H Y P N O S I S:  
A N U N U S A L S T A T E?

G. I. Gurdjieff was, among many other things, an accomplished hypnotist. His knowledge included Eastern versions of hypnosis that are still largely unknown in the West. He knew that hypnosis in various forms was a major part of everyday life. When hypnosis is carried out in a formal way, with a designated "subject" and "hypnotist," with a formal procedure for inducing, testing, using, and terminating it, we recognize its great power. When hypnotic-like procedures and states are interwoven with multitudes of life activities they are not obvious, yet they can be just as powerful. We will review hypnosis in this issue, and look at ordinary consciousness as a form of cultural hypnosis or trance in the next.

Setting and Preliminaries

Let us look at a typical modern hypnotic procedure, that is a standardized psychological test widely used in research for determining how hypnotizable a person is. There is nothing obviously mystical or mysterious about administering this scale. It is standardized to the point where the procedure is read word-for-word from printed instructions.

The subject, typically a college student seeking extra credit, reports to a "psychological laboratory" which is just a quiet room with a comfortable chair. After some casual conversation and filling out some forms, the hypnotist asks the subject to sit comfortably. He reassures him that there is nothing dangerous about what is going to happen, and begins.

Inducing Hypnosis

There are many ways of inducing hypnosis, so I will just sketch the essence of the procedure here. Despite its powerful effects, induction is basically a matter of the hypnotist talking and the subject paying close attention.

The hypnotist tells the subject to listen only to his words, to passively take them in rather than thinking about them. Relaxation is suggested, and the parallel is drawn that it is like the relaxation in going to sleep. Usually the hypnotist suggests that the subject is drowsy and is going to sleep, but he understands that it is a special kind of sleep where he can still hear the hypnotist and experience things that are suggested. The induction procedure only takes ten to fifteen minutes. For the talented subject of concern to us here, this is sufficient to induce a deep hypnotic state. We will look at the nature of this state by describing typical effects that can be produced.

The Effects of Hypnosis

Automatic Movements: The first formal test of the induction is whether the subject's eyes close by themselves by a certain point. If they don't, the hypnotist asks the subject to deliberately close them. Then the subject is asked to hold his arm out horizontally and imagine that it is are becoming very heavy. The arm will feel heavy to the subject, too heavy to hold up, and lower. The subject then holds his arms out horizontally, with the suggestion that there is a force developing between his hands, pushing them apart. Subjects often experience this as being like magnetic repulsion. Without their conscious volition, their hands repel each other.
Sensory Changes: A suggestion is given that a mosquito has gotten into the room. This annoying mosquito lands on the subject's head. Slap! Responsive subjects kill the mosquito before it can bite them. They later report hearing its buzz and feeling it landing.

The hypnotist further modifies perception by suggesting that the subject taste a sour taste. The subject's mouth may pucker up, and the taste experience be quite strong.

Particularly dramatic is anosmia, the inability to smell. In spite of the number of times I have administered it and seen it passed, it continues to amaze me. After suggesting to the subject that he cannot smell anything, a bottle of household ammonia is held under his nose and he is asked to take a good sniff. Talented, deeply hypnotized subjects take a deep sniff, show no reaction, and deny that they smelled anything! The smell of ammonia is not only extremely strong but painful in our ordinary state of consciousness. This ability to reduce or eliminate pain is one of the most puzzling (and practically useful) aspects of hypnosis.

Blocking Normal Control: The subject is again asked to hold his arm out. Now he is told his arm is becoming rigid, by itself, so rigid that he wouldn't be able to bend it. Eventually he is challenged to try to bend his arm. In spite of great effort, the arm does not bend, he has lost his normal muscular control over it.

Constructing New Realities: Now we leave altered perceptions of body and reality and go within. The subject is told he will have a dream, and then given a period of silence. A vivid, dream-like experience is frequently produced. When subjects are asked to compare the reality of these dreams with their nocturnal dreams, they are sometimes just as real, sometimes even more intense. The content of the dream can also be affected by suggestion. Similarly, age regression is one of the more dramatic hypnotic phenomenon. The subject is told he is going back in time, that he is no longer his adult self. A specific time to regress to, such as a childhood birthday party, is typically suggested. The most responsive subjects experience themselves as children again. Their manner of speaking and writing can change, and they feel as if they are re-experiencing an earlier part of their life, rather than remembering it.

