

Confusion Over Delphi Silver-Futures Trials?

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I was glad to read Robert Sheaffer's attempt to clarify the details of the Delphi silver experiments and events surrounding them (*SI, Psychic Vibrations*, Winter 1994). Many people have experienced difficulty in sorting through the many misleading claims about Delphi. I am happy to present another brief attempt to clear up this confusion.

There are a number of factual errors in Sheaffer's comments about the Delphi work itself. He states, for example, that John White was the principal investor and that he turned a substantial profit. He also states that the investor lost much of his earlier profits following two incorrect predictions and lost all further interest in investing through Delphi. John White, however, was never involved in the Delphi work. Anthony White, one of three Delphi partners, was involved—but he was not the principal investor. The principal investor did not lose most of his earlier profits in the two unsuccessful trials. He also did not lose all further interest in Delphi following these trials.

Sheaffer also states that I suggested that the judges may have been thrown off the track in judging the first trial by a comment about the smell of roasted peanuts—which supposedly led them to select the San Francisco Zoo as the target. In fact, I actually pointed out in my published critique of the silver trials (*JASPR*, October 1992) that I do not recall ever having made such a statement—and that the manner in which Russell Targ reported the judging of this particular trial to the editors of Time-Life Books was inaccurate and misleading. For

example, according to Targ's reported description, he found himself scrutinizing drawings that actually were roughly 30-to-40 miles away from him at the time. He later admitted, in response to my critique, that he had not scrutinized the drawings in question—contrary to what was reported. When asked to support his many other claims about the Delphi trials, Targ claimed that he had "lost" the data.

Sheaffer perceives contradictions where none exist. It is true that the first 12 trials in the Delphi series (if we include the pilots) led to correct predictions of future price movements in silver. It is also true that these were informal trials, with optional stopping and spontaneously varied probabilities of a hit, and that the success of these trials is therefore statistically meaningless. My discussion of the judging procedure used in the additional trial involving the golf course, incidentally, was intended merely to show that Targ's claims about supposed "displacement" are not supported by the data. Sheaffer seems to be suggesting that I would have had to have believed myself to be psychic (or actually been psychic) in order for the first 13 trials to have led to correct predictions. This is a mistaken assumption with which any qualified statistician would no doubt disagree.

Sheaffer also expresses skepticism about my stating that I have no further interest in using remote viewing as an investment strategy in playing the silver market. To this suggestion, I can only reply that I have turned down anyone who has ever approached me, since the Delphi trials were reported, proposing such a ven-

ture. In addition, when Targ used my name to promote his National ESP Laboratory, which involved the general public in making predictions about the market, I filed suit to prevent the use of my name in this manner. I believe this was the only responsible action I could have taken. I would not hesitate to take it again if my name were used to promote such activities. In my opinion, the Delphi trials represented a well-intentioned and potentially worthwhile effort, which was unfortunately sensationalized and made the subject of exaggerated and misleading claims.

As to my finally rejecting the "psychic" label, I do not understand why Sheaffer apparently finds this position difficult to comprehend. I have long-since perceived the terrible problems inherent in using such a label to describe any human being—and have written and lectured extensively about these problems. As to Scott Rogo's interesting statement—quoted in Sheaffer's column—that I ever claimed I could "leave my body," this is also incorrect. Out-of-body experiences, as I have often pointed out, are powerful *subjective* psychological phenomena that may be

induced at will.

Finally, Sheaffer states that we will never know what *really* happened in the Delphi trials. This is also not correct. Although Targ now claims to have "lost" the data, the original report on this work was published long ago (*Psi Research*, 4, pp. 79-88, 1985). The critical point made in my recently published discussion of the silver trials is that Targ's recent descriptions of the Delphi series do not correspond with the published report that he himself previously coauthored. Most significant, he has frequently reported (with inconsistent details) a subsequent series of nine formal trials that did not actually take place—and that did not appear in the original report. Targ has subsequently been unable to support this claim with any hard data. I hope that SKEPTICAL INQUIRER readers will take the time to read this critique and learn the true facts of the case. I would be happy to provide a reprint to anyone who wishes to do so.

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Sixth European Skeptical Conference Science, Pseudoscience, and the Environment

The Sixth European Skeptical Conference is scheduled for September 23-25, 1994, in Ostend, Belgium. The conference will be hosted by SKEPP, the Belgian skeptics organization, and coordinated by the European Skeptical Program Committee.

Among the topics tentatively planned for discussion are geobiology, environmental alarmism, cosmic influences, philosophical aspects of pseudoscience and skepticism, science/

pseudoscience in the schools and in the media, alternative medical practices in a Europe without frontiers, recent developments in parapsychological research, practical aspects of skeptics organizations, and practical debunking.

Ostend can be reached easily by train from Brussels International Airport or by ferry from England.

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