



# Hypnosis—No; It May Be A Sin

The founder of Loma Linda's Ethics Center believes hypnotism overwhelms humanity's God-given freedom.

by Jack Provonsba

THE ESSENCE OF MORALITY LIES IN HUMANITY'S capacity for self-determination—exercising conscious discrimination and choice. Hypnosis, or any other modality in which increased suggestibility renders persons vulnerable to manipulation, presents profound ethical threats to personal integrity. No human being has the right to exercise such authority over the mind and will of another. To do so is to “sin” against the very image of God in humans.

Such judgment presupposes, of course, a definition of what it means to be human. Certainly, the nature of humanness is crucial to any ethical analysis of hypnosis or the many other questions that medical technology thrusts upon us.

## Image of God

A biblically based Christian ethic is likely to derive its definition of what it is to be human from the Genesis account of creation.

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There, at the end of a series of creations involving an ascending scale of biologic complexity, the ultimate creation was achieved in humanity. In humans God placed His own image, and it was this feature that separated them from all of the lesser creation.

The “image of God” is not easy to define fully, even as that which it reflects ultimately transcends human understanding. But the “image of God” is not, therefore, an empty expression. It means above all that humanity was given attributes, in limited measure to be sure, that are also characteristic of God. Among these was that area in which humans still most resemble God—creativity. Even though they also share a great deal in other respects, creativity is a power in humans that sets them apart from all other objects and biologic forms in God's vast creation. In that creation, objects, mere inanimate things, could be *acted upon*. Living, organic creatures shared that quality with objects. They could also be acted upon. But living creatures could also *react* in various ways. Humans shared with inanimate objects the ability to be *acted upon* and with other living creatures the ability to *react*. Humans

transcended both in their ability to *act*, to do something that was not merely the effect of some prior cause. Humans could do something they did not have to do. Ellen White refers to this potential in connection with the origin of sin when she states that sin was uncaused.<sup>1</sup> But it is also the basis for *agape* or responsible love—the moral love of the commandment whose essence is volition rather than sentiment.<sup>2</sup>

It is difficult even to conceive of so mysterious and unaccountable a quality in a universe where everything else, at least at the macroscopic level (versus Heisenberg's principle of submicroscopic indeterminacy), is locked into the principle of causal determination. Current reductions of thought and memory to psychochemical processes, themselves causal in nature, make it tempting to revive platonic dualism—a doctrine in which the soul uses the body. But this will not do, for we are aware that such "soul" activities are very much at the mercy of body structures and processes. This is the meaning of "psychosomatic." The creative act may be the only essential mystery in the universe, and perhaps can never be defined by or reduced to anything else. It is essentially unique—*Suis Generis*.

An orderly universe is one in which causes produce their effects generally. To introduce the ability to act, to be genuinely creative, has seemed irrational and "unscientific" to every determinist, including Sigmund Freud. Freud once wrote:

What does the man mean by this? Does he mean that there are any occurrences so small that they may fail to come within the causal sequence of things, that they might well be other than they are? Anyone thus breaking away from the determination of natural phenomena, at any single point, has thrown over the whole scientific outlook on the world.<sup>3</sup>

A century before, this rigorous application of Newtonian physics to human behav-

ior had been outlined by determinists like Voltaire.

Everything happens through immutable laws . . . everything is necessary . . . "There are," some persons say, "some events which are necessary and others which are not." It would be very comic that one part of what happens did not have to happen. If one looks closely at it, one sees that the doctrine contrary to destiny [determinism] is absurd.

Schopenhauer expressed the same sentiment in less picturesque language: "The whole cause of a man's life, in all its incidents great and small, is as necessarily predetermined as the course of a clock."<sup>4</sup>

A major reason for rejecting so inclusive a notion of determinism is that it makes God responsible for everything that has happened in the universe. Ellen White, on the other hand, has written, "In the final execution of the judgment it will be seen that no cause for sin exists."<sup>5</sup> This is a major element in the final vindication of God. If there is no such ability as self-determination, that is, a self that can determine its own destiny by an exercise of its own volition, a flawed universe is the creation of a flawed God. Moreover, in a moral universe in which volitional, responsible *agape* love, is the ultimate principle of right, freedom of the will is a *sine qua non*. There can be no such love unless humans are granted something of the image of God—creative freedom. Such love is an act of freedom.

