



Selected articles from
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Court TV Guilty of Hying "Psychic Detectives"

By [Gary P. Posner](#)

One feature of Court TV is its heavily promoted three-hour "Saturday Night Solution" theme programming from 8 to 11:00 p.m. Eastern. The topic on Saturday, September 6, was "Psychic Detectives."

The first two hours were simply episodes of *Forensic Files* and *Body of Evidence* that dealt with the solution to mysterious crimes but were not specifically related to psychic detectives. Immediately preceding the commercials, the evening's hosts, Kristen Eykel and Dave Holmes, would occasionally chat for a moment to tie in the programming with that night's theme.

The show from 10-11 p.m. did deal with the evening's topic, and was called *Psychic Detectives*. The program had actually first been broadcast earlier in the year (I had taped it on February 27) and had aired again just two days before the September 6 "Saturday Night Solution" theme night. Hosted by former *NYPD Blue* star Andrea Thompson (who later did a stint with CNN Headline News before joining Court TV), the show was an hour of pro-psychic stories unworthy of comment in these pages (other than, perhaps, to note the credulous nature of those police officers and detectives featured).

However, when *Psychic Detectives* was re-aired on September 6, one of the brief "Saturday Night Solution" theme-chats was about Noreen Renier:

Kristen: Renowned psychic detective Noreen Renier has been credited for solving many baffling mysteries. But she is best known for predicting the assassination attempt on Ronald Reagan.

Dave: At an FBI lecture in January of '81, Renier envisioned Reagan having a sharp pain

in his left chest that fortunately would not be fatal.

K: Two months later, the attempt on Reagan's life went very much as she described.

D: Renier then predicted the president's demise in a machine gun assault later that fall.

K: Yeah, you know, Dave, Reagan never was attacked with machine guns.

D: Right. But, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat was! Ummm, see? She never clarified which president. Right?

K: Oooh. I got spooky little chills. Wow! Were her predictions sheer shots in the dark? [She then makes a "punny" face and jabs her partner with her elbow.] Or genuine visions where a single wire got crossed?

D: We'll never know. But we do know this: The "Saturday Night Solution" will return.

In [my chapter](#) on Renier in *Psychic Sleuths: ESP and Sensational Cases*, I cover the above incidents in almost the same wording. I strongly suspect that Court TV gleaned these anecdotes from my chapter, for they are well aware of the book, and the chapter specifically (more on that later). The Court TV website also contains the transcript of an [interactive online "chat"](#) with Noreen Renier, which took place sometime in 1999. Though her Reagan prediction was discussed, there is no mention of Anwar Sadat.

Had our TV hosts also mentioned what appears two pages later in my chapter, viewers would have been informed that Renier had previously predicted Jimmy Carter's reelection in 1980 (Reagan defeated Carter in a 44-state landslide), and Carter's subsequent assassination on the White House lawn. She had added for good measure that Carter's vice president, Walter Mondale, would commit suicide. But clueing in their viewers to the broader context would have risked providing a *genuine* "Saturday Night Solution" to the so-called mystery of "psychic detectives."

During some of their other chats, Kristen and Dave referred their viewers to that week's Court TV "saturdaynightsolution.com" web page. The page contained a link to [this brief summary](#) of the *Psychic Detectives* program:

Psychic Detectives

Psychics may be the hot commodity on afternoon television, but in the world of criminal investigation they can, and have, helped not only in crime solving but also in fine-tuning the gut instinct of a seasoned detective. Told from the detective's point of view, "Psychic Detectives" will re-visit crimes that a psychic helped crack. In addition, investigators and psychics will share the uncanny tips and unexplainable clues that have helped close unsolvable cases. Hosted by Court TV's Andrea Thompson.

And that page contained a link to [Court TV's "Crime Library" coverage](#) of "Psychic Detectives."

As mentioned earlier, Court TV is well aware of my chapter on Noreen Renier in *Psychic Sleuths*. Chapters [7](#) and [11](#) of this "Crime Library" article deal with "skeptics" and contain references to the

book. There's even a photo of me, and I am quoted in both chapters, as is *Psychic Sleuths* editor Joe Nickell.

Oooh. I just got spooky little chills myself, imagining the *good* that television could do if only there was money in "doing the right thing." But I suppose we can take solace in the fact that Court TV appears as devoted to truth-seeking as are the nation's courtrooms.