Sensory Hallucinations: We have seen external sensations reinterpreted or eliminated, and external perceptions replaced with a dream. They can also be replaced with hallucinated perceptions for which there is no physical basis. In one test the subject is told that the secretary forgot to ask him some preliminary questions, but she will now ask them over the intercom in the lab. Responsive subjects hear the questions and reply to them! We can have a negative hallucination also: The subject is told that when he opens his eyes he will see two boxes on the table in front of him. Actually there are three boxes, but the highly responsive subject will see only two. Maintaining the hypnotic state with eyes open is also a mark of a highly talented subject.

Posthypnotic Effects: The hypnotist suggests that when the subject awakens from the hypnosis he will not remember anything about what happened. When the hypnotist gives a certain cue, however, his memories will return. The subject is now dehypnotized and questioned about what went on. A responsive subject will report coming in to be hypnotized, sitting down and relaxing, and then feeling they must have fallen asleep or something, as they can't recall anything else. On cue, all memories return.

Another common hypnotic effect that is routinely tested is posthypnotic suggestion. While the subject is hypnotized the hypnotist suggests that some time after he awakens the hypnotist will give him some cue, such as mentioning that the day is warm. Whenever the subject hears this cue he will experience and do some specified thing, such as opening the door and looking into the hall. The hypnotist also suggests that the subject will have no amnesia for this posthypnotic suggestion.

After the subject is in his ordinary state of consciousness, the hypnotist will occasionally give the cue, usually working it into ordinary conversation. The responsive subject will carry out the suggested action, without remembering that he is responding to a posthypnotic suggestion. If asked why he is doing this, he will rationalize his behavior.
Skepticism About Hypnosis:
Imagination and Acting?

If you are somewhat skeptical about hypnosis, it is quite understandable. Especially if I add that there are more dramatic hypnotic phenomena than those described above. I have hypnotized people with these standardized tests and seen these phenomena dozens and dozens of times. I must accept their reality because of my repeated experience. Or must I?

After all, these apparent phenomena smack of magic. There were no drugs, no operations on the brain, no powerful emotions to push people to extremes of functioning. Two strangers sat in a room. The one called the hypnotist did nothing but talk to the one called the subject. We do this all the time and call it conversation. Yet the subject's reality changed in drastic, impossible seeming ways. Isn't that magic, when the magician's spell (words) changes reality?

Explanations

In trying to understand hypnosis, theorists fall into two general classes, the "experiential" and the "skeptical." The experiential generally take the subject's behavior and reports at close to face value: when the subject doesn't react to the sniff of ammonia and reports that he smelled nothing, it is because he smelled nothing. Skeptical theorists see the drastic changes implied by hypnosis as inherently unlikely or impossible, and so view hypnosis as misunderstood and/or the subject as involved in some sort of pretense: he smelled the ammonia and it was painful, but he acted as if he didn't smell it and lied about his experience.

The experiential theorists run into problems when they try to explain the experience of the hypnotized subjects in more detail. Why can their experience be so profoundly altered? A major line of speculation has been that hypnosis involves profound physiological changes in the nervous system, comparable to sleep or drug-induced states. Unfortunately for this theory, these changes have not been found. While brain waves are a crude measure, the brain waves of hypnotized subjects are pretty much the same as those of people in ordinary states. Other physiological changes in the body turn out to be associated with the relaxation that is normally part of hypnosis. You can eliminate the relaxation and associated physiological changes with suggestion, though, yet the person can still remain deeply hypnotized.

We will undoubtedly find some sorts of physiological changes in hypnosis when our instrumentation becomes sufficiently advanced and sensitive. But there are no gross changes to explain hypnosis at this time and, even more importantly, we are still unable to explain how such profound changes can be brought about just by talking to someone.

The skeptical theorists assume that the behaviors associated with hypnosis are actually "normal," that is within our ordinary capacity: they are just rare and unusual. When we see a lot of them together in the context designated "hypnosis" we (mistakenly) think there is something special about them. Further, they usually reason that the overt compliance with the suggestions is largely a matter of play acting. The subject is not in some sort of mysterious "hypnotic state," he is in a normal state, but acting the part of a hypnotized subject.

Skeptical theories have been with us since hypnosis was introduced to our culture, in its present form, by Anton Mesmer as "animal magnetism." For example, a British physician stationed in India, James Esdaile, discovered that hypnosis could be used to anesthetize many patients for surgery. Chemical anesthesia had not been discovered yet. Ninety five percent of patients who had surgery died from it, as well as suffering terribly. Esdaile reported that not only did his Indian patients feel no pain, but 95% survived the operation!

The British medical journals refused to publish his papers. When he returned to Britain he put on a demonstration for his colleagues of the British College of Physicians and Surgeons. After hypnotizing a man with a gangrenous leg, he amputated it in front of them while the man lay there calmly smiling. The conclusion of his skeptical colleagues? Esdaile was fooling them, he had hired a hardened rogue for a gold piece to lie there and pretend that he was feeling no pain!