It is possible on these terms to set forth the essential truth of a Christian ethic. Whatever lessens the ability of humans to think and do, whatever reduces humans to mere reflectors of others' thoughts is a violation of the Creator's intention expressed in his having made humans in his image. In simple summary: On biblical grounds, whatever enhances the image of God (freedom, self-determination) in humanity is *right*. Whatever diminishes that image is *wrong*.

## LSD, Brainwashing, and Charismatic Experiences

As propos to our present consideration, there are several situations that come under the judgment of an ethic so conceived. Humanness, defined by creative freedom, can be diminished or destroyed by subtle things, such as natural aging processes, illness, and various kinds of organic brain syndromes.

Humanness can be diminished by certain treatment modalities. Hypnotism is certainly one. The "image of God" is also very much at the mercy of psychosurgical and psychochemical techniques. The after-results of a prefrontal lobotomy are an obvious and clear example.

Humanity can be diminished by agents, such as the familiar alcohol, marijuana, and lysergic acid (LSD). In one out of 10 persons with only one LSD session, radical value-system changes, lasting for prolonged periods, may occur.

It may be of some interest that at one time LSD was used in association with hypnosis where it was noted that it greatly facilitated the induction rate.<sup>6</sup> There are numerous other psychotropic substances, of course, although perhaps none as thoroughly studied or that produce such dramatic effects as this potent chemical. One of Walter Pahnke's Harvard



subjects, while on psilocybin, cried out in panic, "I don't know who I am. When will this be over?" Subjects on LSD often expressed confusion about body limits, which along with other perceptual distortions created a sense of bewilderment about the self.

The psychochemicals have been investigated by governments as possible means of modifying the behavior and belief systems of subjugated aliens, as well as dissident citizens of their own countries. However, governments have generally taken recourse to the radical form of behavior modification that has come to be known as brainwashing.

Brainwashing has been called "chronic hypnosis." In a discussion primarily dedicated to a consideration of this subject, it should receive at least some attention, for the same ethical issues are present. (Moreover, brainwashing is a serious element in many dimensions of modern life, some of them extremely subtle—in advertising, education, politics, religion, etc.)<sup>7</sup>

Brainwashing (or chronic hypnosis) takes its theoretical point of departure from the work of the Russian physiologist, Pavlov, who discovered in his work on conditioning that the replacement of one conditioned response with another could be greatly facilitated by the presence of anxiety or other strong emotions. Brainwashing is one example of mind manipulation. The common denominator to practically all such states is vulnerability to suggestion—*disinhibition derived from ego uncertainty*.

Another dissociative state contrasts with an ethic that places highest value on self-determination. It is the so-called charismatic experience. A charismatic psychologist, Harry Goldsmith, a clinical psychologist in Springfield, Missouri, with a doctorate from Columbia University, says

Man is a free moral agent, but in choosing to be filled and refilled by the Spirit of God he has to "pour himself out first." In other words he has to

renounce voluntarily the exercise of his wishes in order that the Holy Spirit might take over—his will, his voice, and his thoughts, so that these might become His will, His voice, and His thoughts. . . . The ego, or self, is denied by allowing it no rational understanding of the experience.<sup>8</sup>

A non-charismatic, Alexander Allans, in a careful analysis of a charismatic meeting, noted all the factors that appeared to enter into the production of the charismatic trance state, and called it hypnotic. Summing up his investigation he says:

Trance, then, within the context of religious ceremony, may be defined as a cultural response to a series of internal and external cues which operate in a particular kind of motivational state. The behavior which we have called trance is most likely a form of hypnosis which will later become auto-hypnosis through a continuation of the learning process.<sup>9</sup>

A neutral investigator (neither in favor of nor against the charismatic experience), anthropologist Dr. Felicitas Goodman,<sup>10</sup> refers to the state as one of “dissociation.” In describing it, she uses language similar to that often employed in reference to the hypnotic state, including “the lowering of inhibitions,”<sup>11</sup> the “switching off of cortical control,”<sup>12</sup> and the loss of voluntary control during the state, although it can be voluntarily induced.<sup>13</sup> She notes that similar mechanisms may be involved as in hypnosis,<sup>14</sup> and that perceptions regarding the body may be altered as in the drug dissociation state.<sup>15</sup>

The lowering of inhibitions (another way of speaking of hypersuggestibility), a prominent feature of the charismatic state, is also noted by British psychiatrist William Sargent. He writes of his experiences at a Pentecostal snake-handling sect’s meetings in North Carolina in 1947, while he was visiting Professor of Neuropsychiatry at Duke University:

