

To the Editor

The "Off the Beat" article about Uri Geller by physicist Jack Sarfatt in the July 20 issue has produced a flood of letters. Samples follow:

Geller and magicians

Whenever I read an article such as Jack Sarfatt's account of Geller performing for physicists (SN: 7/20/74, p. 46) I find myself exasperated by the irrelevance of the eminent people who testify to the "genuineness" of the phenomena.

I'd like to picture to myself the day, long ago, when some enterprising gentleman was first able to produce a rabbit out of a hat, and a congress was convened of the most successful raisers of rabbits in the land, and the most respectable hat manufacturers, all of whom presumably agreed that they had witnessed something extraordinary.

The child in each of us wants to believe in Geller, but I think the adult in us can't help asking why the investigators don't employ the services of an expert magician who will tell us "how it is done."

Morton McMichael, M.D.
South Windham, Maine

I can readily imagine the deluge of comments caused by the "Off-the-Beat" article about Geller. Unfortunately, many of these comments will probably be to the effect that such articles belong in a science-fiction magazine, rather than one which concerns itself with "straight" science.

Please keep your readers up to date on these and related developments. Magazines of a general nature seem somehow to be unable to produce an objective report such as Sarfatt's, and such objectivity is sorely needed when dealing with a subject which invites a spectacular approach.

Robert L. Meyer
Alexandria, Va.

At last I have an explanation for Uri Geller's unreasonable reluctance to "perform" when magicians are present as observers. They must cause a Pauli effect on his mystic link between universes. Johnny Carson, as an amateur magician, only caused a half-Pauli so that Geller was able to perform his fork-bending trick

but not his divination film canister stunt. ("Pauli effect" is a much more scientific-sounding name than the old Al Capp "Whammy," but perhaps it could be measured in the same way to find out which magicians are capable of causing double or triple Pauli's to do Geller in.)

I do object to several items in Sarfatt's account of his observation. First he says that "several experiments were conducted." Yet he mentions no controls and admits that "precise monitoring of the location of the disk . . . could not be made." Even my fourth grade science students laughed at that one.

He also states that "it was absolutely impossible for the disk to have been tampered with by means of tricks while it was under Sarfatt's hand." I maintain that as a scientist, he should be the first to admit that he is no expert on deception and trickery and that he should let an expert deceiver (magician, professional pickpocket or cardsharp) show him the kinds of things that can be done under one's fingers before making such absolute statements.

Lastly, as a reasonable man, I doubt very much that I would accept "relatively well controlled" and imperfect experimental conditions of the type he describes. I find it very unreasonable for a scientist to conclude, as he does, that "Geller succeeded in bending several pieces of metal by psycho-energetic action." For that he deserves a double-Pauli.

Jim Gerrish
Hanover, N.H.

Jack Sarfatt's article might just as well read—"Geller fools the pants off physicists, chemists, biologists, etc.," since it makes no difference how many letters of academic success follow a person's name, Geller will continue to fool them all.

As a professional magician and a geologist, I have been watching Geller's progress closely and have become dismayed by all of those who have added their names to the list of "fooled again," just because they themselves were taken in. As in my last letter that you kindly printed about Geller (SN: 12/15/73), it seems that no one got my message since there were still no magicians present. Sure Geller can fool a convention of PhD's, but have him perform before a convention of magicians and see what happens.

Although as stated in the article that Geller was under some sort of tightly controlled conditions (probably in part specified by Geller himself) and that it was impossible for any tampering or tricky business to have taken place, one just has to look at the magic catalogs that are jammed with such impossible feats, that anybody can buy.

I would suggest that Arthur Clarke and the others go back to their respective occupations and leave the real work to qualified magicians.

In magic circles it is said: Give a magician enough rope and he will do a trick with it, but since Geller is not worthy of the title, in time he will probably hang himself.

Steven Okulewicz
Staten Island, N.Y.

Your report on Uri Geller might be considered a trifle irresponsible, as it makes no mention of Andrew Weil's investigation (PSYCHOLOGY TODAY, June and July 1974). Weil reports that James "The Amazing" Randi was able to duplicate several of Geller's feats: choosing a full container from among empty ones, bending nails, keys and forks, duplicating a drawing concealed in a sealed envelope.

Of course, the fact that a magician can do some of the things Geller does (and that Geller was once a stage magician, also reported in this article) does not prove that he does his feats by sleight of hand. However, the editors of PSYCHOLOGY TODAY have thoughtfully provided a photograph of Uri Geller removing the lens cap of a camera to take some "psychic" photographs, leaving us to wonder why a man with true psychic powers must stoop to fraud.