CHAIRMAN'S CORNER

By [Terry A. Smiljanich](#)

"All men are Socrates (or something like that)"

A. All men are mortal.

B. Socrates is a man.

Therefore,

C. All men are Socrates.

I was reminded of this bit of twisted syllogism from Woody Allen while thinking about the relationship of skepticism and humanism. The leading humanist organization, the [Center for Inquiry - International](#), currently has two major subdivisions: [CSICOP](#), which deals with skeptical inquiry of paranormal claims, and the [Council for Secular Humanism](#), which promotes secular values and rights of the non-religious. If you are a secular humanist, are you necessarily a skeptic? If you are a skeptic, are you necessarily a secular humanist?

The Council for Secular Humanism lists among its tenets the application of reason and science to the understanding of the universe, and skepticism regarding untested claims to knowledge. These principles are surely the hallmarks of rational skepticism. In addition, however, secular humanists make claims regarding justice, fairness in society, moral excellence, and promotion of an open and pluralistic democracy for all. Thus, the two divisions of the Center for Inquiry epitomize this twofold aspect of humanism: 1) a concern for the proper evaluation of claims and theories about the physical world; and 2) a concern for the cultivation of appropriate moral principles about the human world, separate and apart from any religious or theological source.

From this, we can properly deduce that all secular humanists are, or should be, skeptics. A proper disdain for the supernatural is part and parcel of the makeup of a secular humanist. But what about the skeptic? Can a person call oneself a skeptic if he/she accepts supernatural explanations about anything? For example, can a skeptic still believe in the miracle of Lourdes and the magical healing powers of its waters?

In my view, a person who accepts supernatural explanations for the natural world cannot call oneself a true skeptic in the complete sense of the word. The two ideas are mutually exclusive. Yet it seems logical to me that one can be completely skeptical about claims of the physical world, while refusing to accept all of the secular humanists' claims about the moral universe. So, in that sense, all secular

humanists are skeptics, but not all skeptics are secular humanists.

But some argue that unless one has no religious beliefs, one cannot call oneself a skeptic, since such a person perforce must accept supernatural claims of some sort involving supernatural beings. This raises for me a more difficult question. As a few past columns have made clear, I do not count myself as an atheist or true agnostic. I don't have the space here to engage in a complete description of my beliefs (admittedly vague though they are). Suffice it to say that although I do not believe in a "Heavenly Father," angels, miracles, or Hell, I do believe in transcendent universal truths, not dependant on human invention. Concepts such as justice, love and mathematical truths are not human inventions, but have a pre-existing content.

From the above, I deduce (for mostly emotional rather than strictly logical reasons) a deism that cannot be classified as secular humanism. Thus, though I am a skeptic, I don't believe that my skepticism requires me to be a secular humanist (although I share many of its precepts).

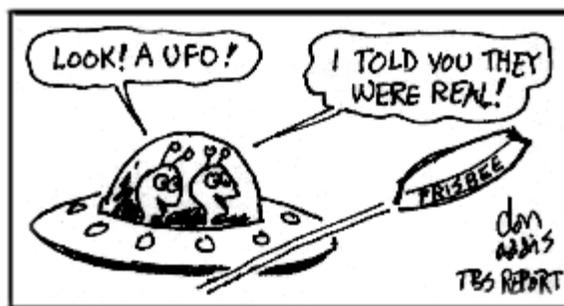
I take comfort in the fact that I am not alone in these beliefs. Skeptic par excellence [Martin Gardner](#) would, I think, agree with me. Likewise, celebrity skeptic Steve Allen shared similar views. Both were skeptics who "believed in God."

Thus, we can conclude:

- A. *All secular humanists are skeptics.*
 - B. *All skeptics share some secular humanist values.*
- Therefore,
- C. *I am a nonsecular humanist and must be right, since Martin Gardner agrees with me.*

Or something like that.

Snippets



The truth about UFOs is out there -- in Stockholm. Astronomer and photographer Tom Callen is curator of a display at the Swedish Museum of Natural History called "UFO: The Truth is Here."

Explained Callen, "The goal is to help people understand that most so-called UFO sightings were merely nothing more than misidentified astronomical, or manmade, objects. People have become so unfamiliar with the night sky that anything peculiar becomes something other than it really is." Cullen has also crafted UFO models and taken photographs of them to illustrate how easily people can be fooled by hoax photos. "We live in an age where critical thinking [should be] a requirement, not an option."