The descent of the Holy Ghost on these meetings, which was reserved for whites, was supposedly

shown by the occurrence of wild excitement, bodily jerkings, and the final exhaustion and collapse, in the more susceptible participants. Such hysterical states were induced by means of rhythmic singing and hand clapping, and the handling of genuinely poisonous snakes . . . [and] brought several visitors unexpectedly to the point of collapse and sudden conversion.<sup>16</sup>

Dr. Sargent refers to a number of other manipulative modalities, including rhythmic music, e.g. rock music, electroshock, and lobotomy.<sup>17</sup> In harmony with Dr. Sargent’s observations is a statement by Robert J. Lifton:

Especially relevant is Janet Mackenzie Rioch’s concern that the psychotherapist . . . take cognizance of the “symbolically submissive position” inherent in the psychoanalytic treatment situation. Her warning to the analyst to avoid the role of the “chronic hypnotist” amounts to a warning against totalism—since hypnosis is in effect a situation of interpersonal totalism in which the subject’s perceptual world is reduced to the highly focused influence of the omnipotent hypnotist.<sup>18</sup>

The above illustrate the concerns created by a definition of humanness that places great value on self-determination.<sup>19</sup>

Mrs. White referred many times to the demonic implications of mind control. Following are but a few typical examples:



The theory of mind controlling mind is originated by Satan. . . . No man or woman should exercise his or her will to control the senses or reason of another, so that the mind of the person is rendered passively subject to the will of the one who is exercising the control.<sup>20</sup>

God has not given one ray of light or encouragement for our physicians to take up the work of having one mind completely control the mind of another, so that one acts out the will of another. Let us learn the ways and purposes of God. Let not the enemy gain the least advantage over you. Let him not lead you to dare to endeavor to control another mind until it becomes a machine in your hands. This is the science of Satan's working.<sup>21</sup>

The theory of mind controlling mind was originated by Satan. . . . Of all the errors that are finding acceptance among professedly Christian people, none is a more dangerous deception, none more certain to separate man from God, than is this. Innocent though it may appear, if exercised upon patients, it will tend to their destruction, not to their restoration. It opens a door through which Satan will enter to take possession both of the mind that is given up to be controlled by another and of the mind that controls.<sup>22</sup>

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*Any practice or technique that increases vulnerability to suggestion hastens the day when human beings are reduced to the status of mere "things" to be manipulated by scheming men and devils. Hypnosis could be another way in which human beings "sin" against themselves and against each other.*

## Hypnotism

Ellen White forcefully rejected hypnosis. Typical is her "cut away from yourselves anything that savors of hypnotism, the science by which satanic agencies work."<sup>23</sup>

Most descriptions of the hypnotic state include words like *suggestion* and *suggestibility*. Lecron and Bordeaux broadly define hypnosis as "the control of thought and action through suggestions."<sup>24</sup> Defined again as "a

state of increased suggestibility,"<sup>25</sup> Weitzenhoffer sees as one of the conditions required for the efficacy of suggestion that the subject

does not use his critical faculties, or is rendered unable to use them with respect to the suggestions, at least at the time the suggestion takes its initial effect. This is probably one reason why it is not uncommon to prepare the subject for this beforehand, by instructing him to make his mind blank, to be completely passive, not to think or to analyze what he is being told, what he feels or what he does. . . . One must ask whether inhibition or abolition of the critical faculties may not be the main character and condition for suggestibility and hypnosis.<sup>26</sup>

Sigmund Freud once remarked that hypnosis endows the hypnotist with an authority that was probably never possessed by even priest or miracle man. Referring to this statement, Weitzenhoffer observes,

Such authority carries a proportionate amount of responsibility. Freud was referring here to the ability he believed hypnosis gave to the hypnotist to alter the mental and psychological status of the

individual. This alone makes hypnosis a great responsibility, but the question goes much deeper.

First there is the matter of trust that the subject places in the hypnotist. Hypnosis requires cooperation to an unusual degree. The subject who submits to hypnosis is seemingly being asked to relinquish his capacities for reality testing, his ability to control the real and mental world and, in essence, much of his adult individuality [the image of God?] . . . the hypnotist must go a long way, indeed, to justify such implied faith.<sup>27</sup>

Rhodes says that the continued control the

hypnotist is given over the subjective mind of the subject

leads to a gradually increasing influence over the subject's objective process as well, and thus to a remolding of his entire thought pattern. This is the basis of therapeutic hypnosis based upon implantation of suggestions in the subject's subjective mind with continuing (post hypnotic) effects.<sup>28</sup>

The development of dependency on the part of the subjects undergoing repeated hypnosis is fairly well recognized. Weitzenhoffer points out that,

