a theory advanced by the physicist Fred Hoyle in 1948 as an alternative explanation for the expansion of the universe as experimentally observed by Hubble. As late as 1962 the famous physicist Richard Feynman suggested that Hoyle's theory was still an option in his lectures (recently published as the Feynman Lectures on Gravitation, see section 13.3 ). But Hoyle's theory has a problem -- it is falsifiable and the Creationism to which I refer is not. The facts relevant to Creationism all suggest that it is false, but this is taken as an indication that the fundamentalist Christian god is inscrutable. Indeed!

Creationism has given us a new corporate citizen in Florence, KY. Answers in Genesis is loudly proclaiming that the biblical book of Genesis explains most of the science and ethics which all people need to know. This group is headed by Ken Ham, an acquisition from Australia. He has been in the U.S. for about 8 years. Before moving to Florence he was involved with the Creation Science Foundation. He is proselytizing in local churches and explicitly states that creationists wish to see, "Our thinking in every area." A cartoon with this caption appears in his book: "The Lie: Evolution." My investigation revealed a substantial group which supports him and which is willing to financially back him in his anti-scientific work.

Mr. Ham is very poorly informed about science. He paints a picture in which all problems in our society derive from a belief in evolution. He explicitly considers evolution responsible for lawlessness, abortion, crime and homosexuality in the United States. (Sociologists may wish to have a look at such an encompassing theory.) Humanists and scientists are portrayed as fixed in their beliefs and unwilling to modify their views. Belief in evolution is described as a religion. He believes that the Grand Canyon was created during the 40 day Noachian flood and that this flood accounts for the vast majority of all fossil and geological formations on the earth. Interestingly, he believes that scientists cannot infer facts about the historical condition of the earth because they were not there when that history occurred. He believes that the Genesis account is literally true because it is literally the "word of God." (God was there, of course.) Evidently this god did not lie in Genesis, but he did make things look as though they were very old to the scientific community. However, this misperception is the fault of the scientists and not the god who created the world which they investigate.

On Sunday, 19 February, 1995, Mr. Ham spoke at Landmark Baptist Church to a group of about 800, including me. The church capacity is about 1000, so he is clearly attractive to such groups. There were several spontaneous ejaculations of "Amen" throughout the course of the service. These were frequent during stories of the creation of a woman from a man's rib, a description of the Grand Canyon as being an indication of the power of god's wrath and other myths which he recalled. The Cincinnati Bible College, an educational institution greatly respected among local Protestant ministers, is also a strong supporter of Ham's ideas.

The Landmark church has several television cameras which are used to tape its services. These tapes appear on the cable network and thus reach a large audience. The church collects about \$40,000 a week in tithes. The Reverend Rawlings warmly praised Mr. Ham for his important message and indicated that his church fully supported these ideas. A conclave of children sat in rapt attention at the front of the church during the lecture. After the service, the congregation supported Mr. Ham by spending about \$50.00 a minute for 60 minutes in buying his books. These included collections of dinosaur books for children (at \$100.00 each) which suggest that dinosaurs were present on Noah's Ark, less than 10,000 years ago.

By some measures Cincinnati is a well informed community. Our public library has the largest per capita circulation in the country at 13.5 items/borrower annually. We are second in total circulation at 11.7 million items annually and we have 4.5 million volumes in the downtown library alone. Yet for all of this reading and the thinking which should go along with it, displays such as those surrounding Mr. Ham make me wonder if the attempt to educate the community, and especially our children, will ever succeed. A scientific understanding of the world requires more than reactionary politics and an uncritical acceptance of books filled with ancient myths and inaccurate science.

-- Bob Riehemann, A.R.T. Vice-President.

See also the Answers in Genesis web site.

## Joe Nickell Joins CSICOP Staff

The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) announced in June that respected Kentucky skeptic Joe Nickell had joined their staff in Amherst, New York. When he was recruited by CSICOP, Joe was a technical writing instructor at the University of Kentucky at Lexington, and an active member of the Kentucky Association of Science Educators and Skeptics (KASES) He is now Senior Research Scholar at CSICOP's new Center for Inquiry complex.

Joe's work on crop circles, spontaneous human combustion, miracles, and the Shroud of Turin has often appeared in *Skeptical Inquirer*. He has also co-authored many books, including *Inquest of the Shroud of Turin*, *Secrets of the Supernatural*, *Camera Clues*, *Mysterious Realms*, *Entities*, *The Magic Detectives*, and *Missing Pieces*.

According to CSICOP Executive Director Barry Karr, Joe is a CSICOP Fellow, frequently appears on television and radio programs, and is often interviewed for magazine and newspaper articles.

In his new job, he will respond to media inquiries and help develop projects to expand CSICOP's public visibility. He will also cooperate with the local and regional skeptical groups and other scientific and educational organizations.

-- Ed., from CSICOP press release May 12, 1995.

Letters to the Editor

Cincinnati Skeptic welcomes letters from readers. Send your letter to Letters to the Editor, Cincinnati Skeptic. Limit your letters to 250 words or less and include your name, complete address, and phone number. Typed letters are preferred. Those selected for publication may be shortened for space reasons.

To the Editor:

Did you read these skeptical blurbs before you printed them? (Cincinnati Skeptic, April, 1995) The one on homeopathic medicine is just plain wrong! Mr. Lutes seems to think that one part per million is a very small dose and can't possibly do anything. If you believe this, just drink a glass of water with one part per million LSD. That should change your mind. In more ways than one.

The real trouble with homeopathic medicines is that they are diluted to much less than one part per million. Once you get past one part in  $(6 \times 10^{23})/m$ , where  $m$  is the molecular mass of the stuff (always greater than one), the amount of medicine you have left (per gram of solution) is less than one molecule. You can't have less than one molecule of something. You're left with a very expensive version of the stuff that comes out of the tap at the kitchen sink. It is true that if you believe in homeopathic medicine with all your heart and soul you can get a good placebo effect going, but that's all it's good for.

I also think it's a bit unfortunate that many of the blurbs have three references, all to *Skeptical Inquirer*. I think we'd look more credible if we referred to more than one source. It would be especially nice if we could include a source favorable to the fuzzy thinking in question, just to make sure we got the fuzzy thinking right in the first place.

-- Andrew W. Jergens, Cincinnati, Ohio.

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