T. V. Wolansky
Thiells, N.Y.

I want to write my approval of your article on the feats of Uri Geller. You will probably receive letters disapproving of this subject on the grounds that it is not science.

But how do we know? There is so much we do not yet understand. Scientists should not close their minds, but should explore all phenomena which might increase our knowledge of the universe.

That is one reason I like to read SCIENCE NEWS. I am interested in all science, in fact all life. If one concentrates too closely on one small area, the view of the whole can be lost. Thanks for keeping me informed in many areas. I hope to hear more about the feats of Uri Geller.

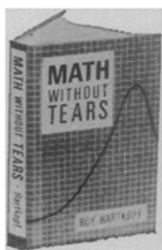
Phyllis Rathbun
Livonia, Mich.

In opposition to Jack Sarfatt's article on Uri Geller's "strange" feats, you might print a summary of Andrew Weil's debunking that appeared in the July 1974 PSYCHOLOGY TODAY. As to Sarfatt's "professional judgment as a Ph.D. physicist . . . that Geller demonstrated genuine psycho-energetic ability . . . which is beyond the doubt of any reasonable man." I am reminded of the remarks which Henry Sidgwick, the famous moral philosopher, made in his presidential address to the Society for Psychical Research in July 1882: "We must drive the objector into the position of being forced either to admit the phenomena as inexplicable, at least by him, or to accuse the investigators either of lying or cheating or of a blindness or forgetfulness incompatible with any intellectual condition except absolute idiocy."

"I am glad to say that this result, in my opinion, has been satisfactorily attained in the investigation of thought-reading. Professor Barrett [then Professor of Physics in the Royal College of Science for Ireland] will now bring before you a report which I hope will be only the first of a long series of similar reports which may have reached the same point of conclusiveness" (quoted by C. E. M. Hansel in *ESP: A Scientific Evaluation*.)

The "mind readers" in Barrett's inves-

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tigation later admitted to fraud. Hansel gives many other examples of distinguished physical scientists being fooled with ease by charlatans. These provide ample justification for Martin Gardner's moral that no report of "psycho-energetic" abilities can be believed unless it contains the sentence: "This experiment was conducted in the presence of professional magicians, who are convinced that no trickery was involved."

Frank J. Tipler
Department of Physics
University of Maryland
College Park, Md.

It was with great interest that I read the discussion of Mr. Sarfatt's report. I am a physics student at Princeton University and also a professional magician, so I have a double concern in Mr. Geller's claims.

Never having seen Mr. Geller perform, I do not intend to say whether his "powers" are a hoax or not. I am certain, however, that any of the feats I have read about could be duplicated by a competent magician. Mr. Sarfatt states that his hand was placed over a metal object, and that Uri Geller bent the object by psychic powers. Furthermore, "it was absolutely impossible for the disk to have been tampered with" while under his hand. I myself perform a similar trick with a deck of cards, placing a card under a person's hand and then having it change into another, previously chosen card. Any nonmagician viewing the trick states that it is absolutely impossible to tamper with the card, yet I admit it is a trick, and not even one of the best.

While I consider myself a good magician, there are others who have been at the art far longer, and can do feats with small objects that baffle even other magicians. When Arthur C. Clarke tells magicians to "put up or shut up" in duplicating Mr. Geller's magic under identical conditions, I believe he is missing the point. The great Houdini performed tricks (note the word) that to this day have not been explained, yet he admitted that no mystic powers were involved. Possibly he was lying, I don't know. I do know, however, that any magician, should he turn charlatan, could challenge Mr. Geller to a "battle of the psychics" and would easily win, linking previously inspected solid steel rings together and making them melt apart again, making a ball penetrate a solid cup, or making cards travel from one spectator's closed hand to another's. I'd like to see Mr. Geller duplicate any of these feats under any conditions.

Michael Nass
Teaneck, N.J.

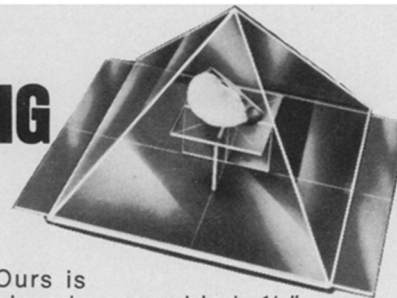
The credulity shown by Sarfatt, astounding though it is, is just one more chapter in a long and discreditable story. Charlatans like Geller have been duping respectable investigators, and perpetuating the belief in "paranormal phenomena," for well over a hundred years. ("If scientists believe it, it must be true.")

The exposing of such frauds should be left to those who are best equipped for it—professional magicians who know what to look for. Scientists should stick to science.

Robert Carroll
Hunter College
New York, N.Y.

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