



The Skeptics SA guide to Australian Skeptics

Are we living in the age of science? It would seem so but why is there so much non-science around? Myth, superstition, mysticism, cults, New Age beliefs, pseudoscience and nonsense have penetrated every aspect of our culture. A 1990 Gallup poll of 1,236 U.S. citizens showed these levels of belief:

- Astrology 52%
- ESP 46%
- Aliens landed on Earth 22%
- Dinosaurs and humans lived side by side 41%
- Communication with the dead 42%
- Clairvoyance 59%
- Personal experience with psychic power 67%

And if you dismiss this as just more U.S. lunacy, think again. A study of Australian tertiary students in 1993 showed that 38% believe in mental telepathy, though no proof has ever been demonstrated for this ability.

Good science doesn't just describe nature. It infers, it generalises and hypothesises. It attempts to make the theory fit the facts and rejects the theory when the facts contradict. A scientist knows that his reputation can be enhanced by destroying an untenable theory as well as by creating a new one. Peer review is devastating to theories with shaky foundations

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of evidence. Good, solid, repeatable evidence is required.

Pseudo-science is much better at marketing than providing proof. Some claims are so vague that they defy investigation, let alone provide evidence. Facts are discarded when they contradict theories. Appealing to the authority of Nobel laureates drawn out of their field is also used as proof. Sadly, when money is involved, science and truth become casualties. Just look closely and critically at the many remedies and claims that are offered by the herbalists or the health food industry.

In 1976, the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) was formed in the United States. This organisation was formed for the purpose of encouraging the critical investigation of claims of paranormal phenomena from a responsible, scientific point of view. They also promote scientific enquiry, critical thinking, science education and the use of reason in examining any important issue.

As CSICOP gained publicity, some well known Australians became aware of its existence. Dick Smith and Phillip Adams became the patrons of the Australian Skeptics in 1980.

The aims of the Skeptics are:

- To investigate claims of pseudo-scientific, paranormal and other phenomena from a balanced, non-cynical, scientific point of view
- To publicise the results of investigations and draw attention to the possibility of more ordinary and natural explanations for phenomena
- To accept good evidence wherever the results lead and be critical of unproven claims regardless of the authority of the source
- To encourage the media and all Australians to adopt a more critical attitude toward extraordinary claims and to understand that publicly making a claim without supporting evidence does not constitute proof
- To stimulate enquiry and the quest for truth, wherever it may lead.

The Australian Skeptics offer you a unique opportunity to use the scientific community who research the paranormal, faith healing, alternative medicine, astrology, flying saucers, creation science, and other New Age beliefs. with their quarterly magazine, *the Skeptic*. *the Skeptic* is an open forum for discussion and debate in many of the subjects that interest us

without the sensationalism of the uncritical media.

The Australian Skeptics are part of a network that covers more than sixty five countries. We promote free enquiry and help to combine the resources of researchers from around the world to provide information. We are dedicated to being a free thinking, non-profit organisation whose aim is to expose the dishonest attempts to abuse science by the charlatans of the world.

Skeptics are often portrayed as cynics, particularly by those afraid of any reasonable investigation. This is not so. We remain open to any evidence, even if it is extraordinary, and will support any claim or hypothesis which is backed by solid, unambiguous and repeatable evidence.

Skeptics are often portrayed as anti-religious. Again, this is not so. People should always be allowed their own faith and we would fight for this right. The Skeptics only become involved when religions use bogus science and brain-washing techniques to achieve their aim.

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The South Australian branch of the Australian Skeptics

For further information on the Australian Skeptics and the journal, *the Skeptic*, contact:

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