They must have had very hard rogues in those days.

Three Dimensions of Hypnosis

I believe the reality is that there are a wide variety of reactions to hypnotic induction, such that both the experiential and the skeptical positions are partly true, depending on what particular person at what particular time they are talking about.

Ronald Shor, a prominent investigator of hypnosis, explained hypnosis in terms of three dimensions of hypnotic depth, three different kinds of alterations of psychological func-
tioning that could occur singly or in combination as a result of the induction. These dimensions were Role Playing Involvement, Trance, and Archaic Regression.

The concept of role playing is something we all understand. An actor plays Hamlet on the stage, but he knows he is not Hamlet, only himself playing Hamlet. We play various roles in life that are clearly artificial, they are not us. The concept of Role Playing Involvement refers to the fact that we can start to become identified with a role we are playing. Our heart is in it, we forget that it is just a role. It can take over: the role plays us.

A few people can simply play the role of a hypnotized subject in response to the induction, as skeptical theorist believe, but for most the role will start to become automatic, unconscious to various degrees. At its extreme, the subject deeply caught up in role involvement will show all the external behavior of a deeply hypnotized subject. Indeed, it doesn't occur to him that he has any choice, he automatically goes along with the role. If questioned about his internal experiences later, though, he is likely to report that he experienced nothing out of the ordinary. His arm did not feel heavy, but there seemed no other reasonable thing to do than to lower his arm as if it felt heavy.

The Trance dimension refers to a fading of the intellectual framework we automatically evaluate our experiences by. Shor called this framework the Generalized Reality Orientation. I think it is more properly called the Consensus Reality Orientation (CRO), to take away that quality of absoluteness "general" implies and remind us that our orientation to reality is very much a product of our particular culture's consensus of what is real and what is important.

Ordinarily when someone says something to you it is immediately evaluated in relation to the knowledge that forms part of the CRO. If a saleswoman says "This is the best product on the market." you immediately and automatically evaluate it in terms of your CRO knowledge that salespeople exaggerate, even lie, about the things they have a stake in selling. You take in the statement, but you add a qualification to it that it has questionable truth value.

As the CRO fades in response to the hypnotic induction, though, the hypnotist's statements stop being automatically evaluated. At the beginning of the induction, for example, the hypnotist might suggest "It would be so pleasant to drift off to sleep." With a fully functioning CRO you might think about that statement: "Do I really want to go to sleep now?" "Is sleep really that pleasant?" "Might I miss something if I go to sleep?" "He's suggested I'm already sleepy, but do I really feel sleepy?" With all the automatic processing of the CRO fading as you get hypnotized, though, the statement becomes a simple, un-evaluated statement of fact: it would be so pleasant to drift off to sleep. Your experiences become "dissociated," a point we shall examine at length as part of understanding Gurdjieff's psychology. The Trance dimension, then, is one in which experiences occur in isolation, without evaluation by your general knowledge. A subject who is deeply hypnotized on the Trance dimension experiences all the classic phenomena: they are perfectly real to him, and his behavior is a straightforward reflexion of his internal experience.

The Archaic Regression dimension of hypnosis evolves from the experiences we all had as children in relating to our parents. We were small, ignorant, and almost powerless, with little self-understanding or internal control. Our parents were giants, possessed of knowledge, control, and power way beyond our understanding. Compared to us, they were god-like. We developed a habit of regarding them as god-like, of understanding us, of expecting unquestioning obedience. In turn they rewarded us by caring for our physical needs and loving us.

Underneath the surface of our sophisticated, adult selves, this set of automatic attitudes still exists, and can operate without our knowledge. Freud spoke of it as transference: we transfer this childlike cognitive/emotional attitude on to some people in our world, often with confusing and unhappy results. Your boss asks you to perform some task for her, and in doing it part of your mind makes her into your mother. All your expectations of how your mother ought to take care of you start to color your relationship with your boss. Since she doesn't know she's supposed to love you and understand your deepest feelings without your needing to overtly express them, you begin to think that she doesn't like you, etc., etc.

One response to the induction of hypnosis is to unknowingly transfer the attitudes you had toward one or the other of your parents on to the hypnotist. The hypnotist now has the sort of magical quality your parent had when you were a child: of course the things he suggests become true. It would be bad if you didn't experience they things the hypnotist/parents say, they wouldn't love you! This can sometimes create intense emotional episodes around
the hypnotic procedure, as well as external compliance with the hypnotist's suggestions.

A hypnotized subject can show strong degrees of being caught up in one or more of these dimensions. All of these dimensions of altered psychological functioning affect us far more than we realize in everyday life.