There is inherent in the hypnotic situation great potential for the rapid development, by the subject, of strong positive feelings toward the hypnotist which further complicates the situation. It is this mechanism which seems to bring about and intensify the subject's extreme cooperation. These feelings not only render the subject extremely receptive to suggestions but often give him an extraordinarily forceful, even overpowering, affectively-toned motivation to carry them out. Furthermore, these sentiments have a tendency to perseverate into the subsequent waking (non-

hypnotic) state, extending the hypnotist's influence.<sup>29</sup>

Hypnosis, as a two-person interaction, is anything but a casual relationship. It places the subject in an especially vulnerable position. This fact puts hypnosis in a special category, and puts the hypnotist in a position of great responsibility during and following hypnosis.<sup>30</sup>

All of which serves to make the point of this article. Whether one objects on ethical grounds to the use of hypnosis, or any other modality in which increased suggestibility renders persons vulnerable to manipulation, depends upon one's presuppositions. From the standpoint of any of the determinisms, manipulative techniques are simply amoral methods for modifying behavior and attitude. But as a concerned, Adventist, Christian ethicist, I must submit that any practice or technique that increases vulnerability to suggestion hastens the day when human beings, created in the image of God, are reduced to the status of mere "things" to be manipulated by scheming men and devils. Hypnosis could be another way in which human beings may conceivably "sin" against themselves and against each other.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1911), pp. 493, 503.

2. 6BC pp. 1100, 1101.

3. S. Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, New York, Liveright, 1935, p. 27.

4. Quoted in Paul Edwards, *Determinism and Freedom in the Age of Modern Science*. Sidney Hook, ed. (New York: University Press, 1958), p. 108.

5. *The Great Controversy*, p. 503.

6. According to Peck in R. A. Sandison's, "The Nature of the Psychological Response to LSD":

"Twelve to 18 percent who are not good subjects or cannot experience hypnosis after numerous attempts are then given LSD, and while they are 'up in the air', so to speak, we give them this positive suggestion: 'Now, from this point on, you will be able to experience hypnosis . . .' Eighty-eight to 92 percent, from that point on, could be hypnotized" (Op cit., p. 130).

7. Robert Jay Lifton notes that "any ideology—that is, any set of emotionally-charged convictions about man and his relationship to the natural or supernatural

world—may be carried by its adherents in a totalistic direction. But this is most likely to occur with those ideologies which are most sweeping in their content and most ambitious—or messianic—in their claims, whether religious, political, or scientific. And where totalism exists, a religion, a political movement, or even a scientific organization becomes little more than an exclusive cult" (*Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* [New York: W.W. Norton, 1961], p. 419).

This can even happen in education. Lifton defines true education versus totalism brainwashing in terms not totally unlike those of Ellen White:

"Any educational experience is a three-way interplay among student, mentor, and the ideas being taught—ideally it is an interplay of stimulating tension. Such tension includes the mentor's forceful presentation of ideas within the context of the cultural tradition in which they arose; his demand that each student permit himself to be challenged by these ideas; his *allowance for each student's individual relationship to the ideas*" (Ibid., p. 444. Italics supplied.)

8. *View*, 2 (1965), pp. 31, 31.
9. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1:2 (Spring 1962), p. 213.
10. Felicitas Goodman, *Speaking in Tongues* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).
11. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 76, 124.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
16. William Sargent, *Battle for the Mind* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, Inc., 1961), pp. 222, 223.
17. *Ibid.*, 55ff.
18. *Op cit.*, p. 450.
19. Regarding the effects of disease on moral freedom: "Evil angels are striving for the dominion of every human being. Whatever injures the health, not only lessens physical vigor, but tends to weaken the mental and moral powers. Indulgence in any unhealthful practice makes it more difficult for one to discriminate between right and wrong, and hence more difficult to resist evil. It increases the danger of failure and defeat" (*The Ministry of Healing* [Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1909], p. 128).
20. Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1911), p. 111.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 114
22. *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 242, 243.
23. Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1958), Book 2, p. 350.
24. Leslie M. Lecron and Dean Bordeaux, *Hypnotism Today* (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1949), p. 139.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
26. André M. Weitzenhoffer, *General Techniques of Hypnotism* (New York: Grune and Stratton, 1957), p. 32.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 5
28. Raphael H. Rhodes, *Hypnosis, Theory, Practice and Application* (New York: The Citadell Press, 1950), p. 117.
29. Weitzenhoffer, *op cit.*, p. 5.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 6.