(Tampa Tribune, Oct. 13)

Despite the best efforts of a fertility specialist, Tampa software engineer Mary Hansen was still unable to conceive -- until she met Dr. Jian Zhong Xue. Formerly a surgeon in China and now practicing traditional Chinese medicine in Tampa, Xue prescribed a sour/bitter concoction of herbs to be ingested three times daily. Four months later, Hansen was pregnant! A miracle? No, pure science. During each visit Xue had examined her tongue and altered the herbal mixture accordingly. "He helps you balance your body," explained Hansen. A few skeptics were also interviewed for the article, including Dr. Sandy Goodman of the Reproductive Medicine Group and Dr. Steven Zeitzew, Chief of Orthopaedic Surgery at West Los Angeles V.A. Healthcare Center.

(St. Pete. Times, Oct. 20)

Jennifer Huffman is an environmental scientist who majored in biology. Hubby Jerry is a former deep-sea diver who participated in oil spill clean-ups. Neither would seem to be the typical crystal freak. But the couple has now opened Crystal Freqs, a New Age shop in Plant City specializing in wares with alleged healing properties. Jerry's epiphany came when he visited an American Indian burial site. Describing a gnarled tree, he said, "You can picture elves running along the branches. . . . I've been a different person ever since." Jennifer became a believer based on the science: "Your body is electrical. Crystals are electrical amplifiers." And, naturally, the specific crystal's molecular arrangement dictates the distribution of electrical current through the body, all the while unblocking chakras and thus promoting good health.

(Tampa Tribune, Aug. 16)

George George died on June 23. His main claim to fame -- which included a bird's-eye photo in Newsweek of his restaurant's roof -- was not his double name, but the greeting that he had painted on the roof in August 1952: "Coffee Free. Welcome Saucers." Indeed, his Charcoal House restaurant, which was located near Al Lang Field in St. Petersburg, was hailed as the world's first UFO welcome station and landing site. But according to son Rick, his father didn't really believe in flying saucers. The sign was just a publicity stunt, and an effective one.

(St. Pete. Times, June 25)

TBS in the Media

Terry Smiljanich was one of Kathy Fountain's three guests on Ch. 13's *Your Turn* on October 17. The topic was Tribulation and End Times, which would be further debated that weekend at a seminar by the two other guests: Thomas Ice (Executive Director of the Pre-Trib Research Center and a confederate of Tim LaHaye) and the Rev. Samuel Frost (Christ Covenant Church).

That same day, the *John Walsh Show* taped a program on "Psychic Phenomena: An Inside Look," to air on October 24. Both [Noreen Renier](#) and [Gary Posner](#) were contacted for possible appearances (just imagine the drama of that confrontation!), as was CSICOP's Joe Nickell (in the event Gary couldn't make it). However, to avoid the airfares to New York City, the show decided instead, as its website announced that week, to "spend a fascinating hour with Dougall Fraser ---- a 26-year-old clairvoyant . . . one of the country's top psychics. . . . Dougall helps our guests find answers, hope, and in some cases, closure in their lives."

John Walsh, of all people, ought to know better. After all, if "psychic" power was genuine, his other TV program, *America's Most Wanted*, would be unnecessary -- the nation's legion of "psychic detectives" could take care of locating the fugitives, including the murderer (still unidentified) of his own son. As Posner told Walsh's producer, rather than "budgetary" concerns, he suspects that they cynically opted to titillate rather than "'educate your viewers about the true nature of 'psychic' [phenomena]."

But Posner had been quoted (sort of) in Leonora LaPeter's October 5 *St. Petersburg Times* [article on "firewalking"](#). As is the rule, rather than the exception, for newspaper reporters, Posner's "quote" was a loose approximation rather than verbatim. One example was her substitution of "psychiatrist" for "psychologist."

Beyond that one "quote," Posner had also explained to Ms. LaPeter the physics of firewalking. Rather than reporting that "The explanation for why firewalkers rarely burn their feet is less clear," and that the podiatrists she contacted "had no medical explanation," she could have *really* quoted from Posner's interview. Though not credited, it was he who explained to her about the "ash" and that "wetting" the feet helps, as well as the importance of other factors such as the length of the walk, the temperature of the coals, and the speed of the walk, and used the analogy of touching a cake baking in the oven to explain heat conduction. TBS member/consultant Alan Soli's excellent [Letter to the Editor](#) explaining much of the above appeared in the Oct. 13 *Times*.

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