Words Are Magic!

Regardless of what the ultimate mechanisms turn out to be, a primary lesson to learn from hypnosis is that we do not have a simple, straightforward contact with "reality." Our perception of the world around us, of time, of our bodies, of our ability to control our bodies, can be drastically altered. And what is the tool for such drastic alteration? Words. Just words. A few words and a nonexistent voice speaks to you, a box disappears, it's a pleasant day at your fifth birthday party.

Perhaps words only have this enormous power in special circumstances, like hypnosis? Perhaps. We will see. How much power do words have over your everyday life?

Isn't There Something Weird About Hypnosis?

In writing the above descriptions of hypnosis and some of the internal processes underlying it, I have mostly written in a scientifically neutral style, a sort of "here are the facts, I make no judgements about them" approach that is supposed to characterize the objective scientist. Even so, what sort of feeling do you get about the hypnotized subject? Even though he agreed to be hypnotized in the first place, hasn't he really given up his will, and gone into a "trance?"

I think that part of our aversion to a "trance" like hypnosis arises because at some level we suspect some very unpleasant facts. Are we already in a trance? Have we spent too much of our life in a trance? Are our behavior and internal experiences too strongly controlled by others? Hypnosis only stands out as an obvious "trance" because the particular things we do in it are socially unusual.

Gurdjieff studied this trance-like quality of life, studied what kept us in this waking trance, and provided methods for "waking up," understanding waking trance and learning how to wake up is vital, and we will continue this idea in the next issue. Meanwhile, try to observe in yourself the ways in which you unthinkingly and automatically respond to other's suggestions in everyday life.

Suggestions for Further Reading


SUBTLE ENERGIES, HEALING ENERGIES

PART 2

In our last issue we began looking at the idea of subtle or "non-physical" energies. Bernard Grad's work with the healer Estabani was examined. By holding a paper bag containing an injured mouse, Estabani could significantly speed up the rate of wound healing. Medical students who held bagged mice had no effects. We weren't really sure if it was some sort of "nonphysical" energy, though. Estabani's hands might have been warmer than those of the medical students, or he might have sweated out some sort of chemical that penetrated the bag and aided healing, or he might have handled the bag more gently. All of these possibilities might be practically useful, but we wanted to know if there was a psychic energy involved. Grad's next experiments give us a positive answer.

The Non-Suggestible Patient

Grad switched to a new type of "patient" that (who?) was not susceptible to suggestion, as in gentling, and a new type of healing procedure that eliminated chemical and thermal contamination. The patients were barley seeds!
Estabani had no direct contact with these "patients." Instead he would come into the laboratory and give a hermetically sealed jar of sterile saline solution (.9%). This is the solution that is used for intravenous feeding in hospitals. Estabani would hold the jar between his hands and give it a healing treatment just as if he were holding his hands on a patient. Because of its hermetic sealing, there could be no chemical contamination of the saline. It probably would get a littlewarmer, so to avoid this, the technician put the jar back on a shelf for an hour so it would cool back down to room temperature.

To give the barley seeds a need to be healed, they were baked in an oven which sapped their vitality and killed some of them. They were then randomly divided into experimental and control groups. The experimental seeds were soaked in saline solution that had received the healing treatment from Estabani, the control seeds in otherwise identical saline solution that had not received such a treatment. One effect of this saline soaking was to keep the seeds patients: the salt was not good for them.

The treated and untreated seeds were planted in separate pots. They were regularly watered with ordinary saline solution (to keep up the need for healing) by a technician who did not know which seeds had gotten the healing treatment and which had not. Another technician, who was also blind in this way, took regular measurements of growth.

The Green Thumb Effect

In this experiment and subsequent ones Grad has carried out, there is a clear effect. For seedlings treated with the "healed" saline solution, significantly more seeds sprout, the seedlings grow faster and taller, and the plants weigh more. It can make you wonder whether people with a "green thumb" do more than just provide better conventional care to their plants.

And the Black Thumb Effect

In one experiment, Grad put a jar of hermetically sealed saline solution in a paper bag and gave it to a psychically depressed patient to hold. She was suspicious of and agitated by this request to hold this bag for a few minutes, but held it. Barley seedlings were treated with this saline.

Compared to controls treated with ordinary saline, significantly fewer of these seedlings sprouted, they didn't grow as tall or as rapidly, and they weighed less. One experiment only, but we do have traditions of people with black thumbs, who can never get plants to grow right in spite of following all the instructions. If "healing energy" can be psychically transmitted, why not "sickening energy?" No one raised this particular possibility in our earlier articles on reasons people fear psychic abilities, but.....

