

True BELIEVERS (Witches, UFOs, ghosts, psychics and God)

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Can science conquer all? What we believe may, or may not, be grounded in empirical evidence. MATT MALONEY reports.

True BELIEVERS

TASMANIAN can be a intriguing bunch. With a population of just over 500,000, the state contains a large range of religious groups, paranormal investigators and psychics - all in seemingly good demand.

We're not spooked by spooks but we are spooked by climate change.

Jin-oh Choi, Organiser
0408 271 800

info@launcestonskeptics.com
www.launcestonskeptics.com

We're prepared to believe in little green men, but not little red foxes.

Some of us will base our assumptions on alien life, spirits or bizarre conspiracy theories on an intuitive belief rather than science - suspending what most of us believe to be rational reality.

A 2009 Nielsen poll of faith in Australian revealed that 49 per cent believed in psychic powers, 34 per cent believed in UFOs, 41 per cent believed in astrology, and 22 per cent believed in witches.

The poll also found that 68 per cent of the 1000 participants believed in God.

Door of Hope minister Sandy Hart said although scientific evidence proving the existence of God or otherwise was not irrelevant to a practising Christian, it was often a personal spiritual encounter that prompted their faith.

"Empirical evidence is only that which is seen and there is a reality beyond perception," she said.

"Phenomenal and demonstrative evidence is an outcome of believing those things that are human, though not able to be scientifically proven, like beauty, anger, and feelings of love.

"We believe those things exist by the demonstration of the person that experiences them."

The worldwide skeptics movement is the antithesis for taken-for-granted beliefs in science, society and ideology.

Launceston Skeptics organiser Jin-oh Choi believes people's ideologies and cultural beliefs unavoidably influence acceptance of science.

Mr Choi further believes people may form beliefs and opinions based on that of others as science-based evidence was often harder or required more effort for the average person to understand.

"If you are unsure about something, you are going to head towards an idea that someone or something else may have control of things," he said.

"Those afraid of the unknown will visit psychics and that sort of thing - they don't want to make their own decisions and have someone make their decisions for them.

"Others will attach themselves to a belief or faith because it makes them feel safe.

"For us, we use critical thinking to come to a decision-making process.

"We don't just accept the claims of others, we try and make sure we look at all the evidence and make sure it does make logical sense."

Others accept that not everything cannot, and may never, make logical sense.

Tasmanian UFO Investigation Centre co-founder Keith Roberts said he was surprised more Australians did not believe in unidentified flying objects.

He has been investigating UFO reports since 1965, adding that such reports had declined from about 200 a year in the mid-1970s to just 30 this year.

Although the centre fields all calls, Mr Roberts said normally, 90 per cent of reports could be swiftly explained and it was the remainder that Tasmanian UFO investigators were interested in.

The centre approaches all reports with a scientific philosophy by not reading into evidence to form a belief or opinion.

Mr Roberts hastened against people believing a UFO sighting meant the existence of aliens or intergalactic life.

"The trouble these days is the fact that something is 'unidentified' immediately gets transposed into 'alien' which gets transformed into 'out of space', and to the best of my knowledge, that's never been proven," Mr Roberts said.

"Over the years we've had interesting reports and have never got an explanation.

"We've been going almost 50 years and one wonders whether there ever will be."

Launceston's Martin Crees-Morris is a chartered accountant and has a honorary degree in physics.

Aside from this, he is a hypnotherapist and psychic.

Mr Crees-Morris contends although he has psychic ability his entire life, to see into the past, present and future of people.

His professional work over the last decade has rested in part on psychological methods, and over that time, he has seen thousands of people, averaging 10 readings each week.

About 90 per cent of his clients are female, particularly successful, tertiary- educated leaders in their field.

The readings start without any questions being asked.

But Mr Crees-Morris said psychic ability ran two ways.

"The past informs the future - the ability to look into past, to look at the causes of a current situation, and the ability to project that into the future, particularly with relationships," he said.

"Different clients require different approaches and different levels of information.

"I don't expect people to believe in me but it does all boil down to experience."

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