What is the Energy?

The procedure seems to rule out conventional kinds of energies, and suggest that some form of subtle energy or psychokinetic effect can penetrate glass, "store" itself in water, and then beneficially affect sick organisms.

We have no idea what the ultimate nature of psychokinetic (PK) energy or any other kind of subtle energy is, only that it is not a known or readily conceivable form of conventional energies. Grad and some other researchers have a little information about its possible interaction with water, though.

Grad finds that as long as the treated bottles of saline are kept hermetically sealed, they can have a healing effects months later. If they are opened to the air, though, their potency rapidly disappears. Both Grad and Douglass Dean, a parapsychologist who has worked extensively with healers, have measured some shifts in the infrared transmission spectrum of treated saline. Magnetic fields applied to saline solution can also produce somewhat similar spectral shifts, but to do this these fields must be enormously stronger than the Earth's magnetic field or any conceivable magnetic field we could expect a person to produce. Thus the healing "energy" may produce some kind of shift in the state of water molecules. This shift might be part of the mechanism of accelerated healing, or incidental to it.

Grad's careful experiments, done in spite of resistance from the orthodox scientific community and with little funding, are truly pioneering and important. I feel he has solidly established that there can be a "subtle energy" involved in healing. Certainly in ordinary laying on of hands there are suggestion effects, positive effects from being paid attention to, etc., but now that we know there can be a vital "something else," it is important to find out all that we can. It's not being done, of course, due to scientific resistance, but it should be done.
Meanwhile, what about your hands? Hold them 8-10 inches apart. Feel whatever the quality of feeling is in your hands. Then feel the quality of the space between them. Is there "something" there? Move your hands closer and further apart: does the feeling change? Try holding your hand near another person's and feeling these things..... Try holding your hand over the afflicted area when someone you care for is ill..... Yes, there may be some imagination involved, but in addition.....

Suggestions for Further Reading


BOO K S  I N  BRIE F

More stimulating books about consciousness, personal and spiritual growth, and parapsychology are published than can be reviewed at length in The Open Mind. This Books in Brief section will note such books, although some of them may be the subjects of essay-reviews in future issues.

The Transmission of Doubt: Talks and Essays on the Transcendence of Scientific Materialism through Radical Understanding, by Da Free John. Clearlake, California: Dawn Horse Press, 984, $10.95 paper, 484 pp., index. A profound examination of the scientific enterprise from a spiritual point of view. Must reading for anyone who cares about science and who is mature enough to recognize that the development of the heart is just as important as the development of the head.

The Fire from Within, by Carlos Castaneda. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984, $16.95 cloth, 296 pp., no index. More teachings from Castaneda's early apprenticeship with don Juan. A consistent and well developed theoretical framework for the teachings is presented. This teaching was originally state-specific, i.e., taught and comprehensible only in a special altered state of consciousness. Castaneda had to recover this material in his ordinary state to integrate it with his other knowledge. Fascinating!

Heading Toward Omega: In Search of the Meaning of the Near-Death Experience, by Kenneth Ring. New York: Morrow, 1984, $15.95 cloth, 348 pp., index. An extremely important book. Millions of Americans have now involuntarily gone through one of the most powerful initiations of the ancient mystery religions, the near-death experience. What an irony that modern medicine, so totally materialistic, has provided this initiation to people! Ring draws out the lessons and meanings of this initiation, the way the experience has triggered spiritual growth.

Psychotherapy East and West: A Unifying Paradigm, by Swami Ajaya. Homestead, Pennsylvania: Himalayan International Institute, 1984, $9.95 paperback, 345 pp., index. The author, a PhD psychologist as well as a yoga practicioner and teacher, puts psychotherapy in a broader context than Western culture.
QUERY TO THE READERS: GERDJEFF'S TEACHINGS

G. I. Gurdjieff's ideas have influenced many people. Some of this influence has been in the form of specific teaching groups formed around his ideas, some of it in its influence on individual people who, by changing their own consciousness and behavior, have then subtly influenced the people around them.

A colleague of mine is trying to document these direct and indirect influences. If you know of any groups that teach Gurdjieff's ideas or that have been strongly influenced by them, would you please write me, tell me the name of the group, and how to get in touch with them? Similarly, if you know of examples of people whose lives have been changed by Gurdjieff's teachings and have then gone on to influence others, Write "G Groups" on the lower left corner of the envelope, and mail to me c/o PPI, Box 371, El Cerrito, CA 94530. Thanks!

LECTURES AND WORKSHOPS

by Charles T. Tart

There are no substantial changes from the schedule published in the last issue.